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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Mark Melancon's latest medical procedure: stem-cell injection

John Shea

SAN DIEGO — Giants reliever Mark Melancon's latest attempt to return to the mound took a turn into Dr. James Andrews' institute outside Pensacola, Fla.

Andrews is a renowned orthopedist known for performing Tommy John surgeries, but Melancon's ulnar collateral ligament checked out fine. Andrews recommended a stem-cell injection into the pronator in Melancon's right elbow, so Melancon had the procedure Thursday morning.

There's no guarantee this is the answer to Melancon's medical problem, and the lack of precedent with this type of injury for a pitcher makes it tough to determine when or if he will return to norm.

The Giants signed Melancon to a four-year, \$62 million contract in December 2016. He blew a save opportunity in last year's opener and finished with a 4.50 ERA and just 11 saves in 16 chances. He underwent pronator surgery in September to relieve pressure in his forearm but hasn't fully recovered.

Thursday's procedure, performed by Dr. Joshua Hackel, was to quicken the healing process and alleviate the tightness around the pronator.

The best-case scenario is for Melancon to feel well enough to begin a throwing program in about two weeks.

"I think it's good news that we don't have to do more than that," manager Bruce Bochy said. "I think in a couple of weeks, we'll get him going. I can't tell you how long he'll be on the mound pitching for us. At least we have a better idea now than we did yesterday."

In spring training, Melancon addressed the uncertainty of the pronator surgery, saying the muscle "had

turned gray. It wasn't completely dead, but over time, it was dying. The doctor was shocked when he saw the grayness. His hope is that it turns back to the normal reddish color. He doesn't know how long it'll take."

Melancon opened the season on the disabled list, his third DL stint with the Giants.

Cueto's sore ankle: Pitcher Johnny Cueto continued to feel soreness in his left ankle and is uncertain about making a start Tuesday. More will be known after Cueto faces hitters before Saturday's game.

"I don't want to give an estimate," said Cueto, who sprained the ankle April 7 doing cardio drills with hurdles. "It still hurts when I throw. I'm concerned about maybe committing to throwing Tuesday and getting hurt more."

Despite Cueto's uncertainty, the Giants optioned Andrew Suarez, who made his first major-league start Wednesday, to Triple-A Sacramento. If Cueto is unavailable Tuesday, the Giants will need to find someone to fill the spot.

Reliever Derek Law was recalled to take Suarez's place.

Another starter on the DL, Jeff Samardzija, is slated to throw 60 pitches for Class A San Jose on Saturday.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Chris Stratton pitches 7 scoreless innings in 7-0 win over Padres

John Shea

SAN DIEGO — The last time the Giants won a series here, they were on their way to the best record in the majors at the 2016 All-Star break.

They've been going mostly downhill since then, of course, even getting bullied by the Padres, who would have finished last in 2017 if not for the Giants' 98 losses.

So it was important for the Giants set a tone for the season series, and that's what they did Thursday night at Petco Park. In the first of 19 games between the teams, the Giants scored three first-inning runs and cruised to a 7-0 victory behind Chris Stratton.

With the Giants' top three pitchers on the disabled list, all eyes are on a mostly young rotation (except for Derek Holland), and Stratton provided a boost with seven scoreless innings of one-hit ball. Strangely, the hit belonged to Clayton Richard, a starting pitcher who got a rare pinch-hit assignment in the third inning.

"I thought he had the day off," quipped Stratton.

It was the first time in 83 years a pitcher who did not start a game got his team's only hit. The previous time was by Pittsburgh's Mace Brown on June 28, 1935. Brown entered as a reliever.

Stratton was more interested in recent history, and Thursday's start marked the first time in his career he completed seven innings — it took 101 pitches. Three times last year, Stratton was pulled after 62/3 innings.

"That was definitely nice, but when you get three runs early, it makes it a lot easier as a pitcher to go out there and pound the zone," he said. "Give the offense credit."

Stratton got himself into a fifth-inning jam by walking two of the first three batters, but he got Austin Hedges to fly out in a 12-pitch at-bat and retired his final eight batters.

"He was coming in as a No. 4 starter for this club," manager Bruce Bochy said. "Now it makes him the No. 1 guy."

Who would have thought Bochy would say such a thing in the season's first month? But with Madison Bumgarner, Jeff Samardzija and Johnny Cueto shelved, Stratton is the next best thing.

"Well, I mean, put (Ty) Blach in there, too," Bochy said. "Those two are guys that we'll be leaning on and, of course, Holland now. But the way it was lined up, it would make Stratton the No. 1 guy."

Rounding out the rotation are Tyler Beede and Andrew Suarez, who made their big-league debuts in back-to-back starts Tuesday and Wednesday.

"Ty and I feel comfortable," Stratton said. "We're out there pitching, not just throwing. We've come through the minors together, along with Beede and Suarez. We're all talking to each other, all feeding off each other."

The Giants scored more runs in the first inning than in their season-opening, four-game series at Dodger Stadium, where they won the first two 1-0 (on Joe Panik home runs) before getting blanked the next two games.

The inning appeared over a couple of times. Evan Longoria, who carried a .132 average into the game, stepped up with the bases loaded and nearly hit into an inning-ending double play, but he beat the throw to first and got an RBI.

The Padres thought they had the next batter, Brandon Crawford, out on strikes, but it was ruled Crawford checked his swing on a low 3-2 pitch. Hunter Pence followed with a two-run single.

The Giants added four unearned runs in the sixth. Third baseman Christian Villanueva fielded Andrew McCutchen's bases-loaded, two-out grounder and threw the ball past first baseman Eric Hosmer, permitting two runs to score.

Buster Posey followed with a two-run double. For a team that had just 12 hits with runners in

scoring position in the first 11 games, the Giants were elated to go 4-for-15 in those situations Thursday.

Stratton got an immediate lift from Crawford, the shortstop who ventured well into center field to make an over-the-shoulder catch of Hosmer's popup in the first inning. Gregor Blanco gave way to the Gold Glover, and Crawford made a difficult play look somewhat routine.

Blanco was one of three Giants with two hits. Austin Jackson, the No. 1 center fielder, was out with a groin ailment and is expected to play the two weekend games when the Giants face left-handed starters.

Derek Law, who was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday, pitched the final two innings and kept the one-hitter intact.

MLB.com

Stratton's 7 one-hit innings lift Giants over Padres

Chris Haft

SAN DIEGO -- The Giants played their incumbent ace, Chris Stratton, for all he was worth in Thursday night's 7-0 win over the Padres at Petco Park.

If you doubt the juxtaposition of Stratton's name with the term "ace," do the math. And watch the highlights of this game.

Stratton pitched a career-high seven innings and limited San Diego to one hit -- a third-inning, pinch-hit single by pitcher Clayton Richard. It was the first time in the modern era (since 1900) that a pitcher got his team's only hit in a pinch-hit at-bat. The last time a pitcher who didn't start recorded a team's lone hit was Pittsburgh reliever Mace Brown on June 28, 1935, against the Cubs.

It's easy to imagine Stratton staying in for a potential no-hitter, had he retired Richard. One person who wouldn't dwell on what might have been was Stratton himself. He reasoned that he didn't perform as well as a no-hit pitcher should.

"You walk three guys," Stratton said. "You can't think of it like that. That's baseball."

However, there was no denying the quality of Stratton's performance. He joins Johnny Cueto as the only Giants starter to go seven innings in a start this season. Since last Aug. 5, the Giants have won seven of Stratton's 10 starts, and he has a 2.09 ERA over that stretch.

With injuries shelving San Francisco's top three starting pitchers -- Madison Bumgarner, Jeff Samardzija and Cueto -- the Giants welcome outings like Stratton's.

"He's one of our guys," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said, using the term that he typically

reserves for the most essential Giants. "He was coming in as the No. 4 starter of this club. Well, now, [the injuries make] him the No. 1 guy. He can do that. He can handle it."

Bochy added that Opening Day starter Ty Blach deserves co-ace status: "Those two are guys we're going to be leaning on."

Stratton proved he could handle that in the fifth inning, when he issued one-out walks to Freddy Galvis and Carlos Asuaje with the Giants leading, 3-0. Up came Austin Hedges, whose 18 home runs last year made him a threat to tie it up. Stratton survived, ending a 12-pitch confrontation with Hedges by coaxing a flyout to left field.

Stratton ended that stalemate with a 90-mph fastball. The sequence of his four preceding pitches: slider, fastball, curveball and changeup.

"He put on a clinic on pitching tonight," Bochy said.

Said Stratton, "I basically threw him everything I had. I knew if I could get that one, we'd get the next guy." That he did, as pinch-hitter Matt Szczur grounded out to end the inning.

The Giants rewarded Stratton with four sixth-inning runs, largely due to a throwing error by Padres third baseman Christian Villanueva on Andrew McCutchen's grounder with the bases loaded and two outs.

The Giants were 4-for-15 with runners in scoring position, but two of the hits came with two outs -- a rarity so far this season -- and each drove in two runs. Hunter Pence contributed a first-inning single before Buster Posey lashed a sixth-inning double.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Giants shortstop Brandon Crawford again proved why he has won a National League Gold Glove Award each of the past three seasons. In the first, he dashed into shallow center field to rob Eric Hosmer with an over-the-shoulder grab. According to Statcast™, Crawford covered 86 feet to make the impressive catch.

UP NEXT

The series continues on Friday at 7:10 p.m. PT at Petco Park, where Giants left-hander Blach opposes Padres righty Tyson Ross. After going 0-4-1 in their last five series at Petco Park, the Giants look to take a 2-0 lead in this series.

MLB.com

Melancon gets stem-cell injection in forearm

Chris Haft

SAN DIEGO -- Giants right-hander Mark Melancon received a regenerative stem-cell injection to treat the pronator in his uncomfortable right forearm, manager Bruce Bochy said Thursday.

Melancon traveled to Pensacola, Fla., to undergo the procedure, which was performed by Dr. Joshua Hackel, who is based at the clinic operated by noted orthopedist Dr. James Andrews.

"I think it's good news that we don't have to do more than that," Bochy said.

Melancon, 33, went on the disabled list with an elbow flexor strain on March 28, one day before the regular-season opener at Los Angeles. Used gingerly during the Cactus League season, Melancon threw effectively for most of the spring, but he continued to say that he "felt something" in his forearm, which required surgery last Sept. 12 to relieve the sensation of compression.

Melancon went on the DL twice last season. He was 11-for-16 in save opportunities and posted a 4.50 ERA in 32 games in his first season with the Giants, after he signed a four-year, \$62 million contract.

Pitching updates

- Right-hander Johnny Cueto (sprained left ankle) felt uncertain about starting Tuesday at Arizona, though he said through an interpreter that he feels "better and stronger" each day.

The Giants should determine whether Cueto is ready to pitch after Saturday, when he'll throw a simulated game at Petco Park.

- Right-hander Jeff Samardzija (strained right pectoral muscle) is expected to throw approximately 60 pitches in what could be his final rehab start Saturday for Class A Advanced San Jose.

- Right-hander Derek Law is back in the bullpen, as he was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento, while left-hander Andrew Suarez was optioned back to Triple-A after he was recalled and made his Major League debut on Wednesday.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Chris Stratton overwhelms Padres, has longest start of his career

Alex Pavlovic

SAN DIEGO — When it was all over and the Giants gathered on the mound for handshakes and back pats after a 7-0 win over the Padres, some of them started to understand how strange the starting pitcher's line actually was.

Chris Stratton allowed one hit in seven innings, and it was a pinch-hit single by starting pitcher Clayton Richard, who was batting only because Bryan Mitchell had struggled so badly that he didn't even make it to his first plate appearance. Richard became the first player since Pittsburgh's Mace Brown in 1935 to enter the game as a reliever and get his team's only hit.

“I thought he had the day off,” Stratton deadpanned.

The odd and historic feat by Richard kept Stratton from chasing his own moment with the record books. He walked three, but other than that it was cruise control, a 101 pitch masterpiece that could have been more. Giants starters do, after all, have a history with these Padres.

Bruce Bochy later said he would have let Stratton go pretty deep to chase a no-hitter. Instead this was just a seven-inning one-hitter, but that still carried significance. Stratton had on three previous occasions thrown 6 2/3 innings, but he had never recorded that 21st out. Going back to spring training, he has talked of getting deeper into games. On this night he became the first Giants starter this season to throw 100 pitches, and the timing couldn't have been better. The Giants had two players make their MLB debuts on the last turn for the rotation, and the bullpen, Bochy said, was gassed.

“When you look at the staff, we've had to put some young kids in there and now (Stratton) is one of our (main) guys,” Bochy said. “He was coming in as the No. 4 starter, and now it makes him the No. 1 guy. And he can do that. He can handle that. I think he's ready to take that on as far as getting us deeper into games.”

Stratton had one wobble, walking two in the fifth, but he won a 12-pitch battle with Austin Hedges and emerged from that inning to retire six straight over the final two frames. When he was done, Stratton lowered his season ERA to 2.60 in three starts. In 12 starts since sliding into the rotation full-time last August, he has a 2.47 ERA. Those are not the numbers of a No. 4 starter.

“He is more than that,” Bochy said, nodding. “He's just been so consistent with all four of his pitches and with his command. His stuff is better than it shows.”

The Padres found that out over seven innings. Perhaps it's understandable, then, that Richard was the one to get the hit. He didn't have time to prepare and then be surprised by the carry on Stratton's fastball, the spin of his curveball, or the depth of his slider.

“It's just part of the game,” Stratton said. “That was a good swing by him.”

NBC Sports Bay Area

Mark Melancon gets stem cell injection, but next step is up in the air

Alex Pavlovic

SAN DIEGO — The Giants finally gave a Mark Melancon update on Thursday, but it was hard to tell whether the news was good or bad.

Melancon had a stem cell injection in his injured right pronator, which did not respond as hoped to September surgery, and the Giants are hopeful he can begin a throwing program in

two weeks. At the same time, there's no guarantee of that, and there was an acknowledgement that this continued pronator tightness is something that there's not really a precedent for among pitchers.

For now, at least, the Giants are glad the procedure was not another surgical one.

"I think it's good news that we don't have to do more than that," manager Bruce Bochy said. "I can't tell you how long before he's on the mound pitching for us, but at least we have a better idea now than we did yesterday."

Melancon sought another opinion from Dr. James Andrews, a noted orthopedist, and the determination was that his ligament is fine. Tightness in and around the pronator and the adjacent nerves caused Melancon to be shut down a few days before the start of the season. He is in year two of a four-year deal that was briefly the richest ever signed by a reliever.

Without Melancon, the Giants will continue to lean on Hunter Strickland. He has just one wobble this season — a homer allowed to Paul Goldschmidt — but otherwise has been dominant.

NBC Sports Bay Area

Giants continue roster shuffle with pitching staff

Alex Pavlovic

SAN DIEGO -- Giants relievers are going to pile up the miles this season.

The roster churn continued Thursday, when Derek Law was recalled from Triple-A Sacramento to take Andrew Suarez's roster spot. Suarez had a solid debut on Wednesday, but the Giants anticipate Johnny Cueto being ready to take his turn and come off the disabled list on Tuesday, so there was no need to keep another rookie starter around. Tyler Beede will start Sunday and Suarez would not have had enough rest days to be ready for that game.

Law may only be here for a few days, and that'll be the trend this season. Roberto Gomez pitched well but was sent down earlier in the week to make room for Beede. Steven Okert spent one night on the active roster but didn't pitch, and he went down for Suarez. With so many relievers with minor league options remaining, the Giants intend to do this all year to maximize flexibility and keep guys fresh.

"We have to protect these guys as much as getting fresh arms," Bochy said earlier this week. "It can affect any of those guys if we need them to throw a couple of innings."

Among the current group, Osich, Law, Pierce Johnson and Reyes Moronta have minor league options remaining, so the Giants can shuffle them back and forth with others like Gomez and Okert. A player must spend 10 days back in the minors unless there is an injury at the big league level.

While the Giants have been busy early, that could change by the end of the month. Will Smith is on track to return May 1 and the Giants will likely go to a seven-man bullpen at some point, and five of those guys could be out of options.

The Athletic

Hitters heed pregame sermon, Chris Stratton deals like an ace as Giants win in San Diego **Andrew Baggarly**

Andrew Suarez had shoulder surgery during his freshman season at the University of Miami, which allowed him to get a jumpstart on his coursework. The Giants drafted him after his redshirt junior season, but he was able to leave Coral Gables having achieved a degree in criminology and psychology.

He doesn't know anything about blood spatter. Except what he learned by watching "Dexter."

"I do love that show, though," he said.

In that spirit, then, Suarez found himself making his major league debut on Wednesday because the Giants pitching staff is currently in a state of dismemberment.

Madison Bumgarner hopes to get the pins removed from his fractured throwing hand on April 19. Jeff Samardzija is working his way back from the disabled list. Johnny Cueto and his sprained ankle just joined him there. The closer, Mark Melancon, is out with more arm problems and his status is foggier than the Outer Richmond. And last year's interim closer, Sam Dyson, continues to wander the neighborhood without GPS. He entered a tie game in the sixth inning Wednesday afternoon, and what came out the other end was a 7-3 loss and a two-out-of-three series defeat to the streaking Arizona Diamondbacks.

It's true: The Giants currently find themselves without their top three starting pitchers as well as the two relievers who were considered their most accomplished and trusted cogs a season ago.

So, naturally, the offense is the problem.

"The starting pitching has been doing a good job," said third baseman Evan Longoria, who is hitting .132 and was double-switched out of Wednesday's loss. "Offensively, we haven't done much to help them out. They've been having to grind to keep us in games. Offensively, we've got to do more. We've got to find a way to jump out ahead early and take the pressure off the pitchers."

At the end of spring, when the clubhouse was still in shock over Bumgarner's fractured hand, Longoria said that the offense would have to step up and produce to win some 8-7 games.

They are not winning 8-7 games.

Give them credit for this much. They did well on Wednesday to tax Diamondbacks left-hander Robbie Ray – he grunted as loudly as Monica Seles on the mound and threw his 100th and final pitch with two outs in the fifth inning – but they once again lacked the breakthrough hit with runners in scoring position and they couldn't muster much against Arizona's bullpen.

They are hitting .152 with runners in scoring position, and if you take a deeper look into the 12 times they've come through this season, you'll find that seven (!) of those hits were squibbers or bleeders that did not result in an RBI.

Longoria (0 for 8, six strikeouts with RISP) has been particularly un-clutch and acknowledged he is trying too hard to make a good impression. Hunter Pence has one extra-base hit thus far. He has regressed to pulling off pitches again and he's on roller skates in the batter's box. Brandon Crawford struck out to strand the bases loaded in the fourth inning.

"It's a matter of time," manager Bruce Bochy said, "and these guys are too good."

Except that's what Bochy said early last season.

No, you can't overreact to 11 games, especially when the record is 5-6. But absolutely, yes, there should be a greater sense of urgency now — especially when the Giants just announced 35,041 tickets sold on Wednesday, their smallest gate since Sept. 15, 2010.

Don't expect Giants trainers to close their eyes, flip to a random page in "Gray's Anatomy," point a finger and create an injury for Pence so they can call up Mac Williamson (11 for 22, three homers, three doubles) from Triple-A Sacramento. But maybe, with right-handed pitchers the next two days at Petco Park, it might be time to give Brandon Belt a start in left field and get Pablo Sandoval in the lineup at first base. Maybe Sandoval should start one of those games for Longoria, too.

The Giants won just three road series all last season — and dropped all three they played in San Diego, too — but Longoria suggested that this 10-game trip to play the Padres, Diamondbacks and Angels might be just what this group needs to relax and coalesce.

"You hate to get off to the start that I did, but I think this road trip is going to be good for us," Longoria said. "Just get out on the road as a group and be able to relax a little bit, you know? Sometimes the pressures at home are tough. You get to sleep in a little more, relax a little more and I think it's going to help us."

And in Longoria's case, being on the road will mean escaping that feeling of trying to impress 40,000 pairs of eyeballs.

"I've just got to relax a little bit, understand we've got a ton of good players on this team and I

don't need to do more than I'm capable of doing," he said. "I've been put in some big situations, and credit to the guys for being able to pass the baton to me, and those are situations where I've got to come through."

Longoria is accustomed to being an every day, nine-inning player. He certainly is not accustomed to exiting on double switches, and the career American Leaguer confessed to some momentary confusion the couple times when Sandoval came out to replace him. But he also is no diva about it.

"No, I mean, I think that's just the move you've got to make to give the team the best chance to win," he said. "You can't have the pitcher coming up the next inning and you're potentially burning another guy. It makes sense. It's the right move."

Even just 11 games in, the Giants have to be willing to react to what they're seeing and make the right moves. Bochy spoke prior to Wednesday's game about how the club plans to take advantage of pitchers with minor league options. He explained to several pitchers in the spring that they might have to ride the Sacramento shuttle this season for the good of the team.

Bochy will have to take the same approach with his star position players, and it's a good sign that someone like Longoria would be on board with taking an early seat and perhaps losing out on a chance to win the game in his next at-bat.

For now, Williamson can only keep doing what he's doing.

"It's a really good start," Bochy said. "He's doing what we hoped he'd do: make some noise and put some pressure on us. This is a huge year for Mac with where he's at as far as his career. It's his time to dominate that league."

Suarez showed enough last season and early in the spring to convince the Giants he could handle a starting assignment, although once Cueto's ankle forced him to miss a turn, they didn't exactly have a choice.

Suarez and Tyler Beede became the first starting pitchers to make their major league debuts for the Giants on consecutive days since Bob Knepper and Frank Riccelli on Sept. 10-11, 1976.

If Beede was a bit squirrely while issuing five walks, Suarez was a picture of calm. He did not frown or fidget when the second batter he faced, Ketel Marte, worked him for an 11-pitch at-bat that ended with a groundout.

Suarez retired the first 10 batters he faced, and the fact he appeared to smile when he squinted for the signs only added to his unruffled air. His scruffy beard was the only thing that kept him from looking like a high school kid. His uniform pants might have been two sizes too big. When he gave up a two-run home run to Paul Goldschmidt that traveled 440 feet and dented a metal bleacher in center field, he calmly made a circuit of the mound and asked for a new baseball.

His mother, grandmother and brothers made the trip from South Florida to see his debut. When he walked off the mound, several thousand fans joined them in treating him to a standing ovation.

“It was great,” he said. “I haven’t had one of those ... ever.”

The pitch to Goldschmidt was a curveball with two strikes and catcher Nick Hundley took a wide stance as if ready to smother something in the dirt. Instead, it hovered in the zone and gave the Diamondbacks a 2-0 lead in the fourth inning.

In the fifth, Suarez executed one of those back-foot sliders to strike out Deven Marrero. He did not execute on the very next slider he threw, and John Ryan Murphy hit a solo shot.

The Giants tied it in the fifth after Austin Jackson walked and Joe Panik singled to put runners at the corners, and no, their scoring rally did not involve a hit with RISP. Andrew McCutchen grounded into a forceout at second base that scored Jackson. Then with no runners anywhere in scoring position, Buster Posey hit a two-run homer.

It was Posey’s second home run on the homestand. He hit just three homers at AT&T Park all last season.

Suarez was allowed to begin the sixth, but Marte solved him for a one-out double. And then Goldschmidt greeted Dyson with a tie-breaking double off the left field wall.

Dyson retired just one of four batters in the seventh inning, and was charged with three runs. And Bochy did not attempt to gloss over what he saw.

“We need to get him on track,” Bochy said. “It’s been up and down with him. You’d like to think he’s going to find his game here pretty quick. The stuff is down and he’s up in the zone. He’s a guy with experience closing and pitching in tight ballgames, and we put him in a tight ballgame and it got away from us.”

The best way to avoid that situation is to play fewer tight ballgames. Longoria noted that the offense hasn’t been able to break out in the early innings — an issue that might sound familiar to you — and being able to put up early runs would alleviate that “here we go again” sense that can begin to creep between ears.

The Giants have been outscored 18-8 in the first four innings this season.

They also have faced some top-tier pitching (especially left-handed pitching) in these first 11 games while dealing with the stops and starts of a rainout along with breaks in the schedule.

Now they get Padres right-handers Bryan Mitchell and Tyson Ross, followed by left-handers

Clayton Richard and Joey Lucchesi. You could see this as an opportunity. And if this offense remains on roller skates through this weekend, you might also see it as a referendum.

The Athletic

Media mailbag: A look at radio wars, the future of Giants announcing, building sources and more

Steve Berman

Other than an occasional feud with a radio host, there's a lot to like about writing a regular media column. It helps that not many writers are in this arena, plus I don't have to deal with offseasons, drafts or scouting combines.

(Just imagine Bay Area media personalities running the 40-yard dash in skimpy spandex outfits, though ... wait, on second thought, don't.)

It's fun brainstorming topics and exploring the weird, wacky, nocturnal world of sports media. But it's not like I'm some incredible expert on this topic or some sort of media savant. A lot of you who read this column and everything else on this site probably consume just as much media content as I do, and I'm willing to bet that several of you probably beat me in this category.

So why not give you a voice? I solicited questions for a Twitter mailbag this week, and I received several good ones, so now it's time to answer a few.

@Cappers54 asks: Fallout from last year's Lund signing with KNBR. Did it help KNBR and hurt the Game like they intended it to do? In my handful of listens Papa seems a lot more know-it-all-y w/out Lund and talks down to co-host.

There are many elements to this equation.

While Greg Papa still beats Fitz and Brooks in the ratings, is that lead as substantial as it was before John Lund left The Game?

Has the presence of Lund improved the quality and/or ratings numbers for KNBR in drive time? How much did Cumulus have to pay Lund to jump ship?

The ratings for specific shows are kept under lock and key, but from what I've been able to ascertain, the ratings both of the affected shows (noon-to-3 p.m. on 95.7 and 3-to-7 p.m. on KNBR) have remained about the same, although KNBR's decision to push Gary Radnich and Larry Krueger (a ratings success) to 10 a.m.-to-1 p.m. has taken a bit of a bite out of The Afternoon Delight's first hour numbers.

Other than Bonta Hill, who Papa plucked out of relative obscurity on KNBR weekend duty with Marty Lurie, I'm not sure if anyone has benefited. OK, Lund definitely got a raise, so he's fine. But he had far better chemistry with Papa than it ever seems he'll achieve with Tom Tolbert, who has always thrived when working with a partner who is very much unlike him. Lund, on the

other hand, seems to be a chameleon who blends into any radio situation.

And while he's polarizing among Bay Area fans because he's the exact opposite of a fan, I always enjoyed Ray Ratto with Tolbert, a pairing which provided a nice soft landing for KNBR's afternoon show after they abruptly terminated Ralph Barbieri's radio career.

As for the last part of your question regarding Papa, he's a competitive guy who demands a rapid-fire give-and-take with anyone, either on or off the air. He was often openly dismissive of Lund's opinions, too. None of his co-hosts probably take it too personally.

@Gundy80 asks: With the current Bay Area market size and general sports interest, how viable long term is it that two sports stations can thrive side-by-side long term?

Survive? Yeah, at least for a while. Thrive? No chance, not with the competition terrestrial radio faces, both now and into the future.

@GrapevineFk9170 asks: Has sports talk radio as a format peaked? Seems as though podcasts are the new energy for sportstalk.

It seemed logical to answer this question after the previous one, since they're both getting at the same point that probably keeps Cumulus and Entercom execs up at night.

Terrestrial radio — much like network television, as the populace transitioned from rabbit ear antennas to cable — is losing a major advantage with every purchase of a satellite radio subscription and technologically advanced car.

Podcasts are popular because they more closely mimic normal conversation and feature fewer commercials. Most satellite radio shows sound like the sports talk we're used to from stations like KNBR or 95.7 The Game, but they also air fewer ads (than KNBR, anyway). Both formats allow for more specialization, which is also appealing to fans who might not necessarily want to sit through a full segment about a team they don't follow, let alone an entire league.

However, satellite radio costs money, and it's tough to find a set of podcasts that provide easily accessible, all-day content. So terrestrial radio isn't going away completely, at least not in the near-term. But the competition from these other platforms is legitimate, and often beats the AM and FM stations when it comes to novelty, quality, and efficiency.

@flem_snopes asks: How much longer is Lacob going to put up with a flagship station many can't hear? What can his strategy possibly be long term?

Until the 2019-20 season?

The strategy was to gain leverage and send a message to KNBR, plain and simple. The Warriors didn't appreciate getting kicked down to the second-tier station (KNBR 1050) when they were

awful, so when the Warriors became not just good, but talk-of-the-sports-world dominant, they took advantage.

They're happier with 95.7's commitment to Warriors chatter, although they'd prefer even a little more from their current flagship station (but that's the way all of these teams think). But I would wager that the long-term strategy is to drum up a nice little battle between Entercom and Cumulus after next season, and their long-long-term strategy is to broadcast games on their own all-Warriors-all-the-time station, once Wi-Fi accessibility in cars becomes a standard feature.

@beandoggerel asks: How much of the ratings is comprised of the teams carried + signal + inertia vs on-air personalities, IOW, if KNBR and 95.7 switched all of their shows, what would be the effect on the ratings?

Lots of radio questions! The "Radio Wars" drama from my BASG days will never die.

This is a great question, though — one I've pondered ever since 95.7 came onto the scene. And since baseball is truly a radio sport, it only makes sense to come to a logical conclusion: KNBR is the Giants in this scenario, and 95.7 is the A's. And not just because of their contractual agreements, either.

Jason Barrett spent his entire tenure as The Game's program director playing musical chairs, while KNBR was content to sit tight with their familiar faces. So for any listeners who complained that "The Sports Leader" was getting stale, there were several more who appreciated the chance to listen to same guys they'd gotten to know and love (or hate) via their car radio speakers for years. The personalities definitely matter.

The teams are pretty important, too. But even if this scenario was to occur, and the two stations switched shows/personalities, not only would it cause a full-scale freakout in the Bay Area and provide me with at least a dozen columns-worth of material, but I think The Game would get a (slight) ratings bump if they had KNBR's daytime hosts.

@druski5150 asks: If it was up to you to replace Fitzgerald as the Warriors play by play guy, who would you pick?

Bill King. Hey, you didn't say my choice had to be alive.

Greg Papa would certainly be an upgrade, but I'd love to hear Mike Breen call 70-plus Warriors games before the playoffs even begin. I'm also a little curious as to how Dave Flemming would do in this role, but he's already got like 56 jobs, so I doubt we'll ever see this occur.

@SoCalledLiz asks: If you could bring back any Bay Area sports broadcaster or host not currently on the air, who would you bring back and why?

There's an obvious answer here, but my mind keeps drifting to someone else. Maybe it was because the 49ers were otherworldly in the '80s, or at least they seemed that way to a youngster growing up in Eureka, but I miss Wayne Walker. He was a good color commentator, but his "49ers Preview" show on KPIX may still be my favorite regular sports program of all-time.

That being said, I miss Ralph's big words, tantrums, "Sport Magazine" references, absurdly long questions, and contentious interviews. I have to thank my wife for posting a question that allowed me to get all sentimental.

@LOLKNBR asks: With Jon, Kruk, and Kuip entering the later stage of their careers (not that I think any of them will be retiring anytime soon), who are the Giants broadcaster "prospects" and how would you rank them? For both play by play and color.

The "later stage" of a baseball announcer's career can extend pretty long. So we might be talking about changes that might not occur for 20 years. Regardless, I must answer the question.

It's pretty clear at this point that Flemming isn't going anywhere unless something weird happens — he knows he's got a good thing going in San Francisco, the city he calls home, and wouldn't he have left by now if a big national gig was his life goal?

Here's what we know about the Giants' announcing preferences: they'll spare no expense to get the best of the best, and they want the best voices. So how about Matt Vasgersian? He'd be an obvious choice, except he's an A's fan and I'm not sure he'd even want the gig, never mind what the Giants brass thinks of his work doing their postseason games in recent years.

Joe Ritzo has been climbing up the ranks. He's still doing San Jose Giants games, but he replaced Doug Greenwald (still with the Fresno Grizzlies, which became the Astros' Triple-A affiliate in 2015) as a spring training announcer on the Giants' website.

But this all may be a meaningless discussion — when is Miller going to retire, anyway? He appears to have lost weight over the offseason, and if he wants to really solidify his Vin Scully impression, he won't retire until sometime around the year 2040.

As for the color commentators, Jeremy Affeldt and Javier Lopez are in the running if they can improve with what few chances they receive. If the Giants could take Affeldt's energy and goofiness, and combine that with Lopez's insight, they'd pretty much have the next Mike Krukow. Shawn Estes has actually become an outstanding (yes, you read that correctly) studio analyst, but brevity is not his strong suit. If he could work on getting his points in a little quicker, he might be the best of the bunch. Tim Flannery would probably be the shoo-in candidate to replace Krukow in a pinch, but that's only if he wanted to get back into the daily grind with everything else he has going on, which seems doubtful.

A wild card candidate, at least in my mind, is Ryan Vogelsong. He was always fantastic with the media, even when cranky, and there's always been some good sarcastic wit behind his maniacal game face. It's also difficult to think of a non-superstar (i.e., player who didn't make \$100 million) who Giants fans love more than Vogey. He probably wouldn't want to step on his teammates' toes now, but who knows what the future will bring.

@MelamedIsaac asks: Would love to see a behind-the-scenes look at media sources, how you all get your info, what types of connections and are necessary, whether there are deals or unspoken rules, and how often people step out of line, etc.

C'mon Milo, I can't give away all my secrets!

All right, fine. Mostly, you just meet a lot of people (in my case, through TV and radio appearances and hundreds of hours in media dining rooms and press boxes) and treat them with respect. Some acquaintances turn into friendships, some turn into sources, and some end up being both.

The key when getting sourced info is to make a judgment call as to whether the source's agenda (because everyone has one) is leading them to overstate some things or even try to smear someone who might have wronged him or her. Those are usually the sources that reach out to you, unsolicited, with juicy information. Sometimes the information is correct, so it gets tricky. In that case, it's best to get a corroborating source.

As for deals or unspoken rules, mostly it's all about not blowing someone's cover.

And I'm not sure if everyone does it this way, but I ALWAYS trust my gut. Whenever I've gotten info I haven't quite trusted, to the point where I'd sit on a story that sounded plausible for hours if not a full day, it always ended up being wrong.

Getting a scoop is just about the most addictive legal activity one can describe on a family website, so you can't let that thirst get in the way of the truth. If it sounds too good (or bad) to be true, it probably is.

The Athletic

Giants notes: Mark Melancon receives stem cell injection in troublesome pronator muscle Andrew Baggarly

SAN DIEGO – The Giants hope to have a clearer view of their pitching staff following this weekend.

Johnny Cueto will test his sprained his ankle by throwing live batting practice on Saturday, and while he remains questionable to return to the rotation Tuesday in Arizona, the Giants more or less boxed themselves into that decision when they optioned left-hander Andrew Suarez back to Triple-A Sacramento.

Jeff Samardzija will throw 60 pitches in a rehab start for High-A San Jose on Saturday, and yes, he is pledging to do what Madison Bumgarner could not last season: strike out the beer batter. (Say, if you're in the area, stop by and bring a radar gun, will ya? Samardzija's velocity was a major concern toward the end of spring before he was shut down with a pectoral strain. The Giants will be gauging his stuff as much as how he tells them he feels.)

Before their game against the Padres here Thursday, the Giants had an update on Mark Melancon as well: the injured reliever underwent a procedure to inject stem cells in the pronator muscle in his forearm, which has not bounced back as hoped following surgery last September to cut the sheath to alleviate compression.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy is casting the Melancon update as "good news" since 1) Dr. James Andrews ruled out ulnar collateral ligament damage that would spell Tommy John surgery and 2) the club now has a timetable of two weeks before the \$62 million right-hander can begin to play catch again.

"I can't tell you how long before he'll be on the mound pitching for us," said Bochy, "but at least we have a better idea than we did yesterday."

In a broader sense, though, Melancon's situation is hazier than ever. He is on the disabled list with a listed cause of a strained flexor, which is an adjacent muscle where the forearm reaches the elbow. But he has described the pain he experienced this spring as identical to his discomfort from last season.

The pronator remains the cause of his discomfort, and the surgeon who operated on him last September, Dr. Steven Shin, noted that the muscle looked gray. That is ... not normal.

A stem cell procedure typically involves the use of a long needle to extract bone marrow from a patient's hip, and then that material is spun to concentrate stem cells. Melancon underwent the procedure in Pensacola, Florida, and will meet the team in Arizona on Tuesday.

Maybe it's the trick that will get his arm over the hump and make him a competitive pitcher again. Maybe it's a desperation play for an injury that will imperil his career.

This much is clear: Melancon's situation is highly unusual, and anyone who expresses extreme confidence or extreme doubt is taking a wild guess.

Suarez returned to Sacramento one day after making his major league debut so the Giants could recall a fresh relief arm. With Roberto Gómez still within his 10-day window and unable to come back, it's Derek Law's turn.

Now with Suarez forced to spend at least 10 days in the minors, Bochy says he has "no plan B" if Cueto cannot start on Tuesday.

Austin Jackson (groin tightness) is available off the bench in theory, but Bochy acknowledged he would like to avoid using the outfielder Thursday and Friday so that he is available to play against left-handers Saturday and Sunday.

The Giants are preparing to face a right-handed pitcher for just the fourth time in their first 12 games.