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San Francisco Chronicle

Giants' Cueto, Samardzija to return this weekend against Cardinals

Henry Schulman

DENVER — The Shimmy and The Shark are returning to a waterfront ballpark near you.

Johnny Cueto and **Jeff Samardzija** will come off the disabled list and rejoin the rotation Thursday and Saturday, respectively, during a four-game series against the Cardinals, manager **Bruce Bochy** said Tuesday.

With **Madison Bumgarner** back from his broken hand as well, the Giants for the first time this season will have whom they consider their Big Three together in the rotation. At the same time, two impressive rookies appear to be sticking around, too, with **Derek Holland** moving to the bullpen as a swingman.

Andrew Suarez will take his normal turn in Wednesday night's series finale against the Rockies at Coors Field. After Cueto ends an absence of more than two months Thursday night, **Derek Rodriguez** will pitch Friday night, followed by Samardzija on Saturday and Bumgarner on Sunday.

That leaves **Chris Stratton** hanging after he allowed eight runs in 52/3 innings Tuesday night. He would seem to be the odd man out, but the Giants made no announcement after the game.

Cueto seemed headed for Tommy John surgery after he was diagnosed with a partially torn elbow ligament, which seemed especially cruel after he led the league with an 0.84 ERA over his

five April starts. He rehabbed his elbow instead and will return after just two starts for Triple-A Sacramento, for which he threw 72/3 shutout innings.

“When you’ve got one of your big guys ready to go, you pitch him,” Bochy said. “He passed all the tests. He checked every box off. He’s thrown the ball well — no runs. His bullpen (Monday) went well, he’s practiced bunts, he’s set to go.”

Cueto told Bochy his arm feels better now than before the minor-league games.

Samardzija has dealt with shoulder and pectoral injuries since spring training. In contrast to Cueto, Samardzija performed poorly (6.56 ERA) in his eight Giants starts upon his return from a first disabled-list stay. His second DL trip came after he was pulled in the first inning of a May 29 game at Coors Field.

Samardzija made his fourth rehab start in this go-around at Sacramento on Monday and held Fresno to two solo homers in six innings.

Holland helped steady the rotation when the other three experienced starters went down, particularly during the club’s 18-10 June, but Suarez and Rodriguez have shown great promise and for now, at least, will stick — a decision that Holland supports.

“What they’re doing, let them keep going,” Holland said. “They earned every bit of it. You’re never going to hear me be upset about it. These guys are pitching their asses off, and I’m going to be there to help, whatever it is.

“As I see it, I had a tryout as a starter until everybody was ready to go. Now it’s my job to be in the bullpen.”

Bochy had Holland in his office for a good while Tuesday to explain the situation and said the left-hander was “great about it. He wants to do what he can to help the club.”

Holland’s days as a starter might not be over. Bochy acknowledged that he and pitching coach **Curt Young** have discussed using off days and the occasional sixth starter to provide Samardzija and Cueto extra rest as they ease back into the rotation.

San Francisco Chronicle
Giants, Stratton crushed in Coors Field fiasco
Henry Schulman

DENVER — Colorado third baseman Nolan Arenado played in his 100th career game against the Giants on Tuesday night. Another 100 like this and he can get to Cooperstown on the strength of his accomplishments against one team alone.

Arenado's three-run homer against Chris Stratton in the fifth inning of an 8-1 Rockies victory was as predictable as it was loud, with the count 3-2, Stratton's pitch count rising and two runners on after a leadoff walk and a single.

The homer was Arenado's 24th against the Giants. He has 90 RBIs in the 100 games against San Francisco, just one reason the Giants have found it nearly impossible to win at Coors Field. They have lost four of five here this season, 14 of their past 16 overall.

This was a bad night for Stratton to have a bad game. Then again, perhaps his future was decided before he allowed eight runs in 52/3 innings.

Manager Bruce Bochy said before the game that Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija will rejoin the rotation during a four-game series against the Cardinals at AT&T Park that begins Thursday night.

That means the long-expected decision on which two starters must go was at hand. Derek Holland is one. The Giants moved him to the bullpen Tuesday, leaving two openings for the three younger pitchers.

The tea leaves did not look good for Stratton before Tuesday's game, and it got no prettier for the 27-year-old right-hander when the Rockies busted him for the second time in six days. Total damage in 92/3 innings: 13 runs.

Asked after the game whether he was told anything about his future, Stratton said, "No, but I certainly didn't help myself out recently. I think they know what I can do. The situation is in their hands. I don't think about that. I just go out and try to win games."

For the Giants the past two seasons, that has proven harder than climbing Pikes Peak in flip-flops.

The Rockies have no magic formula at Coors. They have a losing record here this year. But the Giants cannot stem the tide, even now during a rise in their overall performance.

They have lost consecutive games for the first time in more than two weeks and on Wednesday night must beat another tough left-hander, Tyler Anderson, lest they lose the entire advance they made with their sweep in Arizona.

Bochy is at a loss to explain the Giants' ineptitude at Coors.

"I wish I could. I'd fix it," he said. "It's been a tough place for us. As much as anything, we don't score a lot here. Other clubs put up more numbers. We score two runs, one run, and that's not going to work. We came out of Arizona swinging the bats well and they shut us down."

The Giants have three runs on 11 hits in the two games. Tuesday's failure had an odd twist.

The Rockies promoted right-hander Antonio Senzatela to make this start after he blanked the Giants' Triple-A Sacramento team for 7²/₃ innings Thursday night. Seven more zeroes Tuesday gave him 14²/₃ shutout innings against the Giants' organization in six nights.

After Monday's 5-2 loss in 92-degree heat, Bochy canceled batting practice Tuesday hoping to give his older team a break ahead of another hot one. It didn't help.

Senzatela allowed singles to two of his first four hitters, then retired 19 of his final 20. The Giants did not score until Alen Hanson's RBI double in the eighth off Mike Dunn, long after Stratton had allowed two first-inning runs and then let the game get away as Arenado took his traditional trot around the bases when he faces the Giants.

Andrew McCutchen had the night off after 10 hitless at-bats over his previous two games. Brandon Crawford will get a break Wednesday night.

MLB.com

Stratton, Giants drop second straight to Rockies

Chris Haft

DENVER -- There are times when a pitcher must stand tall on the mound even after his effectiveness has slipped, his deception has dwindled and his hope -- despite his competitive nature -- has evaporated.

Chris Stratton endured that kind of thankless night Tuesday for the Giants, who absorbed an 8-1 loss to the Rockies at Coors Field.

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San Francisco has lost two in a row to Colorado since sweeping three games at Arizona to begin

their six-game road trip. Yet the Giants' imminent return to San Francisco for a 10-game homestand that will take them into the All-Star break will have a therapeutic effect. It may enable most players to shrug off the sting of this one by the time they suit up for Wednesday's finale vs. the Rockies.

Stratton will have this game to dwell on, however. The right-hander worked 5 2/3 innings and allowed eight runs on a career-high 11 hits. **Charlie Blackmon**, the second batter Stratton faced, homered to open the scoring. **Nolan Arenado**, who tortures Giants pitching, added a three-run homer in the fifth. In 100 career games against San Francisco, Arenado has 90 RBIs, second among active players to **Matt Kemp's** 93.

In his last two starts, both against the Rockies, Stratton allowed 13 runs and 19 hits in 9 2/3 innings for a 12.10 ERA.

It's a time of transition for the Giants' pitching staff. **Johnny Cueto** and **Jeff Samardzija** are healed from their injuries and **set to rejoin the rotation later this week**. Stratton (8-6) leads the team in wins, but even he wouldn't call himself the staff's most indispensable pitcher. Asked if he had addressed possible changes in his role with the coaching staff, Stratton said with biting candor, "No, but I certainly didn't help myself out recently."

This outing could eventually prompt the Giants to send Stratton and his 4.93 ERA back to Triple-A Sacramento to refine his potentially impressive curveball. At best, it'll be a career builder for him, an experience that will teach him how to transform bad times into good.

In fact, Giants manager Bruce Bochy praised the perseverance Stratton displayed by lasting as long as he did.

"He did a pretty good job of that," Bochy said. "I'll give him a lot of credit for hanging in there."

The Giants could use more of this toughness at Coors Field, where they have lost 14 of their last 16 games. Bochy's analysis: Coming to Colorado doesn't automatically activate San Francisco's bats as it does with some clubs. On Tuesday, the Giants recorded only their seventh game in franchise history at Colorado without gathering an extra-base hit. That hadn't happened since May 19, 2013.

"We don't seem to score a lot here," Bochy said. "We score two runs, one run -- that's not going to work here."

SOUND SMART

After going 1-for-12 over the first four games of the Giants' road trip, **Alen Hanson** had a 2-for-4

night.

UP NEXT

The Giants conclude a six-game road trip with a Fourth of July date against the Rockies at 5:10 p.m. PT on Wednesday. San Francisco's starter will be left-hander **Andrew Suarez**, who's striving to make his case to stay in the rotation -- or at least in the Majors -- with Samardzija and Cueto returning this week. Colorado left-hander **Tyler Anderson** will oppose Suarez.

MLB.com

Cueto, Shark set to return vs. Cardinals

Chris Haft

DENVER -- It's time for the Giants to implement the highly anticipated changes in their starting rotation. This didn't mean that manager Bruce Bochy felt like discussing them on Tuesday.

To name every occupant of the reshaped rotation, Bochy would have had to condemn pitchers on the current staff to demotions to the Minors. That would be premature and unwise, particularly if more injuries occur in the near future.

View Full Game Coverage

"Obviously, we don't talk about anything until we do something," Bochy said. "No moves have been made yet. There'll be a move Thursday and a move Saturday."

Here's why: Bochy said that **Johnny Cueto**, having proven that the sprained right elbow which sidelined him for two months has healed sufficiently, will start Thursday against the Cardinals at AT&T Park.

Jeff Samardzija, plagued since Spring Training by right shoulder tightness, will start Saturday against the Cardinals.

Dereck Rodriguez has avoided a return to Triple-A Sacramento, at least for now. Bochy named the rookie right-hander, who's 3-1 with a 3.16 ERA in seven games (six starts), to start Friday.

For the short term, veteran left-hander **Derek Holland** (5-7, 4.36 ERA in 17 starts) was rewarded with the role of "backing up" Cueto on Thursday if Cueto needs a long reliever. Bochy praised Holland for his "great attitude."

"I'm here to help these guys, whatever way it takes," Holland said. "I don't care if it's situational

[relief] or long man, I'm going to be ready when they call for me. I've got a lot of respect for their decision. It's part of the game."

Bochy said nothing about rookie left-hander **Andrew Suarez**, who'll start Wednesday's series finale against the Rockies, or left-hander **Ty Blach**, who has divided the season between starting and long relief. Bochy didn't rule out assembling a staff that includes a long reliever and a pitcher who would function primarily as a sixth starter to keep the rotation's top men fresh.

"It's a nice luxury," Bochy said. "There's times when you need a couple of long men so you don't tear up your bullpen. Now, if that happens, it means that things aren't going very well. But at the same time, it's good to have a couple of those guys to give us coverage for our starters."

The Athletic

Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija cleared to return as Giants make the first of several rotation decisions Andrew Baggarly

DENVER – The Giants rotation will be whole again this weekend.

Johnny Cueto will return from the 60-day disabled list and start Thursday's homestand opener against the St. Louis Cardinals. Jeff Samardzija will be activated from the 10-day DL to start on Saturday.

And left-hander Derek Holland, who did a serviceable job of plugging a leak for three months, will head to the bullpen.

Holland is immediately available as a reliever, Giants manager Bruce Bochy said prior to Tuesday's 8-1 loss at Coors Field. But the preference is to hold Holland back to provide coverage for Cueto, who will operate with a limit of 85 pitches in his first big league start since both he and the team feared the worst about his achy right elbow.

Dereck Rodriguez hangs onto his rotation spot for now. The rookie right-hander will make his eighth big league start on Friday, in between Cueto and Samardzija. Madison Bumgarner will stay on turn, of course, and pitch Sunday's series finale against the Cardinals.

Bochy wouldn't say what he and the coaching staff had concocted beyond the Cardinals series, for good reason. One of their starting pitchers in the final two games of the series here in Colorado – Chris Stratton and Andrew Suárez — is about to be demoted, and likely optioned to Triple-A Sacramento. And you don't deliver bad news before you hand over the baseball and ask a pitcher to win you a ballgame.

Stratton appears to be the leading candidate to be optioned, given his recent inconsistency and the fact that Suárez has improved with almost every start.

Stratton's linescore did not provide evidence in his favor. He gave up eight runs on 11 hits in 5 2/3 innings, and given the way the Giants offense has been grounded at Coors Field in recent series, the game was effectively over the moment Nolan Arenado cranked a three-run home run to give the Rockies a 6-0 lead in the fifth.

Asked if the coaches had told him anything, Stratton replied, "No, but I certainly didn't help myself out recently. I think I know what I'm capable of doing here. But the decision is in their hands. I'm just going out there trying to win a ballgame."

Stratton has a 4.93 ERA in 18 starts but most of the damage has come in two mini slumps and the Giants have an 11-7 record with him on the mound. Unfortunately for him, the timing of this latest fusillade of hits – 28 in 15 2/3 innings over his last three outings – does not work in his favor.

Stratton threw 75 strikes out of 104 pitches, which is what you want in this ballpark. And he shook his head after looking at the film, because so many of the hits appeared to come on pitches that were not location mistakes.

"I definitely have to sit down with (Buster) Posey and find out what adjustments I have to make," Stratton said. "We threw a lot of fastballs tonight – on the corners, for the most part."

He faced Arenado after a leadoff walk and a single, and after getting ahead 0-2, he was determined not repeat what happened at home in his previous start to the same hitter — hang a curve and get punished for it. He bounced two curves in the dirt by design, but they landed too far in front of the dish to be competitive chase pitches. Arenado ran the count full and crushed a changeup.

"You could tell he didn't want to leave them up," said Bochy, "and he overcorrected."

It's understandable if Stratton is trying to overthrow his curve. Opponents batted .116 against the high-spin pitch last year. They entered Tuesday night hitting .310 against it this year.

The Giants' rotation decisions are difficult, but they might not matter much in the larger context. All of these young pitchers will be relied upon to make sizable contributions in the second half while potentially taking breaks or serving in occasional relief stints to keep their overall innings down. And the Giants' depth gives them flexibility to juggle the rotation in case they feel Cueto could be best served from extra rest between starts or Samardzija struggles to reestablish himself.

"Looking at the schedule, there's ways to give him a break," Bochy said of Cueto.

Bochy said he mentioned the possibility of spot starts to Holland while meeting with the left-hander in his office.

"He's great," Bochy said. "He wants to do everything he can to help the club. He's ready for anything. He's got a great attitude about it."

No matter how the Giants rearrange their rotation to make it happen, the mere fact that they will deliver the ball to Cueto again represents a major development. He was 3-0 with a 0.84 ERA in five starts before elbow stiffness merited an MRI exam and a series of opinions that led him

toward season-ending Tommy John surgery. But when Dr. James Andrews took a contrast MRI and evaluated Cueto in Florida, he told the right-hander that he could rehab the elbow sprain and attempt to pitch again.

An active and effective Cueto would be a pivotal development as the Giants seek to contend in a winnable NL West.

Cueto rested for several weeks before he began to play catch again and he experienced no known setbacks as he ramped up to live batting practice and then a pair of minor league rehab starts. Bochy viewed Cueto's assignment on Friday as critical, and the right-hander struck out six in four shutout innings for Triple-A Sacramento.

"Johnny's set to go," Bochy said. "He passed all the tests. He checked every box off. He's throwing the ball well. His bullpen (session) went fine. He's done his hitting and bunting. I just got off the phone with him. We're set to go Thursday.

"We'll keep a watchful eye on him. Talking to Johnny, he says, 'I'm ready to go. I feel better than before I went on rehab.'

ESPN.com

Real or not? Ohtani is back too late to save the Angels

David Schoenfield

Shohei Ohtani returned to the Los Angeles Angels lineup at a much-needed time, with the Angels scuffling at a game over .500 and beginning a must-win series against a team they have to chase down for a playoff spot. When Ohtani last pitched on June 6, the Angels were 35-28, four games behind Seattle and three games behind Houston. FanGraphs didn't give them much chance to win the division but tabbed their playoff odds at 35 percent.

It has been a long month since for Angels fans, however. While the Angels went 8-14 without Ohtani, the Astros went 17-6, and the Mariners went 16-8. The Angels had fallen to 11 games behind Seattle.

So Ohtani to the rescue -- well, half of him -- except he wasn't able to solve Wade LeBlanc or Edwin Diaz as he went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts in Seattle's 4-1 victory on Tuesday, and the Mariners ran their win streak to eight games. Ohtani struck out looking at a 1-2 slider in the second, swung at the first pitch in his second at-bat and fouled out to left field, struck out looking again at a 1-2 fastball on the outside corner in the seventh inning and struck out against Diaz for the final out, flailing at a slider at the knees.

Is it too late for the Angels to mount any kind of run? It feels like it. There's the simple matter of the vast ground they have to make up on Seattle. Even if the Mariners collapse, there are the A's to contend with. Oakland beat San Diego 6-2, and the A's have won 13 of their past 16 to climb eight games over .500. The Angels still have too many holes in the lineup, and the rotation continues to dig deep for healthy arms. The Angels have started 12 pitchers, five of

those guys are currently on the DL, and that doesn't include Ohtani.

Ohtani remains a fascinating story, and his return indicates the urgency of the Angels to win now. It seems that they've basically decided to postpone surgery to let him hit -- which makes sense, since either way he might not return to pitching until 2020 -- and there was some criticism of how they handled him. That doesn't seem fair; heck, he averaged less than a start per week until he landed on the DL, and they gave him plenty of days off around his pitching assignments. For now, he'll hit. The Angels have five more games against Seattle before the All-Star break. They pretty much need to win all five.

And their playoff chances now? Down to 1.8 percent.

It's Max Muncy's world, and we're all living in it: The guy is incredible: Muncy's 20th home run came in his 183rd at-bat, the fewest ABs to reach 20 home runs in Dodgers history (Cody Bellinger needed 189 last year). Heck, if he keeps it up, Muncy has a chance to become just the fifth player in Los Angeles Dodgers history to hit 40:

Shawn Green, 49 (2001)

Adrian Beltre, 48 (2004)

Gary Sheffield, 43 (2000)

Shawn Green, 42 (2002)

Mike Piazza, 40 (1997)

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The Dodgers have been pretty incredible as well. They hit six home runs in an 8-3 win over the Pirates, giving us this factoid:

Since June 1, the Dodgers have hit .263/.345/.529 and averaged 5.90 runs per game, most in the majors. Their two best All-Star candidates are Muncy and Matt Kemp. You can't predict baseball.

Weird game of the year: The Rays beat the Marlins 9-6 in 16 innings, but here was the fun part: After the Rays scored five runs in the top of the 16th, Kevin Cash brought in backup catcher Jesus Sucre to pitch, even though Jose Alvarado had been warming up in the top of the inning. Alvarado was warming up because Vidal Nuno injured his hamstring on a base hit and had to be removed from the game.

It nearly led to the managerial blunder of the year. The first three Marlins reached on ground ball singles. Cash then apparently wanted to remove Sucre, but he had made two mound visits with Sucre facing a batter, so Sucre pitched to Bryan Holaday, who hit a deep fly ball that Kevin Kiermaier chased down. Only then did Alvarado come in, and the Marlins got the tying run to the plate.

Even the darkest night will end, and the sun will rise: How do you sum up the misery that is

the 2018 New York Mets? Well, there's this:

Mark then updated his post to reflect that the Mets are now 11-16 in such games. Knowing this, you won't be surprised that the bullpen is last in the majors in Win Probability Added. I guess Mickey Callaway was a lot smarter when he could give the ball to Andrew Miller and Cody Allen.

On Tuesday, the Mets led the Blue Jays 5-0 and found a way to lose. Let's just say the bullpen was rather ineffective, as Lourdes Gurriel Jr. hit a two-run homer in the eighth off rookie Tim Peterson for a 7-5 victory for Toronto. That 11-1 start for the Mets feels like it happened in another century; they have gone 22-48 since. I don't think Mets fans will take solace in the fact that that's a better win percentage than that of the Orioles or Royals.

I'm not sure this is a good thing: The Brewers blanked the Twins 2-0 as Junior Guerra tossed five scoreless innings and the wonderful and amazing Josh Hader tossed three hitless frames in relief. Eric Thames' two-run homer held up. But get this: The Brewers struck out 16 times in just eight innings and had seven fly outs and one liner to third base. That means there wasn't a single groundout or out at first base. It was the sixth time in the past 20 years that a first baseman didn't record a putout or assist.

The three innings from Hader might seem a little surprising, but he hasn't pitched a whole lot of late. He hadn't gone more than three outs or 18 pitches in an appearance since June 11, so Craig Counsell simply calculated the score of the game and the lack of pitches of late and let Hader go a little deeper. He's up to 83 strikeouts in 44⅓ innings and has struck out 50.9 percent of all batters faced.

San Jose Mercury News

Giants shake up rotation to make room for Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija Kerry Crowley

DENVER—The trip down Interstate 80 between Sacramento and San Francisco is typically reserved for rookies and prospects hoping to break into the major leagues and make an impact with the Giants.

This time, the car shuttling a pair of pitchers who most recently started for the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats will have two passengers with a combined 22 seasons of major league experience.

Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija are officially on the road back to the Giants' rotation.

Manager Bruce Bochy announced that both veteran right-handers will return to the club this weekend, as Cueto will start Thursday and Samardzija will start Saturday against the St. Louis

Cardinals.

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Cueto (elbow sprain) made two rehab starts while Samardzija (shoulder tightness) needed four to prove he was healthy enough to rejoin the Giants' staff.

With two starters returning, Bochy said he spoke with left-hander Derek Holland who will move to the bullpen to provide additional coverage. Holland could be used in relief at Coors Field Tuesday or Wednesday, but if the Giants don't need a long reliever, he'll be counted on to pitch behind Cueto Thursday.

"He's great, he wants to do whatever he can to help the club," Bochy said of Holland. "He understands the situation and he's ready for anything. He's got a great attitude about it."

Cueto is expected to be limited to a pitch count of 85 in his first start back from an elbow injury, while Samardzija shouldn't have his workload monitored as closely after he tossed 90 pitches in a six-inning start Monday for Triple-A Sacramento.

Rookie Dereck Rodríguez will remain in the rotation and start Friday while ace Madison Bumgarner will pitch the Giants' series finale against St. Louis Sunday.

Bochy did not announce who will start Monday, but right-hander Chris Stratton and lefty Andrew Suárez are both candidates. Stratton will face the Rockies Tuesday while the rookie Suárez will start the final game of the road trip Wednesday.

The Giants could be inclined to move forward with the pitcher who performs best at Coors Field.

Cueto led all major league starters in ERA with a 0.84 mark when he was sidelined with an elbow injury that he feared would require Tommy John surgery to heal. Instead, after heading to the disabled list in May, he's now expected to make two starts before the All-Star break.

"He's set to go," Bochy said. "He's passed all the tests, checked every box off, been throwing the ball well and hasn't given up a run there. The bullpen went fine, he's been hitting and bunting and I just got off the phone with him about a half hour ago."

Samardzija began the season on the disabled list with a pectoral injury that bothered him

during spring training, but returned to the staff three weeks into the season. The Giants No. 3 starter posted a 6.56 ERA in eight starts and left an outing against the Rockies May 29 after just one inning with shoulder tightness.

After a rough third rehab start in which he allowed five runs in the first inning for Triple-A Sacramento, the Giants wanted Samardzija to make an additional start before he rejoined the team. Samardzija lasted six innings and allowed two runs Monday, and he'll also make two starts before the All-Star break.

Because of the nature of their respective injuries, Cueto and Samardzija will be afforded extra rest whenever possible according to Bochy. A second half schedule that includes four off days in August and four more in September means both pitchers will likely be asked to pitch every sixth day instead of every fifth day.

Bochy said Holland is a candidate to make spot starts when the Giants need another arm.

The final decision San Francisco must make is whether to have Stratton or Suárez continue in a starting role. Both pitchers have minor league options, but Suárez was the more effective pitcher in June as he posted a 2.62 ERA compared to Stratton's 3.55 mark.

With Holland and fellow left-hander Ty Blach pitching out of the bullpen, two of the Giants' starters from their season-opening series against the Dodgers are now relievers.

The Giants do not plan to announce roster moves until Thursday and Saturday, but the club will need to clear a 40-man roster spot for Cueto as he's returning from the 60-day disabled list. Like Suárez and Stratton, Blach and rookie reliever Pierce Johnson have minor league options.

It could be difficult for Blach to hang onto a 25-man roster spot after this weekend because with Holland's addition to the bullpen, the Giants now have four left-handed relievers.

San Jose Mercury News
Giants flop again at Coors Field, Stratton struggles against Rockies
Kerry Crowley

DENVER—What goes up must come down, and the Giants' trips to Coors Field are a testament to that law of motion.

No major league ballpark in the country is situated at a higher elevation than the Rockies' home

stadium, and there's no city the Giants have fared worse in over the past two seasons.

After dropping Tuesday's blowout 8-1, the Giants have now lost 13 of their past 15 games at the mile-high destination that's become a house of horrors for San Francisco's hitters and pitchers alike.

The Giants entered Coors Field fresh off a three-game sweep of the first-place Arizona Diamondbacks, a series that pulled the club within 2.5 games of the division lead in the National League West. But every time the Giants rise up the standings, they seem to fall back to sea level.

With a defeat Tuesday, the Giants have lost consecutive games for the first time since June 15-16 against the Dodgers, which was also the last time the Giants have been held to two runs or fewer in back-to-back contests.

Right-hander Chris Stratton took the mound Tuesday after the Giants announced several changes to their rotation to accommodate the upcoming returns of veterans Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija.

Though manager Bruce Bochy has praised Stratton for helping hold together the pitching staff during their absences, the Giants did not commit to announcing Stratton as the starter for next Monday's game against the Cubs, which is when his turn in the rotation comes up again.

Stratton has been up at the major league level since August 2017, but the second-year right-hander could be on his way down to the minor leagues or back to the bullpen after rookies Andrew Suárez and Dereck Rodríguez flashed impressive potential during an 18-win month of June for the Giants.

Back-to-back losses have brought the Giants down to earth at 45-42, but Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado remains on cloud nine whenever he faces San Francisco.

Arenado appeared in his 100th career game against the Giants Tuesday and in the fifth inning, he launched his 24th career home run against the club to dead center field. His three-run shot extended the Rockies advantage to 6-0 in the fifth inning and brought his career total to 90 RBIs against Giants pitchers.

The Giants' inability to figure out Arenado, who will soon lock up his fourth career All-Star nod, isn't all that surprising considering the Rockies' best player continues to improve as he enters the prime of his career.

What's more confounding is the Giants' struggles against a Rockies team that entered Tuesday's contest with the worst ERA in the National League.

After the Giants managed just two runs in a 5-2 defeat Monday, Bochy's squad did not score against Rockies starter Antonio Senzatela Tuesday. Senzatela made his first major league start of the year against the Giants after facing their Triple-A squad, the Sacramento River Cats, last week.

The burly righty blanked Sacramento over 7 2/3 innings Thursday and tossed seven frames of three-hit ball against San Francisco Tuesday. Though the Giants had won 15 of their last 18 games against right-handed starters, they couldn't maintain their success against Senzatela who now holds a 14 2/3-inning scoreless streak against the organization.

The Giants did scratch across a run on an Alen Hanson single in the eighth, but that was all they mustered against the Rockies.