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San Francisco Chronicle

Rockies' Trevor Story hits 3 homers, one 505 feet, to rock Giants

Henry Schulman

DENVER — Nobody can sugarcoat what happened to the Giants at Coors Field on Wednesday night, and really, all season.

In a 5-3 Colorado victory, Trevor Story hit three solo home runs against Andrew Suarez, one pegged at 505 feet, the longest in the 4-year-old life of Statcast. The Giants were swept again at their own little slice of high-altitude hell, Coors Field, where they lost eight of nine this year and have won twice in their past 20 games.

The Giants did their part to install and keep the Rockies in first place in the National League West, and Colorado showed how many light years separate the two teams in their race toward another World Series.

The only positive the Giants could pluck from Wednesday's failure was Ray Black's confrontation with Story in the eighth inning, when everyone in the building knew what the powerful shortstop was going to attempt.

In a come-to-God moment for the Giants' rookie, he threw fastballs at 100, 99, 100, 100 and 100 mph. He fell behind 2-0 and had kept challenging Story, who swung at the final three heaters and struck out.

That bodes well for the bullpen's future.

Black planned to get ahead with fastballs and finish Story with sliders.

"I bailed on that quickly when I fell behind," Black said. "My goal when I got to 2-0 was not to walk him. I wanted to pitch him up in the zone. If he tags me, he tags me. It's hard to get four homers in a game. I'm glad I didn't throw one middle-middle."

Suarez did throw one middle-middle in the sixth inning. It was a changeup that Story lined over the left-field fence for his third homer, a piddly 416-footer that broke a 3-3 tie.

Story swung so hard at a first-inning Suarez slider he fell down as he crushed it 459 feet, beyond the left-field seats, the ball bouncing past a yogurt stand.

He merely was clearing his throat for the fourth inning, when he turned on an inside-corner fastball at the knees and propelled another ball over the bleachers in left-center. Per Statcast, the 505-footer traveled 12 inches farther than a 2016 Giancarlo Stanton homer that had topped the leaderboard.

Story became the first player to homer three times in a game against the Giants since Hanley Ramirez in 2016, at Fenway Park. The only other Giant in at least 110 years to allow three to the same hitter was Sal "The Barber" Maglie, who won a 1950 game at the Polo Grounds despite serving up three to the Cubs' Andy Pafko.

And yet, Bruce Bochy did not think his rookie lefty had a terrible night overall.

"The kid threw well," Bochy said. "He really had good stuff. Unfortunately for us, one hitter had a big night."

Praising Suarez might smack of asking Mrs. Lincoln how she enjoyed the play, but the numbers showed that he held all non-Story Rockies to three hits in six-plus innings to keep the Giants in the game.

"It's crazy how baseball works," Suarez said. "I thought I threw well. One guy killed me."

"That guy" is going to be in the Giants' division for a long time. He has four homers in nine at-bats against Suarez, who will need to figure him out because they might face each other 75 times.

Suarez has pitched well enough in his first season to earn Bochy's faith. Bochy let Suarez bat in the sixth inning of a tied game knowing Story was due up third in the bottom half.

"Two outs, nobody on, I have confidence in the kid to make an adjustment there, and the pitch got away from him," Bochy said.

Suarez and Black were among seven Giants rookies who appeared in the game.

Aramis Garcia caught Suarez and homered, giving him one in each of his two big-league starts. Some of the older players produced, too. Joe Panik and Evan Longoria each had two hits, including a double, and scored.

But three runs at Coors doesn't cut it, especially when one Rockie can hit three different pitches a total of 1,380 feet.

San Francisco Chronicle

New Giants infielder Abiatal Avelino, blocked in New York, happy with trade

Henry Schulman

DENVER — For a moment after **Abiatal Avelino** was pulled from his Triple-A game last Thursday, he thought he was going to be fitted for pinstripes. Some of his teammates at Scranton Wilkes-Barre heard that big-league second baseman **Gleyber Torres** was ailing, so Avelino assumed he was headed to New York to replace him.

Instead, he was told he was traded to the Giants in the **Andrew McCutchen** deal, a bit of a shock for a 23-year-old who signed with the Yankees as a teenager and had spent eight years in their system.

Shocked, but not disappointed. Avelino understands he has a better opportunity with the rebuilding Giants than with the Yankees, with whom he was blocked on the infield behind Torres, **Miguel Andujar** and **Didi Gregorius**.

"I was really happy because I said in my mind I have an opportunity to go to the Show, and right now, I'm here," Avelino said Wednesday.

He has not started either of his first two games as a big-leaguer, but manager **Bruce Bochy** has promised to play him some. Longer term, the Giants view Avelino as a potential super-utility player in the **Alen Hanson** mold, while not ruling out an everyday job.

Like Hanson, the Giants will try Avelino in the outfield, just as the Yankees were beginning to do early this season.

“That's something that will be discussed,” Bochy said. “He has a plus arm, and he runs well. It’s really a no-brainer as far as his future.”

Avelino hit a combined .283 with 15 homers in Double- and Triple-A this season, but he suggested the stat that better reflects his strength is the 27 steals in 33 attempts.

“My game plan is really good defense, steal a base, be aggressive, be smart,” he said. “If they need me to pinch-hit, I can do that, too. I’m here for everything. For now, I’m not a power hitter.”

Avelino, who turns 24 on Valentine’s Day, comes from San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic, the cradle of shortstops, and signed with the Yankees for \$300,000 after working out for several teams, including San Francisco.

He hopes to play winter ball in his homeland for the Gigantes del Cibao, like last year. Smiling, he said, “Now I can play for the Giants back to back.”

Homer chase: The Giants are the only team in the majors without a 20-homer hitter. In fact, they are the only team not to have one over the past three seasons. The last was **Brandon Crawford**, who hit 21 in 2015.

The Giants will have a good chase for the team lead. **Gorkys Hernandez, Evan Longoria** and McCutchen have 15 apiece, with **Brandon Belt** one behind.

San Jose Mercury News

Story hammers the Giants, Suarez gives up record-setting home run in loss

Kerry Crowley

DENVER—The story takes different twists and turns and features various heroes and villains, yet somehow always leads back to the same familiar ending.

When the Giants travel to Coors Field, there are ups and downs and highs and lows, but the plot finds a way to end in a deflating place, as it did Wednesday in San Francisco’s 5-3 loss to Colorado.

The story in this chapter was Story himself, as Rockies shortstop Trevor Story did his best impression of a pilot, guiding three flying objects high into the stratosphere against rookie left-hander Andrew Suárez.

“It’s crazy how baseball works,” Suárez said. “I thought I threw well, it’s just one guy killed me.”

If Suárez had dreams of entering baseball’s record books, they certainly didn’t involve giving up the longest home run since Statcast began projecting distances in 2015. But with one out in the bottom of the fourth, Suárez served up a 92-mile per hour fastball to Story that landed an estimated 505 feet from home plate.

Story’s second home run of the night and 30th of the season was hit so high and far that the Rockies shortstop may have violated Federal Aviation Administration flight regulations, as it went down as the longest ball hit by a major league player ever tracked by Statcast.

The game-tying solo shot was only the second home run of at least 500 feet measured by Statcast and it bested Giancarlo Stanton’s 504-foot homer from August 6, 2016.

Though the fans gathered out on the outfield concourse had more interest in purchasing hot dogs and beer than following along with the game, Story found a historic way to capture their attention.

“You look at (Suárez’s numbers) and you think it might have been a tough game for him, but really the rest of the lineup I thought he did a really nice job,” manager Bruce Bochy said.

Even with expanded rosters and an 11-man bullpen, Bochy tempted fate and had Suárez face Story with two outs and no one on in a tie game in the sixth. That trip to the plate ended just like Story’s first two, as he lined a 416-foot home run into the left field bleachers, bringing the combined distances of his three home runs to 1,380 feet.

“I thought I made some good pitches, but he was on today,” Suárez said.

The other Rockies hitters combined to finish 3-for-21 against Suárez, and their struggles convinced Bochy to let Suárez face the Colorado shortstop one final time.

“Two outs, nobody on, you have confidence in the kid to make an adjustment there,” Bochy said. “The pitch just got away from him.”

When Story came to the plate in the eighth inning with a chance to tie the single-game record for home runs, rookie reliever Ray Black fell behind 2-0 and drew jeers from a crowd eagerly anticipating history. But Black stuck to his plan and fired three more fastballs, including a 100.1-mile per hour heater that Story swung through for strike three.

“My goal once I got to 2-0 was to try not to walk him,” Black said. “I was going to try to throw him some strikes. If he tags me, he tags me. It’s hard to hit four home runs in one game. Tip your hat to the guy and I’m just glad I didn’t miss middle-middle.”

Story’s three homers overshadowed the one hit by Giants rookie Aramis Garcia, but the recently promoted catcher gave his club a 3-2 lead in the top of the fourth with his own blast to left center field.

The Giants may not have called Garcia up if not for Buster Posey’s season-ending hip surgery, but the 2014 second round draft choice has looked more capable than the coaching staff anticipated at the plate. Garcia homered in his first big league game last Friday, recorded a pinch hit single Tuesday and delivered another big hit on an 0-2 pitch in the series finale at Coors Field.

Despite hitting just .233 across two levels in the minors this year, Garcia has proven he possesses power as well as the ability to handle major league pitching behind the plate.

Garcia wasn’t the only rookie who helped the Giants break into the Rockies’ bullpen after five innings, as right fielder Austin Slater began the night with consecutive singles including a two-out RBI grounder down the right field line that drove in Evan Longoria in the third.

With a loss Wednesday, the Giants dropped five games under .500 for the first time since May 29 and a season-high 10 games out of first place. Though San Francisco fell out of the playoff race weeks ago, an 0-5 start to September has done little to inspire confidence that the Giants are prepared to play the role of “spoiler” down the stretch.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants’ youngest player can fill variety of roles, provide value for 2019

Kerry Crowley

DENVER—Brandon Crawford is resting Wednesday as he deals with lingering soreness in his left knee, allowing utility player Alen Hanson an opportunity to start at shortstop.

Bruce Bochy chose to play the switch-hitting Hanson against Rockies starter Antonio Senzatela, but if the Giants were slated to face a lefty, rookie Abital Avelino may have taken Crawford’s place and made his major league debut.

Avelino was one of two prospects the Giants acquired Friday in the trade that sent right fielder Andrew McCutchen to the Yankees. He joins the club eight years after he tried out in front of

Giants scouts in his native Dominican Republic and eight months after finishing up his winter league season with the Gigantes del Cibao.

The 23-year-old infielder was a Gigante last winter and he hopes to play for the Gigantes again this year, but for now, he'll spend the month of September with the Gigantes that play in the major leagues.

"I'm really happy because I said in my mind, maybe now I have an opportunity to go to the show and now I'm here," Avelino said.

Avelino signed with the Yankees in 2011 for \$300,000 and spent the last seven seasons in New York's minor league system, finally receiving a promotion to Triple-A during the first half of 2018. When he was pulled in the middle of a game last Friday, Avelino thought he was headed to the major leagues, but instead the Yankees informed him he'd been traded.

"Some players told me Gleyber Torres don't feel really good," Avelino said. "And I said, 'Oh, maybe that's my opportunity.'"

Torres, a rookie second baseman and shortstop, turned out to be fine, forcing Avelino to wait until the end of the weekend to receive a call to the majors. Though it came with the Giants instead of the Yankees, the versatile defender is thrilled with the chance to prove himself at the game's highest level.

The acquisition of Avelino could turn out to be a shrewd move for the Giants, too, as they're hoping he can provide a similar impact to Hanson who signed as a minor league free agent in the offseason.

"He's a really athletic kid, you can tell just watching his actions at shortstop," Bochy said. "He could be a super utility-type guy like a Hanson."

The Giants think Avelino could play a bit of third base and potentially help out in the outfield down the line thanks to his plus-arm, but over the next few weeks, most of his opportunities will come at shortstop, second base or as a pinch hitter or runner.

Avelino stole 27 bases in the minors this year and owns 172 steals in seven seasons, which is a valuable talent for a Giants team that lacks speedy starters in the infield.

The youngest player on the Giants roster may not develop into a full-time starting infielder down the line, but Avelino provides the franchise with defensive versatility and athleticism that could make him a core bench piece or platoon player as soon as next season.

With infielder Kelby Tomlinson out of options after this season and the Giants anticipating a 40-

man roster crunch this winter, Avelino could fill the role Tomlinson's held over the last few years if the club wants to go in a different direction.

An ability to hit left-handers could be key too, especially if the Giants want to platoon Avelino with Hanson, Joe Panik or a free agent or trade acquisition at second base next season. Avelino actually hit righties better than lefties at Double-A this season, but his platoon splits in his minor league career are relatively even.

The Giants view Avelino as a stronger defender than hitter, and if he's able to provide strong defense at shortstop, San Francisco may not have to grind Crawford as hard over the next few seasons.

MLB.com

Long ball comes back to bite Suarez, Giants Jack Etkin

DENVER -- Their final game of the season Wednesday at Coors Field was a fitting end for the Giants. It was another loss, which was hardly unexpected given their troubles here. But they didn't so much lose 5-3 to the Rockies as fall to **Trevor Story**.

He hit three solo home runs off starter **Andrew Suarez**. Two were titanic and one was historic. Story had a chance to tie the Major League record of four home runs in a game when he led off the eighth against **Ray Black**, who fired five straight fastballs to Story. He wasn't cheated as he got ahead 2-0 and then took three ferocious swings and struck out on five pitches, missing a 99.3 mph fastball, fouling off one clocked at 100.5 mph and missing strike three, a 100.1 mph heater up and in.

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"I knew the situation," Black said. "I knew who I was facing coming into the game. Played it out in my head, get ahead with the fastball. Start maybe going with sliders. I bailed on that quick, fell behind. My goal once I got to 2-0 was not to walk him. I was going to try to throw him some strikes. If he tags me, he tags me. It's hard to hit four home runs in one game. Got to tip your hat to the guy. Glad I didn't miss middle-middle."

The Giants lost seven of eight games at Coors Field this season, leaving them with just two wins in their past 20 games there. They have lost five straight games overall, one shy of their season-high six-game skid from May 7-12.

In his impressive rookie season, Suarez had allowed two home runs in a game five times. Three of those games came in succession, the last on Aug. 9. Since then, Suarez had given up one homer in 22 2/3 innings in his past four starts and had strung together 14 scoreless innings in his past two outings. Outside of Story, Suarez gave up three hits to the other Rockies hitters.

"The kid threw well," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "Unfortunately for one hitter, that's the difference in the game. Really, he had good stuff, and Story had quite a night."

Suarez, who pitched into the seventh, gave up a triple to **DJ LeMahieu** and a sacrifice fly to **Nolan Arenado** in the first before Story belted a 2-2 slider an estimated 459 feet to left.

In the fourth, Story walloped a 1-1 fastball for his second homer, clearing the left-field concourse and tying the game at 3 with a 505-foot shot, the longest home run since **Statcast™** began tracking in 2015 and the longest in the history of the Rockies, who began play in 1993 and opened Coors Field in 1995.

Story drove a first-pitch changeup to left for his third successive homer in the sixth, giving the Rockies a 4-3 lead and giving Story 31 home runs, tying him with Arenado for the Rockies' team lead.

"I thought those were two good pitches," Suarez said of Story's first two home runs. "But that's his spot down and in, and he showed what he could do with it. I thought I made some good pitches; he was on today."

As for his third confrontation with Story, Suarez said, "I just tried to switch it up and went first-pitch changeup. It just stayed up."

Suarez gave up a double and a walk in the seventh before giving way to **Mark Melancon** and was charged with a fifth run when Melancon yielded a two-out single to LeMahieu.

The Giants tied the game at 2 on **Austin Slater**'s two-out single in the third and went ahead 3-2 when **Aramis Garcia** hit his second career homer in the fourth. The Giants held the lead in each of their three losses in this series.

"You look at the series, I know it's been a rough time here in Colorado," Bochy said. "But they fought hard, came back a couple times, just couldn't hold the lead."

The Giants hit four singles in the first, but came away with just one run. Alen Hanson, who had one of the four singles, scored on **Evan Longoria**'s double-play grounder. After the double play, **Brandon Belt** and Slater singled, but **Chris Shaw** flied to short right.

The Giants had runners on first and second with no outs in the fifth, but couldn't score against **Antonio Senzatela**. He struck out Slater and Shaw and got **Gorkys Hernandez** to fly out on his 91st and final pitch. Senzatela and four relievers combined to retire the final 15 Giants batters in order. The Giants finished with nine hits, but Slater's run-scoring single in the third was their only one in nine at-bats with runners in scoring position.

"We had our chances to add on and have a big inning, but it didn't happen," Bochy said. "Three runs here, it could be tough to win a ballgame."

At some point, that will happen for the Giants at Coors Field. The good news for the Giants is they do not have to return to Denver until May 7, 2019.

"We got our hits," Bochy said. "We just didn't do enough damage. That was the difference in the game. Early there, we put up a run, couldn't put up a crooked number."

SOUND SMART

Hernandez hit no homers in 348 plate appearances last year but has hit 15 homers this season. The last Major League player to hit 15 or more home runs after hitting none with 300 or more plate appearances was Phil Bradley with the Mariners in 1985, who hit 26 homers that season after hitting none in 373 plate appearances in 1984.

HE SAID IT

"I know the crowd was into that. That was good old hardball there." -- *Bochy, on Black falling behind to Story 2-0 and then striking him out on three straight fastballs*

UP NEXT

The Giants are off Thursday and open a three-game series Friday at Milwaukee with left-hander **Derek Holland** (7-8, 3.56 ERA) scheduled to start the 5:10 p.m. PT game. He has pitched very well lately, giving up one run in six innings in a no-decision Saturday in his last start against the Mets as the Giants lost 2-1 in 11 innings. In his past eight starts, five of which the Giants have won, Holland is 2-0 with a 2.42 ERA while limiting opposing hitters to a .224 average and a .659 OPS and allowing just three home runs in 44 2/3 innings in that stretch. The Brewers will counter with **Chase Anderson** (9-7, 3.96).

MLB.com
Giants call up recently acquire Avelino
Jack Etkin

DENVER -- Shortstop **Abiatal Avelino** played the first inning Thursday for Triple-A Scranton-Wilkes Barre, but didn't take the field in the second for the Yankees' farm club.

He thought he could be on his way to New York, getting a promotion to the Major Leagues for the first time, particularly when some teammates told him, "Gleyber Torres doesn't feel really good. I said, 'Oh, maybe that's an opportunity for me.'"

View Full Game Coverage

Soon enough, Avelino, 23, learned that he had been traded to the Giants on Friday in the deal that sent outfielder **Andrew McCutchen** to the Yankees.

"At that moment, I was really happy because I said in my mind, 'OK, now I have another opportunity to go to The Show.' And now I'm here," said Avelino, who was called up by the Giants on Tuesday.

Before joining the Giants, the only player on the team Avelino knew was pitcher **Johnny Cueto**, who is recovering from Tommy John surgery and not with the team. Both Cueto and Avelino are from San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, where Avelino said he once spoke with Cueto.

"So for me, everybody's new [here]," Avelino said.

Avelino said he tried out three times for the Giants in the Dominican Republic, but wasn't offered a contract. He was 16 when he signed with the Yankees in December 2011.

He hit .337 with a .945 OPS this year for Double-A Trenton in 49 games with 10 homers, 28 RBIs and 15 stolen bases. At Scranton-Wilkes Barre, Avelino hit .252 with a .663 OPS in 74 games with five homers, 38 RBIs and 10 stolen bases.

"Same baseball," Avelino said of the highest two levels in the Minors. "In Triple-A, I lost my timing to hit."

Having hit 15 home runs this year, Avelino was asked whether that could be part of his skill-set.

"Not yet," he said. "My game is play really good defense, steal bases, be aggressive, be smart. And if they need me for a pinch-hitter, I can do that, too. But right now, no power hitter."

Avelino played one game in right field this year for Scranton-Wilkes Barre, and Giants manager Bruce Bochy said more outfield play could be in store for Avelino, who in the Minors has played 365 games at shortstop, 190 at second base and 36 at third base.

"It is something that will be discussed," Bochy said. "He's really an athletic kid. You can tell just watching his actions at shortstop. He could be a super-utility type guy like **(Alen) Hanson**. ... He's got a plus-arm. He runs well. So I think that's really a no-brainer as far as his future, getting some work there.

"Not to say he can't possibly be an everyday player somewhere. But meanwhile until then, you want to keep as much flexibility as possible with these athletes."

Crawford out

Shortstop **Brandon Crawford** was not in the lineup due to a recurrence of left knee soreness that caused him to miss three games before he returned Tuesday.

"He's dealing with some soreness in the knee and it's come back to the point where we think it's wise to give him a day off today," Bochy said. "With the day off tomorrow, he should be able to go on Friday. But it flared up on him a little bit. Not to the point where it was, but to try to stay ahead of it, we think it's best to just give him a day."

MLB.com

Giants-Dodgers among baseball's best rivalries

Richard Justice

With respect to **Cole Hamels**, he's entitled to his view of the Cubs-Brewers rivalry. Or non-rivalry, to be more precise. That's the beauty of rivalries. They're whatever you or I want them to be.

For instance, there was a time not that long ago when the Rangers and Blue Jays were as good a rivalry as there was in sport. One **Jose Bautista** bat flip -- and you have to admit, Texas fans, it was a thing of beauty -- in the 2015 postseason hurt some feelings.

Some of us never understood why the bat flip was such a big deal. If you can't show a little emotion at that time, when can you ever show it?

- **Watch FREE on MLB.TV: Cubs vs. Brewers tonight, 8 p.m. ET**

The Rangers said it was that the bat landed a little too close to their dugout, that it was a little too in their face. OK, whatever.

Flash forward to the next season when Rangers reliever **Matt Bush** drilled Bautista with a 98-mph fastball. Interestingly, Texas waited until the final inning of the final game between the two teams.

And then came Bautista's hard slide into second base, and Rangers second baseman **Rougned Odor** delivered an earth-shaking punch to the jaw.

If you're running down a list of things that make for a great rivalry, you might want to start with two teams that learned to hate one another's guts.

That might not constitute a real rivalry because it was a short-term thing. All that was forgotten, if not forgiven, by the time Texas and Toronto met in the 2016 postseason.

Real rivalries must have something much more basic, and it really doesn't have all that much to do with the players in many instances: It's the fans.

"Rivalries are normally created by fan bases and I know the proximity is there," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "The best I can describe it is, I think it's legitimately the Cardinals and Cubs, they've created that [rivalry]. I've been involved in the past in different organizations with the Dodgers and Angels and it's a different feeling.

"You can go back to your high school days, you know what that feels like. It was a great game, both teams are playing well. It's something that could build into something over time. You just can't create a rivalry by writing that it is. It has to be felt, it has to be proven over time."

Or as Brewers manager Craig Counsell put it so eloquently: "Rivalry? Whatever, man. Put me in the building and let me enjoy the game, I'm good."

Kids in Boston learn to dislike the Yankees almost before they can walk. Kids in New York learn that it's not business as usual when the Red Sox come to town.

While there's decades of history between the two clubs, it's still about the fans. They make it happen.

And that's why we beg to differ with Hamels about the Brewers-Cubs rivalry. He said it couldn't be a real rivalry because when the two teams played at Miller Park this week, there were just

too many Cubs fans in the house. To Hamels, that took something away from a potential rivalry.

Actually, it's easy to argue that all those fans wearing Cubs gear, and all those cheers for the Cubs at a Brewers home game, just serve to stir the pot.

We acknowledge the Cubs have bigger rivals than the Brewers. But because Chicago and Milwaukee are so close, and because Brewers fans are white hot to beat the Cubbies, that's all the ingredients needed for a great rivalry.

To ramp it up another notch or two, let's have the Cubs and Brewers meet in the postseason next month. Let's let Milwaukee eliminate Chicago and then do it again next season.

When the Brewers show up at Wrigley Field, we'd find out that suddenly they'd managed to work up a sincere dislike of **Christian Yelich, Lorenzo Cain** and friends.

With this week's Cubs-Brewers dustup in mind, let's rate baseball's five best rivalries:

1. Red Sox-Yankees

I know what you're thinking. Don't you ever get tired of hyping this one? Actually, no. There's no better rivalry in sports because the fans care deeply and the two teams are competitive most years and the games have a crackling intensity to them. There's years of history, from Aaron Boone and Bucky Dent to Pedro Martinez and Don Zimmer to Dave Roberts and Curt Schilling. Sports simply does not get any better.

2. Dodgers-Giants

Some of the same dynamics. These two clubs have been playing for more than a century, and where they once both called New York home and played a few miles from one another, there always seems to be something on the line when they play.

3. Cubs-Cardinals

There was a time a few years ago when the two managers -- Tony La Russa of the Cardinals and Dusty Baker of the Cubs -- disliked one another so much that the series got scary.

So many pitches were thrown inside, so many fights and near-fights, that it would have been appropriate to have had the managers meet in a parking lot to settle things while the players played baseball. Besides that, yes, Cubs-Cardinals games mean something in both cities.

4. Braves-Mets

Did you know that Tom Seaver's first pro contract was with the Braves? That was in 1966, and when it was ruled invalid, the Mets ended up with the future Hall of Famer. And then, wouldn't

you know it, Seaver won Game 1 of the '69 Braves-Mets National League Championship Series.

This didn't really become a rivalry until the Braves were shifted into the NL East in 1994 at a time when they were making 14 straight postseason appearances. While the '99 NLCS -- where the Braves beat the Mets in six games -- was the highlight, Braves-Mets games have had a big edge to them.

- **Cubs-Crew rivalry filled with wild finishes**

5. Cubs-Brewers

Why not? There are two necessary ingredients to a great rivalry: Proximity, and fan interest. So many Cubs fans live in southern Wisconsin that the demarcation line between Cubs territory and Brewers territory is blurred at times. But Brewers fans enjoy nothing more than beating the Cubs, and that's where great rivalries always start.

The Athletic

Giants close out two years of pure misery at Coors Field, but Ray Black provides one glimmer of a victory

Andrew Baggarly

DENVER — The Giants might never see a greater power-on-power matchup than the night in 2004 when Barry Bonds* turned on a 99-mph fastball from Eric Gagne* and pulled it foul into the San Francisco Bay.

But the situation came awfully close in the eighth inning Wednesday night.

The Rockies' Trevor Story strode to the plate hunting his fourth home run of the game, and the previous three were jaw-droppers even by Coors Field standards. The second one traveled 505 feet, according to Statcast — the longest shot by any major-league hitter that the tracking technology has captured in its four seasons of data collection.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy took the baseball and signaled for Ray Black, the brawny right-hander with a 100-mph fastball and an arm freshened up from a recent break in the minor leagues.

It was classic theater. For the Giants, as they play out the string, it might be their last compelling scene before they draw a curtain on the season.

"I knew the situation and I knew who I was facing," Black said. "I played it out in the bullpen: get ahead with fastballs and maybe throw slider. I ... had to back off on that."

His first two fastballs, at 100.1 and 99.8 mph, missed wide of the strike zone. And at that point, with a 2-0 count ...

"I don't want to fool around with sliders and put him on," Black said. "I wanted to challenge him. If he beat me, I'd rather he beat me up there than a ball down that he drops the bat head onto."

Story swung through 99.3 mph at the letters. Then he fouled 100.5 mph straight back. Black saw no need to get cute. He reared and fired 100.1 mph at the top of the zone again.

"If he tags me, he tags me," Black said. "It's hard to hit four home runs in a game. I'm just glad I didn't miss middle-middle."

Black hit his intended spot, and he blew away a hitter who had spent the night flirting with low-grade orbital patterns.

It was just about the only time this season that the Giants could claim victory at Coors Field. Story's three earlier home runs off left-hander Andrew Suarez did enough damage, and the Rockies' thrasher of a power party was loud enough to call the cops. The Giants, with ascots tied and pinkies raised, threw a much quieter affair, as has become their inconvenient custom here. Their own nine hits, aside from Aramis Garcia's second career homer, were as potent as cucumber and cream cheese finger sandwiches in a 5-3 loss Wednesday night.

The Rockies are in first place in the NL West in September for the first time since 1995, and if they see through to their first division title in franchise history, they can partially thank the Giants for serving as their home scrimmage partners.

The Giants finished 1-8 at Coors Field. They are 2-17 here over the past two seasons. And be brave, kids, because this is the part that might sting: take out these nine games here and the Giants have a 32-23 record against the NL West this year. Calculated over a full season, that would equate to a 94-win pace.

For all the Giants' injuries and disappointment, they have not been outclassed anywhere else nearer to sea level in the NL West. They have a winning record against the Diamondbacks (11-8). They have a winning record against the Dodgers (9-7). They have a winning record against the Padres (8-5). They even took four of seven from the Rockies at AT&T Park. And for all the ways that they haven't measured up away from home, they have competed well at their other NL West road stops. They are 5-4 at Chase Field, 5-5 at Dodger Stadium and 3-3 with one more series to play at Petco Park.

So what happened at Coors Field?

"The difference is we have a different team," said Rockies outfielder Carlos Gonzalez, who has seen both feast and famine against the Giants during his time in the NL West. "We've been pitching very well against the Giants and our offense has been clutch against them. Tonight was one of those nights. They had a good pitcher on the mound, but Trevor took over. When a guy has a night like that, it's deserving to get a win."

Prior to the game, Gonzalez went over to talk to Giants bench coach Hensley Meulens and first base coach Jose Alguacil.

"I told Bam Bam, 'To be where you are, with all your injuries?'" Gonzalez said. "We've had years where that happened to us, and ... *whooo*. It wasn't good, man.

"And I have a lot of respect for the Giants. They have the best manager in the league. Bochy knows how to use a pitching staff. He knows his players. He's been a World Series champ three times. I still tell the guys, 'We're playing the Giants today. You'd better be on your game.' They'd always find a way to win, even when they're going through a tough time. Even here."

Sometimes, especially here. As Gonzalez was speaking at his locker, Rockies TV commentator Ryan Spilborghs strolled fast. No Giants fan can hear that name without the phrase, "*walk-off grand slam*" crawling across the brain.

"Yeah, but see? That was the only way we could beat them, something crazy happening," Gonzalez said. "Unless we did that, it seems like they always came out on top. But it's baseball. You can't predict what's going to happen."

The best you can do is prepare for it. And part of preparation is finding opportunities for growth.

That is why Bochy left Suarez in to face Story a third time, even though the score was tied in the sixth inning and the left-hander had already given up two shots that traveled a combined 964 feet. The homer in the fourth broke the Statcast standard of 504 feet that Giancarlo Stanton set here in 2016.

Story was so locked in, he connected for a 459-foot shot in the first inning even as his feet slipped from under him and he landed in the dirt. Suarez made an adjustment in the sixth and went to a first-pitch changeup. He missed his spot, and Story's 416-foot shot was a fence scraper in comparison to his first two. But it gave the Rockies a lead they would not lose.

"Sometimes you try not to make a mistake and that happens," Bochy said. "He's not trying to put it in the nitro zone there. ... No, two outs, nobody on, I have confidence in the kid. He's making an adjustment there and the pitch got away from him."

If that sounds familiar, it's because Bochy said almost the same thing a few weeks ago when the Giants retired Bonds' number. Part of the reason that Bonds hit more home runs against the San Diego Padres than any other team is that Bochy did not default to the intentional walk.

Bochy saw it as an opportunity to learn something about a young pitcher, or send a message of confidence, or both.

"My philosophy is it's about competition," Bochy said last month. "Fans come to see it. They don't want to see him walk. There's times you pitch to him because that's what you do. You compete. And I liked to send a message to my guy, 'I think you can get him out.' Sometimes we did.

"I will say, though, he won most of those."

What about after Story won three rounds with Suarez? Did Bochy seek to learn something about his young pitcher, or send him a message, or both?

“Well, both,” Bochy said. “I want them to know I think they can get them out, and if they make their pitches, they will.”

Black did, and he did. It was a thrilling confrontation. When the Giants scan two years of frustration at Coors Field, it might be the only good memory they choose to keep.

“That was some good old hardball there,” Bochy said.

He almost softened and smiled. Almost.

The Athletic

Coors Field has become a nightmare for the Giants, with two surprising exceptions

Andrew Baggarly

DENVER — You’ll hear Giants manager Bruce Bochy speak some version of this statement every year: Sure, teams that win their divisions are talented and play the game the right way, but they also usually get a pleasant surprise or two.

How are these for pleasant surprises?

Gorkys Hernández hit zero home runs last year. Nobody in the major leagues had more plate appearances (348) without going deep.

Hernández hit his 15th home run Tuesday night.

Dereck Rodríguez was a converted outfielder in the Twins system who hadn’t pitched above Double-A last year. He arrived in Giants camp this spring as a non-roster invitee.

Rodríguez threw his 12th quality start in 15 outings Tuesday night. The only major league pitchers who have a higher quality start percentage are Jacob deGrom and Max Scherzer.

The complicating factor, of course, is that those pleasant surprises are supposed to come from complementary players. They aren’t supposed to be the best pitcher or hitter on your team.

So the most notable part of Hernández’s solo home run in the seventh inning at Coors Field wasn’t that it gave the Giants a momentary lead. The notable part is that Hernández is now tied for the team home run lead with Evan Longoria and the departed Andrew McCutchen.

No disrespect intended to Hernández, but if he is leading your team in home runs, that is a symptom and not a cure.

Hernández’s shot was his seventh against the Rockies this season, and it cleared the fence just in time to make a well-deserved winner of Rodríguez. The right-hander was steady and composed yet again while holding the Rockies to a run on six hits in six innings.

Who thought this could be possible back on May 29, when Rodríguez made his big league debut in this ballpark with 3 1/3 innings in place of an ailing Jeff Samardzija?

Rodríguez's 2.41 ERA ranks as the fifth lowest among NL pitchers with at least 90 innings. He has thrown at least six innings and allowed two runs or fewer in 10 of his last 11 starts. The interruption came in his previous outing last Wednesday at home against the Arizona Diamondbacks. Asked about the end of that streak, he shrugged and said he wouldn't let one night with a wild fastball derail what he had done over the previous two months.

He was right.

Other than David Dahl's home run to start the second inning, the Rockies could not crack Rodríguez even when they put him in the stretch. He had too many wrinkles in his game, too much confidence in his breaking pitches to shy away from them, and plenty of octane on his high fastball. He struck out six and walked one.

His postgame comments were as exemplary as his performance.

"Yeah, man," he said. "I forgot how fun it is pitching here."

Say what?

"I just really like the mound for some reason," he said. "I don't know if it's because it was the first big league mound I've ever stood on, or what. I just feel confident."

Rodríguez has looked and acted confident on every big league mound this season. Bochy has run out of superlatives for the 26-year-old rookie but said it will be a priority to preserve him down the stretch as he pitches deep into September for the first time. There was no chance of pushing him past six innings and 93 pitches.

Rodríguez's decision slipped away in the seventh when Reyes Moronta gave up a pinch homer to Ryan McMahon, and the rest of the night followed it down the drain. Moronta loaded the bases on a hit, a walk and a wild pitch that opened up first base and made an intentional walk to Nolan Arenado an obvious move. Then Colorado native Ty Blach entered and gave up a three-run triple to Carlos González.

The Giants lost for the seventh time in eight games at Coors Field and they are 2-16 here dating back to the start of last season. They'll line 'em up one last time behind Andrew Suárez before leaving the Mile High City behind until their first visit in 2019. Between now and then, they'll have to figure out how to compete in this ballpark again.

They won't do it by loading up on the least valuable component of the three true outcomes. In the series thus far, the Giants have 24 strikeouts and two walks. When you tack on last weekend's three games against the Mets, it becomes 63 strikeouts and seven walks.

But enough about that. By now, you understand that the Giants are a flawed and beaten up offensive group. No need to further enumerate that.

So instead, I'll use the rest of this space to empty the head and the notebook of some recent observations:

—The Giants did well to get two useful players from the Yankees for a one-month rental of Andrew McCutchen. Understand, though, that the trade worked from the Yankees' perspective,

too. That's because both infielder Abiatal Avelino and right-hander Juan De Paula must be added to the 40-man roster after this season or they would be exposed to the Rule 5 draft.

The Yankees have a loaded system, and they probably expected to lose one or both players anyway. So they turned them into a former NL MVP outfielder who might help carry them through October. And the Giants benefited by essentially getting an early jump on two extra Rule 5 picks, without the roster restrictions for keeping them next year.

— Avelino received a call-up Tuesday along with first baseman Ryder Jones in what was expected to be the final roster additions in September. Avelino is 23 and has a mature build. He took grounders at short and showed off nice hands and what I would describe as plus arm strength. He'll be used as an extra guy off the bench and get an occasional start in the middle infield, Bochy said.

Even if Avelino never profiles as any more of an impact player than, say, Ehire Adrianza, he still gives the Giants an asset that they didn't have in the upper levels of their system: a true shortstop who can provide depth in case something were to befall Brandon Crawford, their most irreplaceable player on the field. It's also going to serve the Giants well to have a shortstop who can replace Crawford in the late innings of lopsided games. Nobody has grinded it out more than Crawford or quietly played through more nagging injuries, and he isn't getting any younger. It'll be important to pace him better next year. If Avelino can help to any extent, he'll bring value.

— The rest of this month will be about developing young players like Chris Shaw, and that means there will be yelps of protest from some corners of the internet when Hunter Pence gets a start against left-handers. But keep in mind that starting Pence can be part of that development process, too. You want to shield young players and put them in the best position to succeed, and Shaw hit .208 against lefties at Triple-A. That doesn't mean the Giants see Shaw's potential limited to a platoon role in the big leagues. It just means for now, they don't want to throw him to the wolves.

— Left-hander Steven Okert looks to be in better shape and he is throwing with more velocity. It's funny to think that his scoreless inning Monday was his season debut. I had forgotten that he didn't get into a game when he was on the roster earlier this season. Okert pitched well enough to deserve a call-up, and this will be an important month as the Giants evaluate the best use of their 40-man roster spaces after the season. On the flipside, right-hander Derek Law is not back with the Giants because he has a high ankle sprain, according to Bruce Bochy.

— The Giants have six games remaining with the San Diego Padres, and although they won't have any bearing on the NL playoff picture, they could be six of the more intriguing games that remain on the schedule. The Padres called up Francisco Mejía, the offensive catcher they picked up from the Indians in the Brad Hand trade, after he hit .328 with seven homers in 31 games for Triple-A El Paso. They also promoted pure-hitting second baseman Luis Urias last week.

They'll no doubt wait until next season to call up Fernando Tatís Jr., just as the White Sox waited with Eloy Jiménez and the Blue Jays waited with Vladimir Guerrero Jr. Perhaps the Giants will be in a similar position with Joey Bart, but not until the end of next season. For now,

it'll be fun to watch the Padres as this wellspring of young talent begins to bubble up to the majors. It came together more rapidly than expected for the Braves. Let's see if the Padres will be capable of making a move on the NL West as early as next season.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Andrew Suarez not worried about rough night vs Rockies: 'One guy killed me'

Alex Pavlovic

DENVER — For years, Nolan Arenado has tormented the Giants. They would visit Coors Field and the end result was automatic. Arenado would beat them with a four-hit game, or hit three homers in the series, or walk them off. Or all of the above.

For three days this week, Arenado was practically silent. But the man who stands 50 feet to his left every night was as destructive as it gets.

Two days after he hit two homers off Madison Bumgarner, Trevor Story crushed three off of Andrew Suarez. And by crushed, we mean CRUSHED. Story hit 1,380 feet worth of home runs in his first three at-bats, including a 505-foot blast to the left field concourse that was the longest in the four seasons Statcast has been tracking balls in play.

Suarez stood in the visiting clubhouse a few minutes after a 5-3 loss and shook his head. He managed a smile.

"It's crazy how baseball works," he said. "I thought I threw well. One guy killed me."

It started in the first, when Suarez threw a slider that wasn't far enough in and Story hit a moonshot that landed beyond all the seats in left and disappeared down a hallway. That one was estimated at 459 feet.

Three innings later, Suarez tried a fastball. Another moonshot. This one soared towards the scoreboard at 112 mph and landed just in front of the Todd Helton Grill beyond the concourse. A man in an Arenado jersey looked down, stunned, and scooped up the baseball as he ordered a beer and bag of popcorn. You don't expect to get a souvenir when you're standing 500 feet from the plate, even here.

"He had a great day on us and that was the difference in the game," manager Bruce Bochy said. "He carried them. (Suarez) was hitting his spots with everybody. He just made mistakes to Story."

The final mistake may have been made in the dugout. With two outs and nobody on in the sixth, Suarez was allowed to pitch to Story a third time with the score tied. You never want to

put a runner on at Coors Field, but then again, it's rare that anyone anywhere is sitting on a pair of 450-foot blasts in the sixth inning. Suarez tried to start Story with a changeup this time.

"It just stayed up," he said. "Yeah, he hit it pretty good."

Bochy said he did not regret the decision to let Suarez try to get Story out, even after the third homer.

"Two outs, nobody on, I have confidence in the kid," he said. "He's going to make an adjustment there and the pitch just got away from him."

At that point, this night became less about the end result than Story's end result. He got his shot at a fourth homer in the eighth, but this time the right-handed-hitting shortstop wasn't facing a lefty. Bochy called on Ray Black, who had a plan as he watched from the bullpen. He wanted to start Story with fastballs and get ahead, then bury him with a slider. He fell behind 2-0 right away.

"I bailed on that pretty quick," Black said.

Instead, he kept playing hardball. Black threw three more fastballs, blowing Story away with a 100.1 mph heater on a 2-2 count. Four of his five pitches to Story hit triple digits.

"I just tried to challenge him and stay up in the zone with fastballs," Black said. "If he's going to beat me, I'd rather he beat me up there."

Story did not get his fourth, but that was little consolation in a quiet visiting clubhouse. The Giants were swept here, finishing 1-8 at Coors Field in 2018. They have lost 18 of their last 20 games in Denver.

"It's been a tough place here the last couple of years," Bochy said. "Some things are hard to explain. We don't put up a lot of runs here. We did the first game, but with the exception of that, we haven't been scoring a lot here."

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants give up three homers to Trevor Story, get swept in Colorado

Alex Pavlovic

DENVER — Even at AT&T Park, this would have been a good night for Trevor Story. In the thin air of Coors Field it was historic.

The Rockies shortstop hit 1,380 feet worth of homers, slugging his team to a 5-3 win over the Giants and a series sweep. The Giants looked to be in for a big offensive night early on, but they ended up scattering nine hits and going down quietly most of the night.

They have lost 18 of their last 20 games at Coors Field and went 1-8 here this season. Here's what you need to know from the final game in Denver in 2018 ...

— Story hit a first-inning slider so hard that he fell into the dirt as he finished his swing. The ball went an estimated 459 feet, which looked like a popup compared to Story's second blast. In the fourth, Story once again cleared all the seats, hitting a 505-foot homer that landed at the feet of fans who were getting popcorn out at a left field grill. The homer was the longest in the four years Statcast has been tracking them, edging a Giancarlo Stanton bomb by one foot.

— For some inexplicable reason, the Giants allowed Andrew Suarez to face Story a third time. He homered on the first pitch he saw — a changeup right down the middle — in the sixth, giving the Rockies a 4-3 lead. It only went 416 feet, though, so there's that.

— The fastball ticks up at Coors Field, and Ray Black brought the good stuff to strike Story out as he went for a fourth homer. Black hit Story with 100 mph, 100, 99, 100 and 100 in the at-bat.

— Making his second straight start with Suarez, Aramis Garcia provided some of the offense with a solo shot in the fourth. The blast was Garcia's second. He didn't homer in 38 Triple-A at-bats prior to a promotion.

KNBR.com

Giants swept by Rockies as Story homers thrice

Jacob Hutchinson

There's nothing quite like a series at Coors Field. Over the last three games, the Giants and Colorado Rockies combined for 13 home runs. But those fireworks failed to benefit the Giants, who took a sweep to the first-place Rockies with a 5-3 loss.

The loss is one in a string of many losses the team has taken in Colorado. It gives the Giants (68-73) an abysmal 2-17 record at Coors Field since the start of last season and moves them five games below .500 for the first time since May 29, when the Giants lost their third-straight game to — you guessed it — the Rockies.

Andy Suarez pitched a seven-inning night that was effective outside of the torment from Trevor Story.

Story had an absurd night, hitting two moonshot home runs in the mile-high air before a line drive third homer that brought him out for a curtain call. The first followed a sacrifice fly to give the Rockies a 2-1 lead in the first inning, slipping over and falling on home plate after a monster

shot to left. After Suarez retired eight-straight batters from the first through the fourth, Story stepped back up and hit by far the longest home run of the MLB season.

The ball shot off Story's bat to sail a reported 505 feet, the longest home run ever recorded at Coors Field. It was initially reported as 504 feet, but was updated moments later to beat a 504-foot home run by Giancarlo Stanton by a foot. It tied the game at 3-3 and was just the third hit of the game for the Rockies.

In the sixth, Story must have assumed he would be pitched to carefully because he was first-pitch swinging. He shot a changeup over the left-field fence to give the Rockies a 4-3 lead. At that point, the Rockies had mustered just four hits and four runs, three of which came from Story's solo shots.

However, the Giants were not without their own offense. A pair of back-to-back singles from Joe Panik and Alen Hanson opened the game, but were spoiled by a run-scoring double play from Evan Longoria. Longoria redeemed himself with a double in the third inning and scored on single through the left side by Austin Slater, tying the game at 2-2.

But the highlight of the night had to be another home run from rookie catcher Aramis Garcia – the second of his less than week-long MLB career. It gave the Giants a temporary lead in the fourth before Story countered it in the fourth to make it 3-3.

Only Ray Black secured an out from Story by throwing five-straight four-seam fastballs at 100, 100, 99, 100 and 100 mph, respectively.

KNBR.com

Despite reduced playing time, Hunter Pence remains Giants' locker room anchor Jacob Hutchinson

You can't miss him. A mountain of curly, reddish-brown hair shoots unevenly out the side of his cap and a wild beard covers his face.

He heads toward his locker tucked away in the corner of the clubhouse. As he chats with teammates, there's an excitement in his voice and expression – his grayish-blue eyes seem to go without blinking for minutes.

When a reporter draws near, that excitement dims, and his slightly hunched, 6-foot-4 frame all but hides the gladiator mask resting in the top shelf of his locker.

"You want to talk to me about me?" he asks.

If you know the Giants, you know there is no one quite like Hunter Pence, the 12-year veteran who grew up in Arlington, Texas.

His swing is unique and incendiary, he runs the bases like he's ice-skating, and he throws the ball like he's trying to throw his arm along with it. He's become a true denizen of San Francisco, enjoying cold brew coffee, traveling on motorized scooters, and working on YouTube videos with his wife, Lexi.

"I love this city; I feel like I fit in," Pence said. "I definitely don't think I have a normal personality. I'm a little bit, what's the word? Eccentric, maybe. It just feels like fate has a funny way of working out and I feel great here and I love it."

But his distinctive play style and affability are just at the surface of what's endeared him to the city of San Francisco and the Giants organization.

One thing that nearly everyone around Pence – teammates, coaches, commentators – loves is his authenticity. Ask any player in the Giants clubhouse what they think about Pence and you'll likely hear a story about his unrelenting passion for the game and the unrivaled care and mentorship he provides for teammates.

"There's nothing phony about the guy, what you see is what you get," said Mike Krukow, the longtime Giants broadcaster and player who introduced Pence when he won the 2013 Willie Mac Award. "He's got one speed and he lives life like he's had 22 cups of coffee. Gregarious, friendly, ambassador of the game and if he says he's your friend, he's your friend. And he will fight for you."

The only person you won't hear that from is Pence himself.

"I just don't love talking about myself," he says.

It can be easy to mistake his uncomfortability for self-praise as being confrontational, but nothing could be further from the truth. It's a genuine bit of awkwardness – one of those idiosyncrasies that makes Pence who he is.

Ron Wotus, the Giants' third base coach and previous bench coach, has known Pence well since he arrived from the Philadelphia Phillies in a 2012 trade – with a plane ticket he bought himself so he could try and make it to the game the day he was traded.

"Everybody cares, but he shows it in a different way," Wotus said. "He really is engaged in his teammates and the game and gives you his best every day. I have the ultimate respect for that."

Wotus's favorite Pence memory, and the one that catapulted his status from timely acquisition to fan-favorite and folk legend, is his speech during the 2012 NLDS against the Cincinnati Reds. The Giants trailed 2-0 in the series and before Game 3, Pence, eyes wide and unblinking, delivered a rallying cry to the team before a comeback series win that spurred a World Series-winning postseason.

“It was truly from the heart,” Wotus said. “It wasn’t prepared. It wasn’t fake. It was genuine. And he talked about things that you don’t necessarily talk about. He was talking about the relationships and the friendships and how much he loved being around the guys. Usually, you don’t get that in a motivational speech.”

Since joining the Giants, Pence has been part of two World Series-winning teams and received a five-year, \$90 million contract in 2013. But now, in the final year of that contract, he’s having the toughest season of his career.

Pence spent 25 games in the minors while rehabbing a right thumb sprain and for the first time in his career, he has come off the bench (42) in more major-league games than he’s started (37). He’s also had to shift from right field to left and is batting a career-low .217.

But Pence isn’t someone who dwells much on the past.

“You take what you can learn and grow off of it, but I don’t dwell on the past that much,” Pence said. “I’m constantly forging forward.”

You’d be hard-pressed to find someone who describes Pence as someone who plays baseball with grace. Off the field, it’s the exact opposite. Few people know this better than manager Bruce Bochy.

“He’s such a pro and he’s handled a different role in such a great way,” Bochy said. “During the game, you’ll see him pacing and going down there and getting some swings in, waiting for a moment when he may pinch-hit. Any way he can help us, he’s ready to take on that role. That’s what makes him special. He’s a great teammate and I’m sure it hasn’t been easy for him to have his role change, but he’s been great about it.”

Grégor Blanco has shared the outfield with Pence on-and-off since 2012, along with the two World Series rings he and Pence both have with the Giants. Blanco played most of this season in the minors after he was sent down in early June so Pence could be recalled.

“Hunter, to me, is just the leader of this team,” Blanco said. “He’s just one of the oldest guys here and everybody respects him. He’s always motivated, always happy. It doesn’t matter how bad we can be, he’s always in a positive way. He has such a strong mind that he can feed that to the whole locker room and it’s amazing.”

Pence’s value is no longer in hitting the 23 home runs a year he’s averaged throughout his career. He’s hit a pinch-hit home run and a walk-off double this year, but more valuable than those energetic boosts on the field has been the way he involves himself with his teammates. When rookie center fielder Steven Duggar showed up for his first major league camp in Phoenix, Arizona in 2016, Pence was there to mentor him.

“For a guy who’s had so much success in this game, he really kind of took me under his wing from the jump in my first big-league camp two years ago,” Duggar said. “He was always helping

me, giving me advice here and there, kind of telling me what to expect. He really has been everything to me. Words to try to describe how he is as a teammate, it doesn't do it justice." In spring training, Pence is the Giants' unofficial coach of visualization, encouraging players to imagine, with full conviction, what they want to achieve. Chase d'Arnaud said he and Pence envisioned themselves celebrating a championship in Union Square and has saved that mental image as motivation throughout the year.

"He's the most charismatic teammate that I've ever had in my whole life, maybe the most charismatic person that I've ever met," d'Arnaud said. "I swear, if Tony Robbins met him, I think he would end up listening to Hunter, more than Hunter listening to Tony."

Of course, Pence is actually a scholar of Robbins.

"I don't necessarily have answers, but I've read Tony Robbins," Pence said. "I listen to Tony Robbins. I think he's a pretty remarkable fellow."

Derek Holland might disagree about that first part. When Holland came to the Giants this offseason, he didn't know what his role would be. After splitting time between starting and relieving, he is now in the midst of his best season (3.56 ERA) since 2013 (3.42 ERA) and has cemented himself as part of the starting rotation. You can guess where he drew inspiration.

"(Pence) is willing to do whatever they ask of him," Holland said. "I think that's kind of helped me too. I came here, I didn't know if I was going to be a starter and I've bounced back and forth as a starter and a reliever. And the way he carried himself, I wanted to make sure I'm doing the same thing, so he's been a role model. I love having him as a teammate, a friend, a brother."

Pence says he just tries to "control what you can control." It's a statement in line with his pensive mindset. He reads constantly, but not about any subject in particular. The books find him, he says.

It's that scholarly nature, humility, and a belief in the power of the mind and visualizing success that helps Pence to constantly captivate his teammates.

"I think life is imagination," Pence said. "Imagine where you want to be, that's your creation. Everything is perception. Look at many of the great minds and look at what they tell you to do. Einstein was all about imagining. Imagine, imagine, imagine. And if you truly are trying to be the best you can, you can't dismiss the importance of the mind and imagining."

McCovey Chronicles

Giants prevent Trevor Story from tying major league record, still lose 5-3

Kenny Kelly

After tonight's game, I am very much into every ballpark installing on-deck boxes built out of bulletproof glass. They'd be like the compartments on the Popemobile but instead of protecting from assassins (although they wouldn't *not* protect from assassins), they would prevent any more humans from being struck by line drives in the noggin. I bring this up because **Charlie Blackmon** took a line drive off the helmet while he on-deck during an **Antonio Senzatela** at-bat. It's extremely lucky that it hit him in the helmet. If the ball hit six inches lower, it would have hit him in the face. I made some dumb jokes about Popemobiles in that first paragraph, but seriously: It could have killed him. **Blackmon** was standing well away from the on-deck circle, but the circle is still in the path of line drives. Something needs to be to protect hitters because there's nothing Blackmon could have done. Maybe not Popemobile capsules but maybe a screen. At the very least make it a requirement to be on the opposite side of the batter.

Earlier today, I wrote about how the **Giants are the only team that doesn't have a 20-homer hitter**. Don't be too hard on them. Hitting dingers is hard. It's quite possibly the hardest thing in sports. It shouldn't be physically possible to even make contact with a pitch that's traveling faster than 90 MPH let alone clubbing it 400 feet. Furthermore, most of the Giants seem like nice boys who are trying their best, and—oh what the actual hell? **Trevor Story** hit a ball over the bleachers and he fell down while he swung.

This wasn't a wall scraper. He hit the dang thing over the bleachers. Jeremy "Tom Waits" Affeldt commented that it probably bounced into the player's parking lot, and it wasn't hyperbole. I like to believe that it landed on **Matt Holliday's** car.

It's hard to think of a way to screw up harder than falling down in the middle of a swing. **Story** did that and still achieved the best possible outcome. Giants not named Aramis García have struggled to hit dingers for a decade and a half, and dudes are just stumbling into dingers. **Charlie Blackmon** was nearly wiped off the face of the earth, and he almost hit a dinger on the first pitch he saw. **Shohei Ohtani** found out he needs Tommy John today, and he hit two dingers tonight.

Story also hit another home run—his 30th—in his next at-bat. This time he didn't fall down, and the ball went 505 feet. He hit **Todd Helton's Food Restaurant** or whatever that is. The guy who got the ball was in the process of buying popcorn so who knows?

I ordinarily wouldn't embed video of an opponent's dinger for the purpose of oohing and ahing, but goodness, look at this thing.

Not only is that the longest home run of the season, it's the longest of the Statcast era. One of the things that I like about Statcast is that when someone says a home run went 500 feet there's proof. I've heard people say a ball went 500 feet a bunch of times, but they've always felt like big fish stories. Whoo boy, I tell you, that sucker went 500 feet. The lasers and radar say so.

Story also hit another home run, and this isn't me accidentally leaving in an extra copy + paste although that feels like something I would do. Story hit three dingers tonight. All of them came off Andrew Suárez.

I don't know how many times a batter has hit three homers off the same pitcher in a game before, but I'm going to assume that's usually not how it happens. Usually, if a guy is giving up a bunch of dingers, everyone else in the lineup is hitting, too. The pitcher doesn't get an opportunity to give up a third dinger to a dude because he gets taken out before that. But that wasn't the case tonight. Suárez pitched fairly well to everyone not named **Trevor Story** which allowed him to face Story a third time.

If you're wondering, the Giants haven't had a player hit three dingers in a game since **Jarrett Parker** hit three against the A's in September of 2016. The Giants have had just one player have a multi-homer game in 2018, and that was **Evan Longoria** back in May. Before that, **Brandon Belt** and **Madison Bumgarner** did it during the first week of the 2017 season. The Giants lost all three of those games.

I briefly mentioned that Aramis García hasn't struggled to hit dingers, and that's because he hit his second tonight.

It went about half the distance as Story's second tater, but it went over the fence on the fly so it's a home run by the rules of baseball. One of my remaining hopes for the 2018 season is that García demonstrates that he can be an effective back-up catcher for 2019. I know September stats don't mean a whole lot—**Buster Posey** had an OPS of .235 in September of 2009—but it would be a lot more fun to watch García mash dingers.

I had mostly checked out of the game as it went into the ninth, but then I noticed García would

lead off. So it was very cool that Bruce Bochy pinch hit him for Gregor Blanco. Blanco figures to be an integral part of the 2019 Giants, and he also needs to show what he can do and get his reps in. Frankly, with the platoon advantage, Blanco gave the Giants a much better chance to win this very important game.

Alas, Blanco did not help the Giants win this game. If he had, the Giants would have doubled their win-total in Coors Field from last year. Maybe next year they'll win two games in Colorado.

ESPN.com

MLB awards watch: Breaking down some of the tightest races ever Bradford Doolittle and David Schoenfield

As the 2018 season heads to the final weeks, the race for almost every major award is close. With hardware chases ranging from a 10-man scrum for NL MVP honors to one of the most unusual AL Rookie of the Year races ever, ESPN's David Schoenfield and Bradford Doolittle use Doolittle's Awards Index formula and their own takes to break down who has the lead right now, who to watch out for and what can happen as the season rolls to the finish line. **Awards Index leaders**

Position players:

Paul Goldschmidt, Diamondbacks (3.98)

Christian Yelich, Brewers (3.79)

Matt Carpenter, Cardinals (3.64)

Lorenzo Cain, Brewers (3.31)

Javier Baez, Cubs (3.30)

Nolan Arenado, Rockies (3.20)

Freddie Freeman, Braves (3.09)

Pitchers:

Max Scherzer, Nationals (4.43)

Aaron Nola, Phillies (4.16)

Jacob deGrom, Mets (4.14)

How close is this race? It's incredibly close. Removing the pitchers from this equation, the teams associated with the position players are all competing with each other for playoff slots, and it feels like the fate of the MVP trophy is intrinsically tied to the outcome of that postseason race. -- *Bradford Doolittle*

Why the numbers favor ... Baez, maybe. With the advanced metrics showing no clear separation among the top candidates, you wonder if traditional measures might hold some renewed sway this year. If so, that would favor Baez, who has an impressive suite of old-school measures and has been the best player on the best team. Baez might finish with a .300/30/100 season, and he is already over 20 steals and should get to 100 runs. -- *BD*

But the narrative belongs to ...Baez, thanks to his strength in those traditional numbers and his positional edge over the three first basemen -- although that could change to the player who has the biggest September. Yelich is surging after hitting .400 in July and .307 with 11 home runs in August. If the Brewers catch the Cubs, that could push Yelich to the top. -- *David Schoenfield*

A dark horse to watch: Nobody seems to be talking all that much about Arenado. His problem is that a Coors Field player has to put up bigger offensive numbers than the other candidates do and Arenado hasn't done that, plus he's driven in 130-plus runs the past three seasons and won't get there this season. His defensive metrics are also down. Still, if the Rockies win the West, he'll get extra credit for that. -- *DS*

The bottom line: As things stand now, I don't think any of the top pitchers will win the MVP award because there just isn't a clear-cut case that one of them should outrank the top position player. If the Diamondbacks survive their brutal finishing schedule and get into the playoffs, Goldschmidt will almost certainly be at the center of it. He's the leading position player now by the Awards Index, largely because of his clutch hitting. He's finished in the top three of MVP voting three times, so that could play into it as well. However, if Goldy and Arizona fade, it's a free-for-all. -- *BD*

The three pitchers have clearly been the best players in the league, but deGrom isn't going to win MVP honors with an 8-8 record on a bad Mets team -- no matter his ERA. That makes it one of the most wide-open races in years, and I suspect we might see seven or eight players receiving first-place votes. -- *DS*

AL MVP

Awards Index leaders

Mookie Betts, Red Sox (5.27)

Alex Bregman, Astros (4.82)

Jose Ramirez, Indians (4.52)

Mike Trout, Angels (4.47)

J.D. Martinez, Red Sox (4.05)

Francisco Lindor, Indians (3.84)

Chris Sale, Red Sox (3.55)

Matt Chapman, Athletics (3.52)

Trevor Bauer, Indians (3.20)

Blake Treinen, Athletics (3.13)

How close is this race? I don't think it's all that close at this point, though there is time for things to tighten. Betts is the guy. He leads the majors in fWAR, bWAR and win shares. He's been the best player in baseball this season, hands down. -- *BD*

Why the numbers favor ... Betts. As mentioned, Betts has a consensus of advanced metrics backing up his case, and he's on the best team (by record) in the majors. However, his traditional numbers are awfully impressive as well. He should win the AL batting title with a 30-30 season, score something like 130 runs and is universally regarded as a top-five defensive player. Bill James compares Betts to Willie Mays, and it's hard to argue with the comparison. -- *BD*

But the narrative belongs to ... Betts. Ramirez has been amazing and, like Betts, provides plus defensive value, but his production has dipped in the second half and he's benefited from a terrible division. The narrative could switch to Martinez, particularly if Betts slumps a bit and Martinez wins the Triple Crown. There's some sentiment in Boston that Martinez has made everyone in the lineup better. As David Price said last week, Mookie might be the league's MVP, but Martinez has been Boston's MVP. -- *DS*

A dark horse to watch: Chapman scores high in Brad's index. He's been the top defensive player in baseball this year, and here's a factoid to help his case: He's second in the AL in road OPS (.317/.397/.616), behind Trout and just ahead of Betts and Martinez. He's been a beast in the second half, with an OPS over 1.000 while the A's took off. -- *DS*

The bottom line: I'm sure Bregman's standing in the Index will raise some eyebrows, but consider the underlying factors: He's seventh in fWAR in the majors, 11th in bWAR, second in Win Shares, fifth in win probability added and second in championship probability added. He's come up with one big hit after another all season. Still ... I think Betts is a clear front-runner at this point, and there is no reason to think he'll fade.

If Martinez gets hot and ends up winning the Triple Crown, that could split the Red Sox vote. So far, thankfully, I haven't seen much of that "Triple Crown trumps all" rhetoric that led to Miguel Cabrera winning the MVP over Trout in 2013. -- *BD*

There does seem to be some momentum for Bregman, who gets "extra credit" for carrying the Astros at times while Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa and George Springer battled injuries. I'm not even sure he's the best third baseman in the league, however, as Ramirez leads him in both bWAR and fWAR and Chapman leads him in bWAR. As for Trout, he might end up with his best offensive season yet -- and his worst finish in the MVP vote. -- *DS*

NL CY YOUNG

Awards Index leaders

Max Scherzer, Nationals (4.43)

Aaron Nola, Phillies (4.16)

Jacob deGrom, Mets (4.14)

Patrick Corbin, Diamondbacks (2.88)

Kyle Freeland, Rockies (2.59)

Zack Greinke, Diamondbacks (2.36)

Josh Hader, Brewers (2.13)

Jeremy Jeffress, Brewers (2.12)

Adam Ottavino, Rockies (2.01)

Clayton Kershaw, Dodgers (1.90)

How close is this race? This is a three-horse race with no clear leader. My sense is that deGrom has the edge in terms of buzz. Rather than being penalized for his low win total, it's almost like deGrom is being rewarded *because* he has a low win total. But Nola has several more chances to build his case with clutch performances in high-stakes games. Don't sleep on Scherzer, either. He's only the best pitcher in baseball, after all. -- *BD*

Why the numbers favor ... The big three. Those who tend to decry wins also tend to hate unearned runs, yet when it comes to deGrom, you never hear about his seven unearned tallies. Consider the runs allowed per nine for the big three: deGrom 2.01, Nola 2.28, Scherzer 2.46. When it comes to Nola, that narrows the ERA gap even before you start factoring in ballpark effects. -- *BD*

But the narrative belongs to ... Narrative seems to matter less in Cy Young voting -- it's mostly about cold, hard numbers. In deGrom's case, he has two big ones in his favor: (1) the big edge in ERA. In the past 50 years, seven of the eight pitchers with as big an ERA lead over the No. 2 guy won the Cy Young Award (only Kevin Brown in 1996 failed to do so). (2) He's made 25 starts in a row allowing three runs or fewer, tying an MLB record. -- *DS*

A dark horse to watch: No dark horse here, as the top three guys have clearly separated themselves. Freeland certainly deserves recognition for a sub-3.00 ERA in Colorado, but he's fourth in a strong field. -- *DS*

The bottom line: It's good that we -- the collective baseball community -- have come to realize that wins don't do a great job of describing the success of a starting pitcher, especially in 2018. As I've written before, I don't think that means we set aside the question of, "To what did they contribute?" If the Phillies maintain their playoff push and Nola stays in the middle of that quest, that should matter. This race will be decided over the next four weeks. However, if deGrom keeps doing what he's doing, he'll win it. I mean, he's given up three runs or less in 25 straight starts. The last time that happened was when Europe was still ruled by monarchies. --
BD

Brad makes a good point about deGrom's edge in runs per game being much less significant than his edge in earned runs per game. Where a team finishes in the standings also doesn't matter like it does in MVP voting, but if deGrom has a bad outing or two and Nola's Phillies make the playoffs, maybe he wins in a close vote. -- *DS*

AL CY YOUNG

Awards Index leaders

Chris Sale, Red Sox (3.55)

Trevor Bauer, Indians (3.20)

Blake Treinen, Athletics (3.13)

Edwin Diaz, Mariners (2.86)

Corey Kluber, Indians (2.84)

Justin Verlander, Astros (2.73)

Blake Snell, Rays (2.67)

Gerrit Cole, Astros (2.54)

Luis Severino, Yankees (2.24)

Mike Clevinger, Indians (1.99)

Carlos Carrasco, Indians (1.88)

How close is this race? The news that Sale should be back in action next week probably locks up this race for him, assuming there are no further setbacks. However, if something bad happens, and Bauer doesn't get back before the postseason, that opens the door for chaos. --
BD

Why the numbers favor ... Sale. Boston's ace has a sub-2.00 ERA and a sub-2.00 ERA FIP, which is to say there is not one iota of flukiness in his performance. His WHIP is 0.85 -- he's allowed

only 91 hits all season. If he lowers that WHIP number below 0.8, he'd be just the second pitcher ever to be that stingy with baserunners. Pedro Martinez (2000) holds the record at 0.74. -- *BD*

But the narrative belongs to ... Sale ... no, Verlander ... no, Bauer ... no, Snell? The injuries to Sale and Bauer and second-half slide of Verlander opened things up a bit, and Snell's 17-5 record and 2.02 ERA make him a strong candidate. Still, I'm with Brad: If Sale finishes with three or four good starts, he's the favorite. -- *DS*

A dark horse to watch: I still wouldn't dismiss Verlander. He's going to have a significant edge in innings over Sale, Snell and Bauer, he leads in strikeouts (over teammate Cole) and ranks fourth in ERA. He might not get the most first-place votes, but he could be top three or four on everybody's ballot and pull it out. -- *DS*

The bottom line: The winner should probably just be a group award given to the Indians' rotation. Cleveland has four of the top 11 spots among AL pitchers according to the Awards Index. Since that won't actually be an option on the ballot, this is Sale's award to lose. In addition to pure dominance, Sale might get a Goldschmidt-like boost from being the top active pitcher to never get the Cy Young Award. He's been in the top six in each of the past six seasons. It's time for him to finish on top. -- *BD*

Sale has been the best pitcher in the league. Yes, he's not going to get to 200 innings, but we've already had a starter win with fewer than 200 -- Kershaw won in 2014, when he made 27 starts and pitched 198 innings. Sale might only get to 170 or so. Is that enough? -- *DS*

NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

Awards Index leaders

Brian Anderson, Marlins (1.90)
Ronald Acuna, Braves (1.87)
Harrison Bader, Cardinals (1.72)
Juan Soto, Nationals (1.68)
Walker Buehler, Dodgers (1.35)
Yoshihisa Hirano, Diamondbacks (1.27)
Jack Flaherty, Cardinals (1.23)
Reyes Moronta, Giants (1.10)
Dereck Rodriguez, Giants (1.05)
Dan Winkler, Braves (0.93)

How close is this race? Anderson leads the Index on the strength of sheer volume. Maybe if he goes on a power spree from here on out he could get into the conversation, but it's doubtful. There is too much wind behind the Acuna vs. Soto sails. And that is one great debate, one I don't think is close to being settled. -- *BD*

Why the numbers favor ... The youngsters. Soto's on-base percentage draws a lot of attention, as it should. But I can't help but wonder if the collective fixation on that area for him is somewhat a product of curiosity. Being a teenager and being ultra-disciplined are not traits that typically have much correlation, so it is a fascinating thing. That said, for all those walks, Acuna has created almost as many runs as Soto and has a big statistical edge in defensive metrics. -- *BD*

But the narrative belongs to ... Acuna. He has 24 home runs in 88 games -- that's a 42-homer pace over 155 games -- and he's doing it for a first-place team. He's also been a monster in the second half, hitting .329 and slugging .699. -- *DS*

A dark horse to watch: Bader has received some attention of late, but nobody has talked much about his teammate. Flaherty has been a stalwart in the Cardinals rotation, going 8-6 with a 2.83 ERA in 23 starts. The 154 K's in 127½ innings is a testament to his stuff. For whatever reason, there just hasn't been much sizzle around Flaherty. I mean ... he's a 21-year-old kid with big stuff, a sub-3.00 ERA, pitching for a playoff contender and a popular team. But it seems like the narrative was built around Acuna before he was even called up. I'm not saying Flaherty deserves to win, it's just surprising that his season hasn't garnered more attention. -- *DS*

The bottom line: Bader's metrics are at the very least going to be perceived as inflated because of his plus-22 defensive runs saved, and it's fair to look at that number with a degree of skepticism. That's not to say that he's not a great defender, and he's certainly a gas to watch.

The problem for Soto is that as good as he's been, Acuna has been just as good or better in pretty much every category except walks. And Acuna has the advantage of performing in games that will be crucial for his team down the stretch. I think Acuna will end up as the Rookie of the Year, and he'll end up being the best player from this rookie class. Those two facts don't often go hand in hand. -- *BD*

With apologies to Anderson, I've always felt *part* of the consideration for Rookie of the Year should factor in the player's future potential. For example, Bob Hamelin beating out Manny Ramirez in 1994 was silly, as was Ken Griffey Jr. not winning in 1989. It's not the primary factor, maybe more of a tiebreaker.

In the Acuna versus Soto debate, however, you can flip a coin. Acuna is more athletic and will have more defensive value. Soto also has a chance to be a left-handed Albert Pujols at the plate, with big OBPs and power numbers. I probably go with Acuna since he can play center field, but if you want Soto, I won't argue. -- *DS*

AL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

Awards Index leaders

Gleyber Torres, Yankees (1.83)
Shohei Ohtani, Angels (1.82)
Miguel Andujar, Yankees (1.39)
Joey Wendle, Rays (1.38)
Lou Trivino, Athletics (1.29)
Brad Keller, Royals (0.93)
Jaime Barria, Angels (0.63)
Shane Bieber, Indians (0.48)
Ryne Stanek, Rays (0.47)
Niko Goodrum, Tigers (0.47)

How close is this race? This might be the tightest race of all. Ohtani is the rare bird who attracts so much attention that there isn't a media edge for the Yankees' candidates. This picture can change rapidly, too. Andujar outrated Torres as recently as 10 days ago, and look at what's happened since. Ohtani had an edge over both of them, and now that's gone as well. -- *BD*

Why the numbers favor ... Ohtani. No one's numbers attract as much attention as those of Ohtani. It doesn't matter how you mash together the hitting and pitching feats -- it's amazing. Let's see: 15 homers and 63 pitching strikeouts; 270 plate appearances and 51⅔ innings. Here's one I like: Ohtani doesn't qualify as either a full-time hitter or a full-time pitcher in statistical leaderboards. But if you combine the pitches he's thrown from the mound and the pitches he's seen as a batter, he ranks in the 86th percentile in volume. Bet you didn't know that. --*BD*

But the narrative belongs to ... The news about Ohtani on Wednesday throws this even more up in the air, as we don't know if Ohtani will choose to have surgery and if he does, whether he'll have it now and or just wait until after the season. His monster two-homer game on Wednesday seems to be another click in his favor. -- *DS*

A dark horse to watch: Wendle of the Rays actually leads in WAR -- he's hit well enough (although not as well as Andujar or Torres) and has played good defense at multiple positions.

He's not a sexy choice -- he's 28 -- but the numbers suggest he's a strong candidate. -- *DS*

The bottom line: This one is tough to call. Torres is hot, with a 1.060 OPS over his past 18 games, and the Yankees will be playing in games that matter for playoff positioning from here on out. Andujar has that latter advantage and his offensive percentages stack up nicely with those of his teammate. Only he's got 122 more plate appearances, giving him nearly a 20-run edge in runs created.

Andujar has awful defensive metrics across the board -- it's not just DRS -- but I don't have a feel for how much weight voters put into that at this point. To me, the glove work is a clear differentiator between Andujar and Torres, who has been about average.

If Ohtani had finished well on the mound, I think he would have created some separation but that point is now moot. Still, he's leaving little doubt that he'll finish well at the plate, putting up his biggest game yet on the day the news about his likely elbow surgery broke. Ultimately, I think still think Ohtani will deserve the award. I just hope no one will hold it against him that he came over from the Japanese leagues. Ohtani is an MLB rookie who will be on the ballot. That's all we should consider. -- *BD*

What Brad said. I'm still on the Ohtani bandwagon. Even with the injury, his two-way success is one of the more amazing baseball stories in recent years. -- *DS*