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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants lose 5th straight amid Andrew McCutchen lovefest in Pittsburgh

Henry Schulman

PITTSBURGH — First came the news conference, then the hugs on the field during batting practice, two video tributes and ovation after ovation. The longest lasted 90 seconds, when he came to bat in the first inning, because catcher Francisco Cervelli refused to take his position and let it end.

Then in a final media scrum before going home Friday night, Andrew McCutchen expressed hope that Saturday would be “a little more normal.”

Whatever “normal” means for the Giants on this trip. There is nothing normal about winning three games in Georgia, then losing five in a row in Pennsylvania by scores of 11-0, 4-2, 11-3, 6-3 and finally, in McCutchen’s homecoming at PNC Park, 11-2.

“It’s pretty apparent we haven’t been playing our best baseball these last five games after leaving Atlanta,” McCutchen said after answering the 1,000th question about his coming home.

“We came across a good Phillies team. Their pitching was on, their hitting was on, and the Pirates, they showed up today.”

The Giants' offense did not, save for Austin Jackson's two-run single in the fourth inning.

The Giants continued their whiff-fest with 14 strikeouts, five against starter Jameson Taillon in three innings before he left with a cut on his pitching hand.

The Giants have struck out 69 times during the losing streak, with no fewer than 11 a game. For the season, they have had double-digit strikeouts in more than half their games (20 of 39). Only the Rangers, at 21, have more.

The Giants found many other ways not to score, too. To go 2-for-16 with runners in scoring position and strand 12, you have to mix it up.

"We've had a hard time making contact, even productive outs," manager Bruce Bochy said. "That's why we have five ugly losses."

Don't forget the rotation, which in one full turn since Atlanta has lasted a total of 22 innings and allowed 23 runs.

Friday's culprit was rookie Andrew Suarez, coming off his first big-league win, at Atlanta, also the team's last victory.

Suarez allowed a two-run Starling Marte homer in the first inning. After Jackson tied the game with his two-run single in the fourth, Suarez gave it back and more in the bottom half on Jordy Mercer's RBI triple and a two-run homer by Jose Osuna, who pinch-hit for one of the conga line of Pittsburgh relievers who all but shut down the Giants for six innings.

Meanwhile, the Pirates added six runs off the Giants' bullpen. Even Tony Watson, a former Pirates left-hander who got a nice hand from the crowd, was not immune. Watson had allowed one run all season before Max Moroff got him for a three-run homer.

Pittsburgh fans had the best of all worlds. They could cheer McCutchen, even when he hit a seventh-inning double, because the home team was up four runs. They could have cheered a McCutchen grand slam in the eighth, too, because it still would have left the Giants two runs

behind. He grounded into a force to end a 1-for-5 game.

McCutchen struck out his first two at-bats and admitted all the emotions of the night played a part.

“I think they had the advantage of me because of the moment,” he said. “I was off tonight. I didn’t have a great day at the plate.”

McCutchen did throw one runner out at the plate, a small victory on a big day for one of the greatest Pirates ever.

San Francisco Chronicle
What Giants and dodgers are missing and Yankees and Red Sox Have
John Shea

It’s like old times for the Yankees and Red Sox, who are playing entertaining baseball, fighting one another and, most significantly, possessing the majors’ two best records.

That’s when rivalries are at their best, when the teams truly matter and the games provide a playoff atmosphere, even in May. By all early indications, both New York and Boston are on the fast track to October.

The Red Sox opened 17-2 (before they were no-hit by Oakland’s Sean Manaea), and the Yankees had a 17-1 run before losing Thursday’s series finale to the Red Sox in the Bronx, which was booming. The new Yankee Stadium, so often seen with empty seats including behind the plate, had that old feel as fans partied like it was 1999, 2003 and 2004.

Those were the years the teams met in the American League Championship Series, back when every game was presented as a battle for world domination, when little else in the universe seemed to matter, at least according to ESPN.

We’re hearing again the Yankees and Red Sox have the greatest rivalry in sports, certainly in

baseball. Folks on the left side of the country might disagree.

Right, Padres and Mariners fans?

Actually, we're referring to teams with a little richer history dating back to their days as the New York Gothams and Brooklyn Atlantics, better known now as the Giants and Dodgers.

We Californians tend to favor fellow Californians, except maybe in politics, so we'll rank Giants-Dodgers over Yankees-Red Sox, the current state of affairs notwithstanding. While the Eastern teams are the two best in baseball, the Western editions are showing no signs of being playoff-bound.

It's subjective, of course. Your opinion is what matters. A case can be made for either rivalry having more legendary players and classic moments and greater intensity/bad blood/brawls, but let it be said the Giants-Dodgers feud is missing three major components prevalent in the Yankees-Red Sox annals:

- 1) a Babe Ruth to put a curse on his former team simply by leaving one city for the other (we can't count Orel Hershiser or Brian Wilson, sorry);
- 2) the Eastern time zone (bias, anyone?);
- and 3) a head-to-head postseason history.

The Giants and Dodgers twice extended their regular seasons to break first-place ties, playing best-of-three series in 1951 and 1962, but never met in the postseason, either the National League Championship Series or even a Division Series.

Such an environment would be epic up and down the coast, not to mention an extremely hot and unaffordable ticket. We're nowhere close to that, of course, because the Giants haven't been a good team since the first half of 2016, and it's not like the Dodgers are gearing up for a sixth straight division title.

When the Yankees and Red Sox met in the ALCS, the playoff format was different. Teams from the same division couldn't meet in the Division Series. Now they can, thanks to a rule change in

2012 stemming from the addition of a second wild card. So if either team finishes with the league's best record, and the other wins the wild-card game, they'd have to settle for a Division Series.

A best-of-five rather than a best-of-seven. Not quite as intense but still a ratings paradise. The Giants and Dodgers had a chance to meet in an NLCS, but the Giants' bullpen collapsed in the 2016 Division Series and did the Cubs a monumental favor, pointing them toward baseball immortality and the end of a 108-year drought.

The Yankees and Red Sox have split six games, dating to an April series that included a bench-clearing brawl and four ejections, prompted by the actions of Tyler Austin and Joe Kelly. Not exactly Alex Rodriguez vs. Jason Varitek or even Pedro Martinez vs. Don Zimmer, but it's the modern version..

The uniforms are the same, but the faces are different. Now we have resident stars Mookie Betts and Aaron Judge, incoming stars Giancarlo Stanton and J.D. Martinez, rising stars Didi Gregorius and Xander Bogaerts, pitching stars Luis Severino and Chris Sale and closing stars Aroldis Chapman and Craig Kimbrel, along with rookie managers Aaron Boone and Alex Cora.

The teams have 13 more games including the final three of the season, providing us plenty of reminders of the good old days. Meantime, the Giants and Dodgers are hibernating.

- Curious to see Ichiro Suzuki in uniform and wearing batting gloves and celebrating on the field immediately after James Paxton's no-hitter. But that's Ichiro. He has enough status with the Mariners (and hits) to do what he wants in his new gig as special assistant. So he works out with the team before games, hangs out in the clubhouse during games (there's a rule limiting staff in dugouts, but that doesn't stop him from hitting off a tee in the indoor cage) and re-emerges for celebrations. Another perk: He's serving as bench coach this weekend, replacing Manny Acta, the acting manager while Scott Servais attends his daughter's graduation.

- When Jed Lowrie of the A's broke into the majors with the 2008 Red Sox, he had to adjust for Ichiro's speed. "I remember playing shortstop pretty much at double-play depth with nobody

on,” Lowrie said, “because if he hits you a groundball to the left side, the only way you’re going to throw him out is by charging it and getting rid of it, a do-or-die play, even on a hard-hit ball.” At the time, Ichiro was 34.

- With the early-season weather leading to canceled games and double-headers, I asked umpire supervisor Eddie Montague, a regular at Giants games, if he ever served as the plate ump on both ends of a twinbill. Turns out, he did in the Pacific Coast League as part of a two-man crew with Randy Marsh. They didn’t rotate on this particular day. “I had such a lousy game in the opener that I told Randy I’m doing the second game,” Montague said. “I was pissed. My dad always said leave the game at the park, but if I missed a call, I’d carry it for two weeks.” Montague called a good game in the nightcap and slept well. His dad, Ed Montague, was the Giants’ scout who signed a kid from the Birmingham Black Barons named Willie Mays.

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants weeks away from getting Mac Williamson back
Henry Schulman

PITTSBURGH — **Mac Williamson**, whose thunderous bat gave the Giants such a lift for five games, will remain on concussion protocol for seven to 10 more days while he performs vestibular and other related exercises to alleviate his symptoms, manager **Bruce Bochy** said Friday.

Add the time Williamson will need to spend in the minors in rehab games, and the concussion that occurred when he slammed his head into a wall at AT&T Park chasing a **Bryce Harper** foul ball will have cost him at least a month.

“The timing is terrible for him, to be honest,” Bochy said, “the way he was as far as swinging the bat and his timing, how good he was doing. That’s when you want to be out there playing. Once he’s over it, he’ll go down for rehab and get back on track.”

The timing is terrible for the Giants, too. Williamson had given the Giants a much-needed injection of youth and power. He hit three long homers in 19 at-bats, including one in the April 24 game just after he got hurt.

The Giants have no plans to call up any of their Triple-A outfielders (**Steven Duggar, Austin Slater, Chris Shaw**), because a fifth outfielder would come at the expense of their 13th pitcher, whom they cannot afford to lose.

Williamson's prognosis follows examinations by top concussion doctors in Pittsburgh. Although not cleared to play, he can do physical activity, and he shagged flies in batting practice.

Crick and Catch: Reliever **Kyle Crick**, one of two players the Giants sent to the Pirates for **Andrew McCutchen**, did not make the team out of spring training but has struck out 13 in 91/3 innings since his April 13 call-up. He retired McCutchen during a shutout inning Friday. **Briefly: Joe Panik** had the stitches removed from his left thumb Thursday, 11 days after surgery to repair a torn ligament. Now he can begin range-of-motion exercises. ... Triple-A Sacramento officially restarted **Hunter Pence**'s rehab assignment after it was paused to rest his thumb, but he did not start Friday night.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' McCutchen on return: 'If I cry, big whoop,' plus lineups

Henry Schulman

PITTSBURGH -- What we learned from Andrew McCutchen's news conference at PNC Park on Friday.

He went to his favorite pizza joint for lunch.

He and his wife also took their 5-month-old son to a doctor's appointment to get some shots. ("He was a big boy. He didn't cry.")

He called right field "a little boring," although the wind and dimensions at AT&T Park make it a little less boring.

He did not plan to pop into the Pirates clubhouse to say hi, saying, "I want to be professional. It would be a little awkward for the guy pitching tonight. I'll see them on the field."

He plans to live in his Pittsburgh home in the offseason, which is not surprising. He's a free agent.

He got emotional just running into one of the stadium workers when he arrived. As for what happens when he steps into the box in the first inning, batting second against Jameson Taillon, "If I cry, big whoop. I'm supposed to."

In The Chronicle's story on McCutchen's return, he talks a lot about the difficulties he and his family have had with the move west.

The game: The Giants have not won since Andrew Suarez beat the Braves in Atlanta on Sunday to complete their three-game sweep. The role of stopper now lands in Suarez's left arm in just his fourth big-league start.

The Giants will try to avoid their first five-game losing streak of the season. They have won six straight games against Pittsburgh, including a three-game sweep here during their one good road trip.

Double Play Podcast: We recorded a new Giants Double Play podcast in Philadelphia before Tuesday's game. Please give it a listen. There's a lot of talk about the Giants' good run before Philadelphia, injuries to the team and throughout the West and much more.

Lineups:

GIANTS (vs. RHP Jameson Taillon)

Blanco LF

McCutchen RF

Posey C

Belt 1B

Longoria 3B

Crawford SS

Hanson 2B

Jackson CF

Suarez P

PIRATES (vs. LHP Andrew Suarez)

Moroff 2B

Polanco RF

Marte CF

Bell 1B

Cervelli C

Freese 3B

Rodriguez LF

Mercer SS

Taillon P

San Jose Mercury News

Why Giants won't call up a Young outfielder despite Williamson's absence

Kerry Crowley

PITTSBURGH—A red-hot Giants team didn't miss Mac Williamson's during a three-game sweep of the Atlanta Braves, but his absence was notable in Philadelphia.

In four losses against the Phillies, the Giants' offense managed eight total runs and struck out 55 times, a new franchise record for a four-game series.

Williamson traveled with the team to Atlanta, but flew ahead of the club to Pittsburgh where he met with a concussion specialist. The power-hitting outfielder has been sidelined since April 24, and after a check-up this week, the Giants do not anticipate Williamson will be back on the field for at least another seven days.

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"He will do some baseball activities but he's still in concussion protocol and will be for a bit longer too," manager Bruce Bochy said. "I can't tell you how long, but it's going to be a week to 10 days probably before he will be cleared."

Williamson was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento despite an impressive spring training, but played his way back onto the 25-man roster by tearing up the Pacific Coast League. In five games with the Giants, he crushed three home runs and helped spark an immediate turnaround for a club that started the season in an offensive funk.

"The timing is terrible because of where he was as far as swinging the bat, his timing, how good he was doing, that's when you want to be out there playing," Bochy said.

With Hunter Pence on the disabled list due to a sprained thumb, the Giants are carrying just four outfielders on their 25-man roster. Bochy has used infielders Alen Hanson and Brandon Belt in left field, but neither player looks entirely comfortable tracking flyballs.

Outfielder Austin Slater has already taken 10 at-bats with the Giants this year while prospect Steven Duggar nearly made the club out of spring training, but as of Friday, Bochy said the organization is not considering promoting a younger outfielder.

The Giants have 13 pitchers on their 25-man roster, and after four starters combined to log just 18 innings in Philadelphia, Bochy is concerned about taxing the available arms in the bullpen.

“We haven’t talked about that, we just feel right now we need the pitcher to give us coverage,” Bochy said. “We didn’t get a lot of length out of our starters the last few days so we want to make sure we’re covered in the bullpen.”

Slater’s .378 batting average ranks third among qualifying hitters in the PCL while Duggar would provide the Giants with a reliable glove and much-needed speed in the outfield, but neither player appears likely to join the club in the near future.

With center fielder Austin Jackson struggling at the plate against right-handers, the Giants have begun using Gorkys Hernandez more frequently. Though Hernandez has impressive range in center field, the Giants may reconsider their plans for Duggar and Slater if their struggles as a team continue.

Left field prospect Chris Shaw is another prospect worth watching in the outfield, as the Giants are high on his potential as a power hitter and hopeful that a recent surge with Triple-A Sacramento will continue. Shaw has already hit nine home runs for the River Cats this season and is slugging .570.

Black promoted

Pitching prospect Ray Black was promoted from Double-A Richmond to Triple-A Sacramento after recording 20 strikeouts in 10 innings to start the season.

Black missed almost all of the 2017 season after having surgery to remove bone spurs in his elbow and has dealt with an extensive list of injuries throughout his Minor League career, but he’s showed plenty of promise of late.

Since being selected in the seventh round of the 2011 draft, Black has never pitched above the Double-A level. That will change, however, after he picked up four saves with the Flying Squirrels.

San Jose Mercury News

Five times Andrew McCutchen talked about the Giants in Pittsburgh

Kerry Crowley

PITTSBURGH—Andrew McCutchen doesn't know how he'll react when he steps into the batter's box at PNC Park on Friday.

"If I cry, I cry," McCutchen said. "Big whoop. You're supposed to. And if I don't, I don't."

Though McCutchen may not know how he'll feel in his first game back in front of Pirates fans who came to adore the five-time All-Star, he does know how he feels about playing for Bruce Bochy, how he likes AT&T Park and what he thinks of the Giants fan base.

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Ahead of a three-game series in Pittsburgh, McCutchen held a press conference with reporters who cover the Pirates. While he answered questions about what restaurant he's already visited and whether he'll continue to live in Pittsburgh in the offseason, he also spent much of his time talking about adjusting to a new team.

Here are five things McCutchen said about playing for the Giants.

What's McCutchen's relationship like with Bochy?

"He's cool and he's pretty much what I expected. Pretty laid back and he kind of just lets you go out and do your thing. He lets me be myself and keeps the ball in my court and that's awesome. I highly respect him and he respects me as well. He just sits back and watches us play. It's a pretty cool thing. You see him and when you talk to him and if you don't, you know where the door is. It's a pretty cool thing."

What's McCutchen's comfort level with the Giants?

"I'm comfortable there. All of the guys on the team are great. Bochy is great. The coaching staff, everyone is really good there and you know, just being out there in San Francisco, the stadium itself is pretty surreal. It's a really nice stadium. The ballpark, the fans are always crazy there. Always loud. Play the Dodgers, it gets even louder. So yeah, it feels normal. It feels good, it just feels like another home for me."

Was the transition to the Giants easier because so many former Pirates are on the team?

“It made it a little easier just because with (Tony) Watson going over there, seeing (Mark) Melancon has been over here, then playing with a couple of other guys that came over too. (Alen) Hanson came over. Gorkys Hernandez had been there and we played together, he came up here. It made the transition a little easier just because I wasn’t the only person in that boat. But not only just teammates, other guys too. Longoria came from a franchise in Tampa and he had been there longer than I had. He had been in the same boat as me. That made it easier. We were able to talk, empathize with each other over our past and just to be able to move forward together. That helped for sure. It wasn’t just like I was just going over to a team, there was a group of guys and a lot of them played together and there wasn’t really any new faces. It made the transition a little easier.”

How does McCutchen like playing right field?

“It’s cool, it’s boring a little bit but it’s fun, though. I don’t get too many, you know running the ball down in the gaps and making a crazy play. Playing right field in San Francisco is just a little different just because of the ballpark itself. The wind, you’ve got all of that to deal with that. I had a routine line drive come to me and I missed it. I was just like, ‘Wow, I don’t think I’ve ever done that as far as a routine one.’ You just kind of go at it and it hits off your glove. You have to constantly keep moving your feet there and that’s something that I’ve learned and I’m still learning. But you’re not running a whole lot, not running a whole bunch of balls down. I guess I could just say the pitching does a good job to where I don’t have to run as much. It has its perks too. Save your legs. Try to use them on the basepaths. You don’t need many days off because your legs are feeling pretty good.”

How did McCutchen’s walkoff home run against the Dodgers feel?

“That’s part of the reason they traded for me. They believed they were going to get a player who in big situations can be able to step up and come through. To be able to do that was awesome. Just more for the fact because I won a lot of fans over after that and it was the rivalry. To win it in that dramatic of fashion was the icing on the cake. It was a great performance, it was a great night and it was amazing. It took me back to 14 innings here against the Cardinals, the last time I thought about it. But yeah, it was awesome just to have that and I’ll have that for the rest of my life. To be able to do it early in the season was a plus.”

San Jose Mercury News

**Andrew McCutchen opens up about return to Pittsburgh, adjusting to life with Giants
Kerry Crowley**

PHILADELPHIA—Andrew McCutchen has played in 673 games at PNC Park, but he’s never stepped foot in the visiting dugout.

He’s never dressed in the visiting clubhouse and never worn anything other than black and gold on that field.

“No reason to,” McCutchen said. “Now I have a reason.”

After spending the first nine seasons of his Major League career reviving baseball in Pittsburgh, McCutchen will return to the city as a guest.

The five-time All-Star used to walk across the Roberto Clemente Bridge on his way to work. Since Clemente’s death on the last day of 1972, it’s possible only Hall of Famer Willie Stargell meant more to Pittsburgh’s baseball history.

On Friday, McCutchen will arrive at the ballpark and don a gray Giants uniform with black lettering and orange trim. He’ll trot out to right field where Pirates fans will shower him with praise and curse their own organization for ever parting ways with him.

McCutchen has an idea of how he’ll handle his emotions. But it’s just an idea.

“How do you think you’re going to feel? I don’t know,” McCutchen said. “I’ve never experienced it before. It’s no different. I’m going to go there and I don’t know what I’m going to feel like. I’ll be there and be in the moment and let the emotions be what they are.”

The 31-year-old outfielder has spoken —and even written— extensively about how he handled being traded away from the only organization he ever knew. McCutchen was drafted by the Pirates out of high school in 2005, debuted with the club in 2009 and ended the organization’s 21-year playoff drought by willing Pittsburgh into the postseason in 2013.

“It was a turning point for the organization,” Giants reliever Tony Watson said. “From that point forward it was a baseball city. Everybody said that once the Pirates started winning the fans would come out and they did.”

Watson is one of five Giants who played for the Pirates earlier in their careers. All are eagerly anticipating the roar of the crowd when McCutchen steps in the batter's box on Friday.

Closer Mark Melancon and Watson both made All-Star teams in Pittsburgh. Infielder Alen Hanson was once a top prospect in the organization. Outfielder Gorkys Hernandez wasn't accustomed to positions other than center field when he made his Major League debut with the organization in 2012, but as he quickly learned, there was no spot for him in center when the Pirates called him up.

"I knew when I got to the big leagues I couldn't play center field," Hernandez said. "McCutchen was there. I respected it."

McCutchen was the heart and soul of the Pirates, a hard-working symbol for a working class town. Because he grew up in Florida, McCutchen doesn't call Pittsburgh his home.

But who's to blame Pirates fans for considering him one of their own?

"What he did for the city, all the kids, he was always out doing stuff in the community and building relationships," Watson said. "Visiting the hospitals and schools and stuff. Then we started having success and the stadium started to fill and you saw a lot of 22 jerseys."

Those No. 22 jerseys shouldn't be at the back of closets just yet. McCutchen wasn't traded until the middle of January, so his first reunion comes just four months after the separation became official.

On Friday, there will be handshakes and hugs. The videos and visuals of McCutchen's best days as a Pirate will be on display, too.

But after McCutchen spent 13 years with the franchise, it's fair to wonder whether he's had enough time to move on from an emotional standpoint. Having to uproot his wife and newborn son hasn't made any of this easier.

"It's hard for me but it's even harder for my wife," McCutchen said. "She's in Arizona by herself. She's in San Francisco by herself. Trying to raise a little baby and most of the time she's doing it on her own. That's a toll, but you have to make the adjustment."

Pirates and Giants fans alike won't witness how McCutchen is making that adjustment off the field. All that most have to go by is how he's transitioned on it.

The powerful right-handed hitter walked off the Dodgers in epic fashion with a three-run home run in a 14-inning thriller, which quickly endeared him to Giants fans. But a career .290 hitter is batting .250 and his OPS is down more than 100 points from his career average.

McCutchen's bat speed is still present and he's reaching base at the same rate he always has, which is a sign that more productive days may lie ahead. Though his time as the guiding force for the Pirates is behind him, McCutchen says the quality that made him such a joy to watch in Pittsburgh is still a defining part of who he is.

No matter how much of a toll the trade took on him, regardless of how challenging a cross-country move was for a family man, McCutchen says he'll return to PNC Park as the same fun-loving player Pirates fans learned to adore.

"Fun is fun, I always have fun," McCutchen said. "That never changes. I'm sure the camera catches me smiling, laughing, whatever. That's what I do and that never changes."

MLB.com
Giants drop 5th straight as Cutch returns to PNC
Bob Cohn

PITTSBURGH -- **Andrew McCutchen** got a **warm reception** in his return to PNC Park, but the San Francisco right fielder and his teammates had more relevant items on their agenda on Friday.

The Giants arrived seeking to end a four-game losing streak after being swept in Philadelphia. Instead, the skid reached five as rookie left-hander **Andrew Suarez** gave up a pair of two-run homers and the Pirates collected 15 hits in their 11-2 victory.

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The Pirates' marquee player for the better part of a decade until his January trade to the Giants, McCutchen went 1-for-5, stranding six baserunners. He said he was touched by the tribute, which included two video presentations and a prolonged standing ovation before his first time at the plate. He got loud cheers for his subsequent at-bats, too.

"These fans came and they showed their support, and that says a lot to me," McCutchen said. "I'm humbled by it, and I appreciate it. I always have. And I always will."

Pirates catcher **Francisco Cervelli**, who **extended the festivities** by refusing to assume his

position behind the plate until he was good and ready, said, "This is one time in his life he needs to enjoy, because he did a lot of good things in this organization. This guy was impressive for me, best player in this organization. He deserves all that."

Yet despite the feel-good atmosphere, McCutchen acknowledged that the circumstances and atmosphere kind of got to him.

"You try your best to make it as normal as possible but you're playing against a bunch of guys you played with," McCutchen said. "That's not normal. That's not easy. You gotta go out and compete and I did my best to do that, but I think [the occasion] had the advantage over me a little bit."

McCutchen took a called third strike in the first inning. In the third, he struck out trying to check his swing with runners at the corners and two outs. He grounded out in the fifth inning with a runner on first before hitting a one-out double in the seventh.

Pittsburgh led, 8-2, in the eighth when McCutchen had a chance to impact the game, coming up with the bases loaded and two outs. He hit into a force play to end the threat.

Not particularly known for his arm, McCutchen threw out **Colin Moran** at the plate as he tried to score from second base on **Max Moroff's** single in the sixth.

Suarez, making his fourth Major League start and coming off his first win against Atlanta, yielded a two-run homer to **Starling Marte** in the first inning and a two-run shot by rookie **Jose Osuna** that capped a three-run fourth. Osuna's homer followed **Jordy Mercer's** RBI triple.

The Giants had tied the game in the top of the fourth on **Austin Jackson's** two-run single. Even with Pirates starter **Jameson Taillon** leaving after three innings with a lacerated finger, that was their only source of offense. Pittsburgh pitchers recorded 14 strikeouts, bringing the total to 69 for the Giants in the five losses.

"We're having a hard time making contact," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. "Even productive outs."

Suarez lasted four innings in his shortest and rockiest outing of the season, allowing five runs on seven hits. He struck out five and walked two as his ERA swelled from 3.06 to 4.57.

"My command wasn't very good," Suarez said. "I left a lot of pitches down the middle of the plate and gave up a lot of hits. ... I was just trying to locate fastballs in, and they were in the middle of the plate and they took advantage of it."

Bochy said, "He kept missing his spots there. He paid for it."

Pittsburgh scored three runs off Giants relievers **Cory Gerrin** and **Jose Valdez**, and former Pirate **Tony Watson** gave up Moroff's three-run homer in the eighth.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

McCutchen had a chance to make things interesting when he came to the plate in the eighth facing **George Kontos** with the Giants down by six and the bases loaded with two outs. Given a chance to add some storybook drama to the scenario and also tighten the game, he hit into a force play.

"I was off tonight," McCutchen said. "I didn't have a great day today at the plate. I was just trying to go up there and battle. [Kontos] gave me a couple of pitches, but I just got on top of one. It would have been nice. It would have been nice if I went 5-for-5 with a win, but that didn't happen."

HE SAID IT

"We're not doing a lot offensively, and the pitching's not on top of their game. That's why we're in this little streak we're in right now. Hey, you've got to deal with this. You gotta keep coming and going hard. That's all you can do. The offense breaks out, or a well-pitched game, that's what we need right now." -- *Bochy*

UP NEXT

Right-hander **Jeff Samardzija** hopes to get on track for the Giants on Saturday at PNC Park at 4:05 PT in Game 2 of the series against the Pirates and righty **Chad Kuhl** (4-2, 4.12 ERA). An 11-year veteran, Samardzija is 1-2 with a 6.62 ERA in four starts since coming off the disabled list (strained right pectoral) last month.

MLB.com

Cutch greeted with ovation, tribute in PNC return
Adam Berry

PITTSBURGH -- Thursday night and Friday morning brought nothing out of the ordinary for **Andrew McCutchen**. He ate at The Oven Pizza Co. in Wexford. He slept at home, in Pittsburgh's northern suburbs, with his wife, Maria, and his son, Steel. He took Steel to a doctor's appointment for shots. "He was a big guy," McCutchen said. "He didn't cry."

Then McCutchen took a familiar trip to an unfamiliar destination. McCutchen drove down to

the north shore of the Allegheny River, walked into PNC Park and for the first time found his locker in the visiting team's clubhouse.

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"Good to be back. Still hasn't really set in yet, being on visitor's side. A little weird," McCutchen said Friday afternoon before the series opener between the Giants and Pirates, an **11-2 Pittsburgh win**. "I felt like I needed a few more steps. You always walk by it, but you don't ever notice it. Now you notice it."

McCutchen couldn't help but notice what happened when he took the field Friday night. He ran out for warm-ups, and the crowd responded with a standing ovation. The public-address announcer introduced McCutchen, batting second and playing right field, and the cheers were even louder.

The day had been full of reunions. McCutchen met with the Pittsburgh media for nearly 20 minutes in a news conference room typically reserved for the home team. He saw friends and former teammates during batting practice. Before leaving the field, he spent nearly 15 minutes signing autographs for fans.

When McCutchen came to bat in the first inning, the Pirates played the first of two "Thank You 22" videos on their left-field scoreboard. **Jameson Taillon** stepped off the mound, **Francisco Cervelli** stood in front of the plate, and for 90 seconds, Pittsburgh **expressed its appreciation** for the former face of the franchise.

What were his emotions like in that moment?

"They were intense. Something to remember, for sure," McCutchen said. "I did my best to soak it all in. They did a good job giving me that moment. I signaled to [Cervelli] that I was ready to go, but he shook his head, 'No.' So I stepped back and continued to be in that moment."

McCutchen tipped his helmet while shortstop **Jordy Mercer** and the entire Pirates outfield -- **Sean Rodriguez, Starling Marte** and **Gregory Polanco** -- clapped along with the fans. An "M-V-P" chant broke out. McCutchen went down looking at a called third strike, and the response was a mix of applause and boos.

"Today might have been cooler than my debut, honestly," Taillon said. "That reception and just seeing him up there was really cool. I've never been a part of something like that, so I didn't really know when it was time to step on the mound. I'm glad Cervelli knew what to do."

The Pirates played a longer video and another ovation ensued when McCutchen took his place

in front of the Roberto Clemente Wall in right field. Fans stood and cheered before each of his five at-bats, and they celebrated his seventh-inning double off reliever **Michael Feliz**. It's no coincidence the Pirates drew a season-high attendance of 34,720 on McCutchen's first night back in town.

"The man off the field is a very special and significant guy. The player on the field was a special and significant Pirate as well," Pirates manager Clint Hurdle said. "He'll be an iconic Pirate forever."

For nine seasons, McCutchen called PNC Park's outfield his home. The city still is. He's a San Francisco Giant now, in town only to play the Pirates for the first time since being traded in January, but his attachment to Pittsburgh hasn't been broken.

"This is my home. Me and my wife got married and made that decision a long time ago that this is where we're going to live, regardless of baseball," McCutchen said. "That's not going to change. We love it here."

McCutchen earned Pittsburgh's adoration with his elite play, energetic attitude and charming personality. He won the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 2013 and the Roberto Clemente Award in '15, representing both his on-field impact and his presence in the community. He helped bring postseason baseball back to Pittsburgh after a 20-year drought.

McCutchen said he was only a part of that success, but as starter **Trevor Williams** said earlier this week, "He was the Pirates." McCutchen said he hasn't reflected too much on his accomplishments in black and gold, anyway, because he's still playing in black and orange.

"I don't look at anything like a closed book. I just look at it as another chapter," McCutchen said. "I'm still making the book right now."

MLB.com
Times change, but Bucs' love for Cutch remains
Adam Berry

PITTSBURGH -- **Andrew McCutchen** needs no introduction in this city. He was the face of the Pirates' franchise for nine seasons, its best player since Barry Bonds and perhaps its most beloved star since Willie Stargell. He was productive and popular. He helped end the franchise's 20-year losing streak and brought postseason baseball back to Pittsburgh.

On Friday, he'll be reintroduced as a San Francisco Giant.

The Pirates are set to open a three-game series against McCutchen and the Giants at PNC Park on Friday night. It will be McCutchen's first game in Pittsburgh as anything other than a Pirate. There will be a video tribute and standing ovations in the first inning. There will be talk of his legacy and the January trade that sent him to San Francisco. And there will be many memories shared.

Everyone has a McCutchen story. Before the Pirates' first official meeting against McCutchen, here are a few of theirs about their introduction to -- or first impression of -- their former teammate.

Neal Huntington wasn't the Pirates' general manager when they drafted McCutchen 11th overall in 2005. His first impression of McCutchen came when he was assigned to evaluate the Pirates' organization in Spring Training of 2007, when he was scouting for the Indians.

"Andrew's bat speed and explosive athleticism capture your attention immediately," Huntington said. "Watching him compete that spring was like watching a seasoned veteran, as he never seemed anxious or rattled in the box, on the bases or in the field."

When Huntington became Pittsburgh's GM in September 2007, he said he knew that, "Andrew was the key to the future." They met for the first time in the spring of 2008 during the players' entrance interviews.

"Andrew's intelligence, poise and presence were obvious," Huntington said. "The meeting with Andrew exceeded all of the expectations resulting from those that had worked with him and all the positive things they had to say about Andrew. Andrew was genuinely self-confident yet genuinely humble, which is a rare combination for elite athletes at a young age.

"His bat speed, athleticism, poise and presence are what stood out to me as a competitor and evaluator. Once I became a Pirate, his humility and character were added to the mix."

Jordy Mercer was in the Florida Instructional League in Bradenton, Fla., after his first professional season. McCutchen didn't have to be there, Mercer said, as he was nearing the Majors and the shortstop was just starting his climb to Pittsburgh after being drafted in 2008.

Even then, before his 2009 debut, McCutchen stood out.

"I don't know what he was doing there, but he came over and practiced with us. That was the first time I met him," Mercer said. "I was just like, 'It's Andrew McCutchen!' We were all like, 'What the hell's he doing here?' I remember being kind of star-struck that he was there and practicing with us, and he was there in general."

The Pirates played the Rangers in Arlington in 2010, when Clint Hurdle was Texas' hitting coach. He took notes on the entire Pittsburgh roster, including McCutchen, throughout the series and reviewed them before interviewing for the Bucs' managerial job later that year. The first two Pirates players he met were Joel Hanrahan and **Neil Walker**, but he met with McCutchen before his first Spring Training.

"I remember walking away feeling like there was a lot of thought involved. He's a smart guy. He articulated his thoughts clearly, communicated very well," Hurdle said. "Had a passion for the game of baseball, which you could feel. Also morphed into talking about his family. He talked about respect for the game and the desire to play the game hard."

Jameson Taillon will be the first Pirates pitcher to face McCutchen on Friday. He's joked around the clubhouse that he might quick-pitch to pre-empt the inevitable ovation, but in reality, he'll let McCutchen have his moment.

"He deserves it," Taillon said. "I hope it's packed for him."

When Taillon was a prospect, he used to sit in the stands to watch big league Spring Training games. Even now, he remembers the generosity that **Pedro Alvarez**, Walker and McCutchen -- all former first-round Draft picks like Taillon -- extended to Minor Leaguers.

"I remember when we did the player panels at Pirate City. Big leaguers come over and offer any sort of insight they have," Taillon said. "I remember people just lining up for pictures with Cutch after. He had professional baseball players wanting to get pictures with him. That's the ultimate honor, and that tells you how big of a star he was and how highly regarded he was."

"Man, he had that superstar status. Then I got to become teammates with him, and that was cool."

Chad Kuhl, who will face McCutchen on Saturday, was drafted in 2013, McCutchen's National League MVP Award campaign. Kuhl showed up early for Minor League Spring Training in '14, and the big leaguers were already populating the Pirate City clubhouse. While passing through the big league side of the room to get to his locker, Kuhl brushed shoulders with McCutchen, still sporting his signature dreadlocks at that point.

"He might have said, 'Hey,' and I was just kind of star-struck," Kuhl said. "I walked right by him and almost froze. I was just star-struck. I was like, 'Holy crap, that was Andrew McCutchen.' I had that star-struck moment first time seeing him."

Trevor Williams, acquired in October 2015, used the same term, "star-struck," to describe his first interaction with McCutchen. Their conversation in the spring of 2016 wasn't all that memorable -- "It wasn't anything profound," Williams said -- but the moment was.

"I was especially star-struck by him because he encapsulated the Pirates. Like, he was the Pirates," Williams said. "Once I came over, once I got to meet him, it was like I'm officially a Pirate now, I guess you could say."

Sean Rodriguez quickly developed a relationship with McCutchen in 2015, Rodriguez's first season with the Pirates, and they remain close friends. It all began with a song by the Christian rapper Lecrae.

"When I first came into the clubhouse, my first Spring Training, I was always big on having a little speaker and putting music on," Rodriguez said. "I put some music on and he was sitting not too far away and he started singing to the song that came on. I was like, 'Man, I didn't think there were too many people out there who knew this.' Just got to talking then. We had a lot of similarities. Similar taste in music. Similar faith. We just hit it off."

The Pirates played a pair of exhibition games in Philadelphia before Opening Day in 2015, and then-prospect **Josh Bell** got to make the trip. After one of the games, Bell said, he went out to dinner with McCutchen, Rodriguez and **Josh Harrison**. McCutchen's star power was on display, as fans followed their group from the hotel to the restaurant and back in pursuit of an autograph.

"That's unlike anything I've seen to this day, that celebrity status away from the field," Bell said. "Just seeing that, people almost begging and pleading for an autograph, kind of opened my eyes to who he was and what he did on the field and what he meant to the game. That was my first real impression where I was like, 'Oh my God, I get it, but jeez!'"

When Pittsburgh traded McCutchen, Harrison became the Pirates' longest-tenured player. He made his MLB debut on May 31, 2011, a little more than two years after McCutchen's first big league game. They became fast friends, probably as close as any two people in the Pirates' clubhouse. Harrison and McCutchen still talk on the phone and via text message, and their wives also keep in touch.

The former teammates' conversations are different now than they were back in 2011, when Harrison was 23 and McCutchen was 24. Now, they might be exchanging parenting advice or asking about Harrison's daughters, Mia Jade and Kinsli Rose, or the McCutchens' 5-month-old son, Steel.

"Times are changing," Harrison said. "We're not babies anymore. We've got babies."

The Athletic

Andrew McCutchen savors his moment in Pittsburgh but the Giants' rotation continues to crack

Andrew Baggarly

PITTSBURGH — Andrew McCutchen wasn't sure how to negotiate two conflicting emotions Friday night.

He wanted to soak in his first-inning ovation as much as he could, be fully present in the moment, experience every decibel of an auditory embrace he will cherish and remember for the rest of his life.

He also wanted to get the heck in the batter's box.

Pirates catcher Francisco Cervelli stood up and backed away from the dish when McCutchen came to the plate for his first at-bat as a visiting player at PNC Park, a gorgeous baseball venue on the banks of the glassy Allegheny that was perfect for postcards but didn't hear the rip of playoff tickets until after he arrived as a fully formed superstar here.

Thirty seconds later, Cervelli remained as still as a royal guard.

"I signaled to him I was ready to go but he shook his head no," McCutchen said, smiling. "So I was able to step back and just continue to be in that moment."

The truth, now. Did McCutchen hope Cervelli would get in his squat?

"Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I did," McCutchen said. "It was, 'OK, thanks, (I'm) just trying to have this at-bat.' But he gave it to me and I appreciated it because it's something you don't want to rush through."

We can rush through most of the game details because the Giants took a short flight over the Alleghenies only to play the same abysmal nine innings that you saw in that four-game evisceration in Philadelphia.

The hitters struck out 14 times, giving the Giants 69 over their five-game losing streak. All of a sudden, they rank second behind the Padres for the most strikeouts among National League clubs.

The pitching wasn't good from the outset. Andrew Suárez did not command his fastball while allowing five runs, and because he threw 88 pitches in four innings, manager Bruce Bochy had to go get the rookie even though he is getting desperate for a bit of length from a starting pitcher.

The Giants are averaging just more than 4 1/3 innings per start over their losing streak. And on four of the five games, the back-end relievers who were pressed into service allowed games to turn into blowouts.

You could argue that the strikeouts are the most troubling trend, especially since the whiffs continued on a night when the Pirates were at a pitching disadvantage. Manager Clint Hurdle had to empty his bullpen after Jameson Taillon came down with a finger laceration and had to depart after three innings. The Giants only managed to nick one of the six relievers — Austin Jackson hit a two-run single that tied the game in the fourth inning — and strikeouts killed several rallies (Former Giants Kyle Crick and George Kontos each made pitches from the stretch while posting scoreless frames.)

But the offense's main problem was a familiar one from April: trouble hitting in the clutch. They went 2 for 16 with runners in scoring position. They stranded 12 runners, all in a six-inning span from the third to the eighth.

Ordinarily, you'd happily take 16 opportunities with runners in scoring position night after night.

Here's the thing: It's tough to have resourceful at-bats when you're constantly trying to bomb your way back into a game. That's why it hurt that Suárez allowed a two-run home run to Starling Marte in the first inning, and why it hurt even more that he allowed a three-run shot to pinch-hitter Jose Osuna immediately after the Giants had tied it in the fourth.

Bochy, asked if it was uncharacteristic for Suárez to lose the strike zone the way he did at times, offered a dry retort.

"Well, he found it," Bochy said. "He was missing his spots there and he paid for it. He's been throwing the ball well. He just caught too much of the plate on some pitches."

The Giants have to hope Suárez will be better in his fifth major league start than he was in his fourth, because there are no appealing alternatives. Tyler Beede walked six in 1 2/3 innings in his start for Triple-A Sacramento on Thursday. Even Chris Heston is on the River Cats' disabled list after making just one start in April. Dereck Rodriguez, the son of Pudge, is probably the next man up (2-0, 3.45 ERA, a nice 29/9 K/BB ratio along with seven home runs allowed in 31 1/3 innings).

So ... the strikeouts are troubling, especially when Mac Williamson remains in the concussion protocol and won't be cleared to begin a minor league rehab assignment for at least another seven to 10 days.

But this is the same movie we watched for six months last season: this team is least competitive when the rotation takes a bad turn. Don't look now but the rotation ERA is up to 4.41, which is 11th out of 15 NL teams, and only the Brewers and Reds staffs have struck out fewer batters.

"It's your starting pitching," Bochy said. "That's how you go on a roll. When your (rotation) struggles, you get in a rut and that's what is happening with us right now."

Pennsylvania is a large state with distinct metropolitan cultures, and it didn't take long to understand that the Yinzers here do things a bit differently than they do in Philadelphia.

McCutchen's ovation lasted 90 seconds before Cervelli relented and allowed his former teammate to step in the batter's box. It wasn't too terribly different from the reception Pat Burrell received as a Giant when he played his first game as a visitor in South Philly.

The difference: When McCutchen took a called third strike, the crowd booed the umpire. When Burrell homered in his first at-bat, Phillies fans booed him around the bases.

"Yeah, it's a little different," said McCutchen, about Pirates fans siding with him all night, even cheering when he hit a double. "It shows what this fan base is all about, man. They're ride or die. They've been riding with me and seems like they'll keep riding with me."

McCutchen threw out a runner from right field but he also contributed two of the team's 14 strikeouts and grounded out against Crick, a player who was involved in the deal that sent him to San Francisco. He also grounded into a fielder's choice against former Kontos to strand the bases loaded in the seventh.

He acknowledged the Pirates had the upper hand. There was no way for him to pretend this was a normal game.

"I mean, I don't think there was anything too normal about it," he said. "You do your best to make it as normal as possible, but you're playing against a bunch of guys that you played with and that's not easy. That's not normal. You've got to go out there and compete at the end of the day. I did my best to do that. I think they kind of had the advantage over me a little bit, just because of the moment and being here."

A normal frame of mind will help, because the Giants slipped back below .500 mark Friday night. Given all that has happened, they should feel fortunate to be there.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

McCutchen's Pittsburgh return can't provide spark for sinking Giants

Alex Pavlovic

PITTSBURGH — Andrew McCutchen did not know how he would feel when he finally stepped into the batter's box at PNC Park. As it turned out, the Pirates fans didn't even allow him to get that far.

A 90-second **standing ovation for McCutchen's first at-bat back started** as Gregor Blanco's leadoff fly ball to center was landing in Starling Marte's glove. McCutchen let it all in, calling the moment "intense."

"It's something to remember, for sure," he said. "I did my best to soak it all in. (Catcher Francisco) Cervelli did a good job of just giving me that moment. I told the two of them (Cervelli and starting pitcher Jameson Taillon) I was ready to go, but he shook his head no. I was able to step back out and be in that moment. There was great emotion there.

"These fans came and that says a lot. I appreciate them, always have, always will."

The fans gave McCutchen such a prolonged ovation that Cervelli moved between the plate and the mound to let it play out. The Giants would have been better off had he never gotten back into his crouch to restart the game.

It was all downhill from McCutchen's ovation, the first of a half-dozen on this night for the former face of the franchise. The failures were universal. The lineup struck out 14 more times and went 2 for 16 with runners in scoring position. Andrew Suarez gave up five earned in four innings, continuing a streak of futility for the rotation. Jose Valdez made his debut and gave up a long homer. Tony Watson returned to Pittsburgh, as well, and gave up a three-run shot after allowing one run in his first 15 appearances.

Even McCutchen wasn't spared. He received a standing ovation before every at-bat and watched a tribute video on the scoreboard before the bottom of the first, but he had just one hit in five at-bats and grounded out with the bases loaded.

"It's pretty apparent we haven't been playing our best baseball the last five games," he said. "We've just got to show up tomorrow and be ready to go. This night, just flush it down the toilet and be ready to go tomorrow."

The Giants need to flush the last five. They've been outscored 43-10 while losing to the Phillies and Pirates. The starting staff, without the two co-aces, has been hit particularly hard. Suarez

had pitched well, but gave up a pair of homers Friday, joining the chorus. Over the five losses, the starters have allowed 23 runs in 22 innings.

“It’s starting pitching,” manager Bruce Bochy said. “That’s how you get on a roll or have struggles. That’s usually what’s happening, your starters are going through a rut, and that’s what’s happening with us right now.”

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Pirates spoil McCutchen’s return as Giants drop fifth straight

Alex Pavlovic

PITTSBURGH — Andrew McCutchen got a standing ovation before each of his plate appearances Friday night, including one **that lasted 90 seconds**. That was the highlight of the night for the Giants.

Andrew Suarez became the latest Giants starter to get rocked and the lineup struck out 14 more times in an 11-2 loss to the Pirates, including two by McCutchen, who was 1 for 5 in his first game back. Through five games, the Giants are 0-for-Pennsylvania. They are back below .500. If that’s not enough, here’s more!

— Suarez gave up a two-run homer in the first and another in the fourth. He didn’t pitch the fifth. The latest time through the rotation, the five Giants starters combined for just 22 innings and allowed 23 runs. Derek Holland was the best of the bunch and he gave up three earned in five innings.

— Jameson Taillon picked up where the Phillies left off. The hard-throwing right-hander had five strikeouts through the first three innings — including two of McCutchen — but he was removed before the top of the fourth with a finger laceration. The Giants have 69 strikeouts in their last five games.

— Kyle Crick was traded for McCutchen. They faced off in the fifth, and McCutchen grounded out to third with a runner on. The Giants still probably won that trade, but you can bet Crick enjoyed that moment.

— Old friend George Kontos , who was very, very excited about facing the Giants, pitched the eighth. He loaded the bases on a hit-by-pitch, error and single, but got McCutchen to ground out to third with two outs.

— Jose Valdez made his Giants debut in the seventh. He was throwing 96 mph. He also gave up a two-run homer to Josh Bell on a fastball right down the middle. This bullpen has a serious depth issue.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

McCutchen gets 9—second ovation in Pittsburgh return

Alex Pavlovic

PITTSBURGH — Perhaps because they didn't want to draw attention to a trade they made, the Pirates were awfully quiet about Andrew McCutchen before Friday's game. An on-field stadium host was previewing the matchup 20 minutes before first pitch when he was cut off by a huge crowd.

McCutchen had taken the field to start warming up, and the fans gave him an extended standing ovation, drowning out the man with the microphone as he tried to talk about Jameson Taillon. McCutchen's first at-bat back in Pittsburgh led to an even stronger reaction. The sellout crowd stood and roared as Gregor Blanco's leadoff fly settled into center fielder Starling Marte's glove. The entire crowd was standing before McCutchen even approached the batter's box, and he walked a few feet from the plate and tipped his cap.

After about 50 seconds, McCutchen tried to dig in. The crowd started chanting "MVP! MVP!" and he stepped back, a smile on his face. Catcher Francisco Cervelli vacated his spot to let the chant continue. Finally, after 90 seconds, McCutchen took a couple of deep breaths and stepped back into the box.

Earlier in the day, during a rare press conference in an opponents' park, McCutchen said he did not know exactly how he would respond.

"If I cry, I cry. Big whoop," he said. "You're supposed to. If I don't, I don't. I want to just try and soak it all in and appreciate it and appreciate the fans around here."

Those fans gave him another long ovation as he took right field for the bottom of the inning. The Pirates showed a tribute video highlighting his nine-year career here. After that, it was down to business, and that's what McCutchen anticipated for most of the weekend.

The Giants and McCutchen arrived Thursday evening, and he went straight to a home he bought with his wife after they were married. McCutchen said he intends to live there for the rest of his life, and it continues to be his offseason home. In the first few hours back he took care of some important business. He went to his favorite local pizza place.

ESPN.com

Even in new threads, McCutchen will be at home in Pittsburgh

Jerry Crasnick

During Andrew McCutchen's 673 home games as a Pittsburgh Pirate, he developed an appreciation for franchise history and a sense of comfort at PNC Park. But he never once felt emboldened enough by his achievements to see the statues of Honus Wagner, Willie Stargell, Roberto Clemente and Bill Mazeroski outside the stadium and entertain the possibility that he, too, might be immortalized in bronze one day.

Gerrit Cole? Aces. Giancarlo Stanton? Hit or miss. Here's how the top names who changed teams are faring in their new surroundings.

As contenders and pretenders start to separate themselves, we run through all 30 clubs to see who will be adding and subtracting.

Why waiting to sell could be a big mistake for the Orioles, how to judge starting pitchers in 2018, and an upcoming closer milestone we won't see often.

"I don't think I'm that important," McCutchen said. "Those are guys in the past who did great things, who won championships. I didn't do that. I didn't win championships. I had some personal accolades, but we made the playoffs and that was it. Those are great guys who were there for a very, very long time. As far as me, I'm just a guy who is a part of history, but not to that stature."

But sometimes a player's impact is measured more in hearts touched and warm memories triggered than trophies hoisted and champagne sprayed. Neil Walker, Pittsburgh born and raised, received a standing ovation when he returned home as a New York Met in 2016. Now it's McCutchen's turn to feel the love.

The festivities will be carefully choreographed when McCutchen returns to Pittsburgh in a San Francisco Giants uniform Friday night. He'll hold a pregame news conference for the local media and be recognized during two in-game celebrations. The Pirates have scheduled a brief video in conjunction with his first plate appearance in the top of the first inning. A longer, more elaborate video presentation will take place when he jogs out to right field in the bottom of the first.

"Our fans, for good reason, love Andrew and what he stands for and everything that he did," general manager Neal Huntington said. "There are going to be a lot of McCutchen jerseys -- some black and gold, and maybe even some black and orange. Throughout the ballpark, I fully anticipate an incredibly warm welcome."

The buildup stems from McCutchen's impact as a driving force behind the franchise's emergence from baseball hell. McCutchen joined the Pirates as the 11th overall pick in the 2005 draft, as part of a stacked first round that included future All-Stars Justin Upton, Alex

Gordon, Troy Tulowitzki, Ryan Braun, Ryan Zimmerman and Jay Bruce. Over nine seasons in Pittsburgh, McCutchen won a Most Valuable Player award, made five All-Star teams and led a franchise burdened by 20 straight losing seasons to three straight playoff appearances from 2013 to 2015.

He's in some impressive company statistically. McCutchen ranks fourth behind Stargell, Ralph Kiner and Clemente -- and right in front of Barry Bonds and Dave Parker -- with 203 home runs, and he's in the top 10 among Pirates in doubles, walks, strikeouts, wins above replacement, runs created and adjusted OPS+.

Beyond the numbers and awards, McCutchen showed a commitment that endeared him to the fans. He signed a \$51.5 million contract extension in 2012 that was universally regarded as club-friendly, and three years later he won the Roberto Clemente Award for sportsmanship, community involvement and his contribution to his team. During a memorably touching encounter in 2015, McCutchen brought two young Pirates fans to the verge of tears when he handed them his batting gloves at the end of a victory over the San Diego Padres.

"For me, Andrew McCutchen has earned a place among the all-time great Pirates," club president Frank Coonelly said in an email to ESPN.com. "I will leave his exact ranking among Clemente, Wagner, Stargell, the Waner brothers and the other great Pirates to baseball historians and sabermetricians, but I have no doubt that Andrew is on the very short list of the all-time greats of this historic franchise."

Aside from the statistics, Coonelly said, "what makes Andrew so special to this franchise is that he was the offensive leader of the club that finally brought baseball all the way back in Pittsburgh after a very difficult run for this proud franchise. I will always remember the joy and pride on Andrew's face when the 2013 club won its 82nd game in Texas and again when it clinched a playoff berth in Chicago.

"When your best player is also a truly wonderful person who generously gives his time, talents and love to improve the lives of others in your community, you are fortunate as a club to have a genuine superstar on your team, and that is exactly what we enjoyed during Andrew's nine years here."

Whether by signing autographs, helping in the community or powering the Pirates back to the playoffs, Andrew McCutchen found many ways to put smiles on the faces of fans during his time in Pittsburgh. Photo by Justin Berl/Getty Images

Business and sentiment inevitably collided in January when the Pirates sent McCutchen to San Francisco for outfielder Bryan Reynolds and pitcher Kyle Crick. The Pirates valued McCutchen's deep bond with the fan base. But they studied how things had worked out with David Wright,

Braun, Joe Mauer and Joey Votto -- franchise mainstays who had signed lucrative second deals with their original clubs -- and feared the model might not work with McCutchen if his performance slipped noticeably, or they lacked the resources to field a competitive team around him.

A lot of people in Pittsburgh didn't buy that rationale. A change.org petition urging Major League Baseball to force Pirates owner Bob Nutting to sell the team generated more than 60,000 signatures.

"Pittsburgh is a baseball town that is being destroyed by a greedy owner," the petition began. "There are so many loyal fans who truly care and support this team through thick and thin. We deserve better."

One company pulled its advertising from the Ogden Newspaper Group, the chain owned by Nutting's family, and the MLB Players Association filed a grievance in February against the Pirates and three other clubs for allegedly hoarding their revenue-sharing money.

Meanwhile, six weeks into the season, the Pirates are playing better than anyone expected. They're 21-16 and third in the National League Central even though McCutchen is gone, Gerrit Cole is pitching like a Cy Young candidate in Houston and Josh Harrison, a two-time All-Star, is out six weeks with a broken left hand.

So how will fans react upon McCutchen's return?

Jim Wiltman, a season-ticket holder since 1992, describes himself as a "bad baseball expert." While he plans to attend Saturday's game against the Giants and cheer McCutchen at the plate, he supported management's decision to trade McCutchen and send Cole to Houston in a five-player deal in January. Wiltman does not rank McCutchen's homecoming on a par with goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury's February return to Pittsburgh as a member of the Vegas Golden Knights -- or even Barry Bonds' first game back in Pittsburgh as a Giant in the mid-1990s.

"Andrew is a good guy, and he was a great face of the franchise for a few years," Wiltman said. "He helped turn the team around. But he needed a change of scenery, and so did Cole. It's not as if they traded Babe Ruth. The Pirates aren't in a position where they can spend a lot of money on a guy with diminishing skills who's on the wrong side of 30."

"When your best player is also a truly wonderful person who generously gives his time, talents and love to improve the lives of others in your community, you are fortunate as a club to have a genuine superstar on your team, and that is exactly what we enjoyed during

Andrew's nine years here."Pirates president Frank Coonelly on Andrew McCutchen
Mark McDonel, a 30-year season-ticket holder, also holds an opinion that he considers contrary to the majority of Pirates fans.

"There are two perspectives," McDonel said. "From an emotional perspective, it's a shame. Andrew was here for such a long time and he represented the Pirates so well in so many ways. From that perspective, it was hard to see him go.

"But from a practical reality, I understood the decision, and I agree with it and support it. Baseball's economic system is broken, and this is a microcosm of that. The easy way out for the Pirates would have been to do nothing and let him roll into the free-agent market, and they wouldn't have to endure the criticism. But they were willing to take the short-term pain to try and improve the team long term. I'm energized by that as a fan."

McCutchen's final years in Pittsburgh were marked by developments that put a strain on his relationship with the team. The Pirates moved him to right field in April 2017, only to shift him back to center when Starling Marte received an 80-game suspension for PED use. Trade rumors began swirling around McCutchen entering the 2016-2017 offseason and persisted until the day he departed.

If Coonelly has one regret in hindsight, it's that the team didn't do a better job of articulating its long-term vision to the fans.

"It was always going to be challenging to explain how making the very difficult decision to trade Andrew McCutchen for two young players was consistent with our commitment to build a championship club," Coonelly said. "Notwithstanding that degree of difficulty, I wish I had done a better job of explaining why, at this particular juncture for the organization, this was the type of extremely difficult decision that we needed to make to put us in the best position to return to the playoffs as quickly as possible."

During his transition, McCutchen eased the burden on the Pirates by going out in style. He wrote a goodbye note to Pittsburgh in the Players' Tribune and posted a heartfelt tweet that received 87,000 likes.

*Pittsburgh. My Home. My Fans. My City. The place that raised me and helped mold me into the man I am today. You will forever be in my heart. A tip of the cap to all who have been on this journey with me. With Love and respect,
Cutch pic.twitter.com/QB0n9vuBuZ*

- andrew mccutchen (@TheCUTCH22) January 15, 2018

"Everything is branded with choice," McCutchen said. "You have a decision to make on what you say, what you do, how you act, how you react. I always choose to respond in a manner that

if I look back five or 10 years later, I'm pleased with what I said and what I did. I don't want to try and react off pure, raw emotion just because of something that happened that maybe I didn't agree with.

"I'm not perfect, but I try to make a conscious effort to take a deep breath and think before I speak. That's the biggest thing. That's why I said what I said and the reason things came off the way they came off. That's why there's no bad blood."

As McCutchen adapts to San Francisco, a piece of him remains in Pittsburgh. He still has a house in the suburbs, and he's looking forward to sleeping in his own bed and commuting to the park this weekend. In November, McCutchen's wife, Maria, gave birth to their first child, a son named Steel. While it's natural to discern a Pittsburgh connection, McCutchen shakes his head "no" at the perception that the name choice was in honor of the Steel City.

"No significance to it," he said. "I love Pittsburgh, but it just worked out that way. We weren't necessarily thinking of something that has to do with the city. We just wanted a strong name, and that was the name we thought of."

As the big homecoming awaits, Steel's dad knows he can only do so much to keep his emotions under wraps. How will McCutchen react when the highlights flash on the PNC Park scoreboard and all those fans in No. 22 jerseys join voices to express how much he means to them?

"You just have to try and embrace the moment and savor it, because it's not going to last very long," McCutchen said. "As much as you anticipate it, that quickly, it's going to be over."

Nine years and 673 games will be compressed into a couple of videos, a standing ovation or two and maybe the tip of a cap or a wave in response. A city will show its appreciation, and a ballplayer's legacy in that city will flash before his eyes.