



SF Giants Press Clips Monday, May 27, 2013

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San Francisco Chronicle
Bay Area Series should be closely matched
Scott Ostler

The fate of the Giants and A's this season might be greatly influenced by the four games of this week's Bay Ferry Series*.

(* - Formerly the Bay Bridge Series, but we don't want to encourage fans to use the Russian Roulette Bridge.)

The A's and Giants approach the season's one-third pole (is there such a thing?) with playoff aspirations very much in play. One team could come out of this experience with a broken heart.

Two questions worth asking are:

-- Which team is the most believable as a playoff factor?

-- Which team is more lovable?

Question A could be a push.

Both teams were supposed to be pitching rich, but both have been disappointing in that area. The staffs have been healthy for the most part (sorry, Ryan Vogelsong) but mysteriously below par. The A's promising youngsters have taken a step back, and the Giants' more-illustrious group has fallen off form.

Through Sunday's games, A's pitchers had posted a 4.02 ERA, 134 walks, 380 strikeouts, .250 average against. Giants: 4.02, 162, 404, .253.

At bat, the A's have more home-run pop (50, to the Giants' 39) while the Giants put the ball in play more consistently (.272 average to the A's .246). It evens out: Giants' OPS .737, A's OPS .732.

The teams have nearly identical won-lost records, but the A's have gotten a big boost from MLB, which delivered an adorable bundle of joy to the Athletics' doorstep this season in the form of the Houston DisAstros.

The A's are 9-0 against the DisAstros, outscoring 'em 68-31!

It's the gift that will keep on giving, as the A's will play Houston 10 more times.

But enough of the stats. Which team is more lovable, and thus most deserving of fan support and the karma of the baseball gods?

If you root for the fiscal underdog, the A's are your team. Their payroll is less than half that of the Giants' (about \$69 million to about \$142 million). The A's are baseball's forgotten team, awaiting word of their future, which will be determined largely by a commissioner's committee that was last seen climbing Mount Everest in a blizzard.

The Giants, from the top down, might be most solid, sane and centered organization in baseball. Compare 'em with, say, the Dodgers or Yankees.

The A's, meanwhile, are a team in transition, with no clear idea of what they are transitioning from or to.

The Giants' ownership has settled into a groove; the A's ownership is stuck in a ditch.

The A's, then, are more sympathetic than the Giants, but also more anonymous. Compared to the Giants, the A's players seem more like rented furniture. Who's more well-known outside the Bay Area - Kung Fu Panda or Josh Donaldson? Hunter Pence or Seth Smith?

Giants fans can comfortably invest in a Brandon Belt baby giraffe cap (made from synthetic giraffe), knowing it won't go out of style in a few months, but A's fans realize their current heroes - and the organization itself - are just passing through. An "Oakland" jersey could be outdated in three months.

This makes it tougher to be an A's fan, but it also makes the A's fans tougher.

Does this class disparity trickle down (or up) to the players? Tough call. Last season's A's had all the grit and gumption you could want, but the much more privileged Giants had no shortage of spunk (see: World Series!).

So in the category of team character going into this series, we'll call it even. It's this very series that could determine which team is the gutsiest.

It could all come down to intangibles, and here are some to look for:

-- Most surprising player: Tie, Marco Scutaro and Donaldson. Donaldson, a converted catcher, is playing Gold Glove third base and hitting 90 points over his average coming into the season. Scutaro, an aging journeyman, stepped through the looking glass and into a new world as a Giant.

-- Most exciting player: Pablo Sandoval. Routinely swings at pitches in the dirt or in his eyes, yet hits .300 with power. Makes defensive plays that are filed under "For a man of his size ... "

-- Best closer: You'd have to go with the guy who exudes ethnic pride, whose quirky mound antics and emotionality can be borderline disturbing, who seems to work on the fringes of sanity, and who almost always saves the day. Yep, that would be Sergio Romo ... and Grant Balfour.

-- Oddest duck: Pence, maybe. It's not uncommon for outfielders to run out from under their caps; Pence *swings* out from under his cap. But don't overlook A's shortstop Adam Rosales, who can match the enthusiasm of Sandoval or Pence, and who thinks the home-run trot is an Olympic event.

-- Infielder with the most range: Tim Flannery.

-- Best advertisement for interleague play: You'll be looking at it.

San Francisco Chronicle
Michael Kickham to replace Ryan Vogelsong
Henry Schulman

Nothing excites the masses more than the big-league debut of a top prospect. On Tuesday night in Oakland, Giants fans will get that rush when 24-year-old left-hander **Michael Kickham** replaces **Ryan Vogelsong** in the rotation.

"I look forward to watching him," manager **Bruce Bochy** said after announcing the pick. "He needs to go out and pitch the way he's been pitching, and he'll be fine."

Kickham forced the issue with a 1.34 ERA and 29 strikeouts in 31 1/3 innings over his past five starts for Triple-A Fresno. The 6-foot-4, 220-pounder will become the first Giants draft pick from 2010 to reach the majors, ahead of first-rounder **Gary Brown** and **Heath Hembree**.

Chad Gaudin was considered for the start, but the Giants did not want to disrupt the bullpen further now that **Santiago Casilla** is headed for surgery this week to remove a cyst in his right knee. Although head athletic trainer **Dave Groeschner** will not provide a prognosis before the operation, he said Casilla's knee will be immobilized for "at least a few weeks."

Pagan hurt: **Angel Pagan's** game-winning, inside-the-park home run Saturday was more impressive in light of news that he had strained his left hamstring earlier in the game. The injury was bad enough to keep him out Sunday, and he is not certain if he will play in Oakland on Monday.

"I can't say I feel great," Pagan said.

This is Pagan's third leg injury this season, including a strain in his other hamstring. That one was higher on the muscle and hurt when he swung the bat. This one could be more disruptive because it affects the him when he runs.

"It takes away myself," he said. "I depend on my legs."

Pagan said he aggravated the injury between second and third during Saturday's winning dash, but he had no thoughts of pulling up.

"When you play with heart, you don't feel pain," he said. "If I blow out my leg, I blow out my leg. I wanted to win the game for the team."

GIANTS ON DECK

Monday

at A's

1:05 p.m. **CSNBA**

Bumgarner (4-2) vs. Straily (2-2)

Tuesday

at A's

7:05 p.m. **CSNBA**

Kickham (0-0) vs.

Parker (2-6)

Wednesday

vs. A's

7:15 p.m. Channel: 11

Milone (4-5) vs. Lincecum (3-4)

GIANTS LEADING OFF

Two-strike magic: Marco Scutaro almost seems uncomfortable hitting unless he has two strikes. He leads the Giants with 24 two-strike hits. He had two more Sunday to pass Brandon Crawford, who has 23.

San Francisco Chronicle
SF Giants beat Rockies, 7-3
Henry Schulman

Fifty games in, the Giants are 28-22 and stand with Arizona atop the truly wild West, where even the last-place Dodgers are a good week or two from flexing their \$200 million muscles.

Some praise the defending World Series champs for standing tall despite a breakdown in their core strength, the rotation. Others sniff at the record as a byproduct of a few unusual comebacks and argue the pitching struggles will lead the Giants into an inevitable collision with reality.

The truth should become evident very soon.

Following Sunday's 7-3 victory against the Rockies, which completed a series win and a 4-2 homestand, the Giants embark on one of the most treacherous portions of their schedule.

Starting with Monday's holiday matinee at Oakland, they play 18 games against six teams that stand a combined 170-129. Fourteen of the 18 games are on the road, including visits to three teams with records among the best in the National League: the Cardinals, Pirates and Braves.

The Giants understand they need to play leagues better than they did on their past trip, a 1-5 gag through Toronto and Colorado in which they coughed up 52 runs with the "help" of 13 errors.

"What we want to do is start hitting our stride together and play baseball the way we're used to," Matt Cain said after he won his fourth straight decision with an odd five-and-dive against the Rockies. He allowed two hits in the five innings, but he walked five and threw 107 pitches.

Manager Bruce Bochy understands the challenge of the coming three weeks as well as anybody.

"The pitching has to be consistent when we're playing good teams, and we've got to catch the ball," Bochy said. "We've really got to tighten up the defense. We're still not where we need to be. We're still making too many mistakes."

The Giants did play better on their homestand, which ended on an up note Sunday.

They fell behind yet again when Michael Cuddyer hit a two-run double after Cain walked the bases loaded in a 38-pitch first inning. In fact, Giants pitchers have allowed the most first-inning runs in the league at 33.

However, Cain saved himself three times by striking out Carlos Gonzalez, one of the majors' best hitters, who has no clue how to hit Cain. Gonzalez is 4-for-38 with 14 strikeouts, the third-worst average against Cain among left-handed hitters with at least 25 plate appearances.

Down 2-0, the Giants had a sharp retort for Jon Garland, starting with Buster Posey's seventh home run leading off the second inning.

Brandon Belt hit a two-run double after the Giants got a huge break in the fifth inning. Second baseman D.J. LeMahieu whiffed on Hunter Pence's two-out popup to extend the inning.

Andres Torres, subbing for an injured Angel Pagan, followed with an RBI double for a 5-2 Giants lead. Pence added a two-run double against reliever Edgmer Escalona in the sixth, a sinking liner that right fielder Charlie Blackmon could not catch.

Ten hits and seven runs from the offense aside, Bochy praised Cain for his "intestinal fortitude" in holding Colorado to two runs and said, "This game is all about Matt Cain settling down."

Now the Giants settle into a stretch that could chew them up if they do not play solid baseball.

"It'll be a good challenge for us," Posey said. "Hopefully it's something everybody embraces. To get where we want to go, we've got to beat the best teams."

San Francisco Chronicle
Nolan Ryan's kid now Astros president
John Shea

HOUSTON - **Reid Ryan** learned early in life that he was no **Nolan Ryan**.

"I was given a different skill set than my dad," he said in an interview Friday, "but one thing we have in common is we both love the game of baseball."

Like the old man, young Ryan was a pitcher. He pitched in high school, at Texas Christian University and in Class A, realizing after two pro seasons that his future was not on the mound. His fastball topped out at "maybe 90 on my best day. His, a hundred and something. I got the hair. He got the fastball."

So Reid set out on a new life journey, jumping to the game's management side and running minor-league clubs, learning the business from the ground floor. With his Hall of Fame dad, little brother (**Reese**) and an outside investor, Reid has been CEO and president of the group that runs Triple-A Round Rock and Double-A Corpus Christi, both in Texas.

This month, he got the call to the majors.

He's the Astros' new president. Officially, Ryan oversees business operations. Unofficially, he's in charge of turning a down-in-the-dumps organization into a legitimate major-league outfit, one of the toughest jobs in the game.

The Astros are targeted for their third straight 100-loss season. Their attendance ranks 27th. Their TV deal is a joke - only 40 percent of the Houston television market can tune into the games. A falling-out with **Larry Dierker**, a long-time Astros ambassador, led to his departure two months ago. Former players felt alienated from the franchise. And management pulled the plug on an Astros wives' gala for charity, an event going back 23 years.

No wonder fan morale is so lousy and new owner **Jim Crane** is taking a beating.

On Ryan's second full day on the job, he rehired Dierker as his special assistant. He's diving into talks that would land the Astros a lucrative regional TV deal, looking into the wives' charity mess, reaching out to several ex-Astros and trying to meet with as many civic groups as possible.

"One thing I bring to the table is credibility," said Ryan, 41. "When your name is Ryan in the state of Texas, you have a responsibility to baseball fans, and to Texans, to run this place in a manner that makes us all proud. I'm not a guy who'll live in New York or California or Florida. I'm going to live my life in Texas. This opportunity means more to me than other people who aren't from here."

The biggest problem is the roster. It has too many players who are not ready or not good enough for the majors. Technically, Ryan isn't on the baseball side, which is overseen by general manager **Jeff Luhnow**, who's in his second year after working in the Cardinals' scouting and player development departments. But Luhnow said he'll seek Ryan's opinion.

"Obviously, we have someone with a pretty good feel for the game who has been around the game his whole life," Luhnow said. "We're probably going to have a lot of conversations. He gives us a presence in the community that will allow us to accomplish our goals faster than we already set out to do."

Ryan knows the Astros' past, having been around the clubhouse (sometimes as a bat boy) while his dad pitched at the Astrodome for nine years. And also their future, having run the Astros' Double-A team the past 16 years.

"I was brought in to help drive the vision of this organization, and the biggest part of the organization is what's happening on the field with these players," Ryan said. "I've got to make sure I'm able to get Jeff the resources he needs and be out telling the story of the Houston Astros."

Meantime, Nolan Ryan remains the Rangers' CEO, having lost his title as president over the winter. It would be a coup if Ryan the younger hired Ryan the elder away from the mighty Rangers. The only thing better than one Ryan is two Ryans, especially in Texas.

Something for the Mets to cheer about

For a team that has taken a backseat to the Yankees since before the 232-day players' strike of 1994-95, before androstenedione was a household word and before **Matt Harvey** entered kindergarten, the Mets have a lot of catching up to do.

They're not going anywhere as a team this year, yet they'll be on the national stage for one reason: They're hosting the All-Star Game on July 16. The Mets could add some sizzle to their revelry if **Bruce Bochy** picks one of their own to start on the mound.

Harvey.

He's 5-0 and coming off a rare subpar start (four runs in 6 1/3 innings against the Reds) that ballooned his ERA all the way to 1.93, his WHIP all the way to 0.829.

Harvey has stiff competition, one of three National League starters in their first full seasons dominating hitters. The Diamondbacks' **Patrick Corbin** is 7-0 with a 1.44 ERA (0.98 WHIP), and St. Louis' **Shelby Miller** has a 1.74 ERA (0.93 WHIP) and averages 9.79 strikeouts per nine innings.

We prefer Harvey because he's succeeding on an inferior team and actually makes the Mets presentable on days he pitches. If that's not enough for Madison Avenue, the Sports Illustrated cover boy is dating a Sports Illustrated model, **Anne V**.

We still have seven weeks before Bochy needs to announce his starter, but Harvey is equipped for the long haul, a real deal who has drawn comparisons to Mets legend **Dwight Gooden** and came close to throwing a perfect game against the White Sox.

Of course, Bochy could make a statement of his own and choose **Madison Bumgarner**. Or make a statement of another kind: **Clayton Kershaw**.

The Bull Pen

-- The Giants and A's are known for developing top-end pitchers, but their overall record for position players doesn't rank with other teams, at least in quantity. On the All-Star ballot, the Giants and A's each have just five players developed from their organization, fewest in the majors. The Braves have the most, 14.

-- A's managing general partner **Lew Wolff**, in a letter to the Los Angeles Times in response to a critical column on Angels owner **Arte Moreno**: "He unhesitatingly risks his own resources to seek a World Series for his fans, his team and his family. His market and all of MLB is elevated by Arte." To which the columnist, **T.J. Simers**, followed up by writing, "If I were competing with Moreno every year, I wouldn't want him going anywhere either."

-- **Matt Garza** could be one of the top free-agent starting pitchers next winter, which doesn't say much about the group. Then again, the Cub tossed five scoreless innings in his first appearance of the season and could be targeted by other teams before the July 31 trade deadline. By then, he'll have made as many as 12 starts.

-- We were all set to declare the Diamondbacks the Team of the Month when noticing they scheduled a Memorial Day doubleheader against the Rangers - until we learned it's a day-night doubleheader with separate admissions. Great for revenue, not great for fans.

-- Need good eyes to play ball, right? The Royals' best hitting prospect, **Bubba Starling**, couldn't see too well, especially at night, and had his eyes checked. Next thing he knew, he was having Lasik surgery. What? He's 20. Well, it apparently worked for Royals first baseman **Eric Hosmer**, who had the surgery at 19.

-- **Adam Dunn**, actor? The White Sox DH has a bit part as a bartender in an upcoming movie, "The Dallas Buyers Club," starring **Matthew McConaughey**. Dunn didn't need to go to acting school for the role. He's a silent partner in the movie's production company and a buddy of the company's founder, **Joe Newcomb**, a former Blue Jays minor-leaguer who has thrown Dunn batting practice.

San Jose Mercury News

San Francisco Giants beat Colorado Rockies 7-3

Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO -- Brandon Belt is still searching for consistency, the kind that has Buster Posey looking up at the scoreboard after 50 games and seeing a .317 average and .939 OPS, the 10th-best mark in the league.

"I think I'm getting there," Belt said Sunday afternoon. "I'm hopeful that I'm progressing in that direction and being more consistent."

Sunday's 7-3 Giants win over the Colorado Rockies provided the latest signs that Belt is moving forward. Few are in Posey's class, but the Giants will happily take Belt's current approach as the starting staff continues to struggle, putting more pressure on the lineup.

Belt has shaken off a slow start and entered the series finale with a .277 average in May.

After drawing walks in his first two plate appearances, Belt lined a 3-2 fastball to the wall with two outs in the fifth inning, breaking open a tie game.

The two-run double came just moments after Rockies second baseman D.J. LeMahieu had whiffed on Hunter Pence's pop-up that should have ended the inning.

For long stretches of his big league career, Belt has gotten off track by swinging at balls and watching mistake pitches zoom right over the heart of the plate. He said Posey, who extended his hitting streak to 10 games on Sunday, provides a daily example of what needs to be done.

"He's someone you can look to because he takes advantage of missed pitches," Belt said. "He does it as well as anybody, and it shows (in his numbers)."

Posey hit his seventh homer of the season as part of another strong offensive effort that helped Matt Cain earn a win on a day it appeared he might last just a couple innings. Cain walked five of the first 10 batters he faced and needed 38 pitches to get out of the first inning trailing 2-0. The Rockies got a two-run double from Michael Cuddyer, but Cain stranded two runners in scoring position.

In the second inning, he stranded two more but brought the pitch count up to 65.

"I thought I might run out of pitches sometime in the third," Cain said.

Manager Bruce Bochy was thinking the same thing. Always cognizant of keeping his pitchers out of too many stressful innings, Bochy had the bullpen warming up as Cain struggled and considered pulling his opening-day starter during both lengthy frames.

But Cain battled through, allowing just one base runner in his final three innings before he was lifted with the Giants leading 5-2. After losing Cain's first five starts, the Giants have won his last six.

"It's pretty amazing, really," Bochy said. "It shows you how mentally tough he is and the makeup of Matt Cain and how strong he is. It's all about battling, and that's as gutty an effort as you'll see."

☐ Bochy announced that left-hander Mike Kickham will come up from Triple-A Fresno to make Tuesday's start in place of the injured Ryan Vogelsong. Kickham, 24, has a 4.33 ERA and has been strong in his past five starts, going 3-1 with a 1.72 ERA and 29 strikeouts to just nine walks.

"He's a young kid that's just settled in at Triple-A and started pitching well," Bochy said. "He's been the best pitcher down there in Fresno. He's a left-hander we think a lot of."

Kickham is the fifth-best prospect in the organization, according to Baseball America. Brett Pill has spent most of the season playing first base behind Kickham and said the lefty "is tall and lanky with a lot of moving parts.

"He's been lights out," Pill said. "He's just getting better every start."

☒ Right-hander Santiago Casilla will have surgery in the coming days to remove a cyst in his right tibia. Trainer Dave Groeschner said it's too early to set a return date but said Casilla will be immobilized at least a few weeks.

☒ A day after an electric walk-off inside-the-park homer, leadoff hitter Angel Pagan was out of the starting lineup because of a strained left hamstring. Pagan had previously missed time this season with a right hamstring strain.

The speedy Pagan said he wasn't sure if he would be able to play Monday because the strain bothers him while running.

Pagan said the injury happened during Saturday's game when he was diving for a ball in the outfield. He felt it again as he approached third base on the inside-the-park homer.

San Jose Mercury News
Giants' Santiago Casilla to have surgery to remove cyst
Alex Pavlovic

SAN FRANCISCO -- Giants right-hander Santiago Casilla will have surgery in the coming days to remove a cyst in his right tibia.

"They're taking the cyst out and filling in the area with medical concrete, so to speak, to let it heal," trainer Dave Groeschner said. "He'll be immobilized at least a few weeks."

Groeschner said it's too early to estimate a return date for Casilla, a valuable member of the bullpen. As the primary right-handed set-up man for closer Sergio Romo, Casilla had a 1.89 ERA in 21 appearances before being put on the disabled list earlier this week.

Casilla pitched through the issue last year, missing just a few days. But the discomfort has become too much and the Giants were worried that Casilla would hurt his arm if he continued to pitch without full strength in his knee.

Casilla isn't the only Giant frequenting the trainer's room at the moment. Right-hander Ryan Vogelsong had surgery on his fractured finger earlier this week and center fielder Angel Pagan was out of Sunday's lineup with a mild hamstring strain. Manager Bruce Bochy said Pagan first felt the strain while playing defense Saturday, not on his game-winning inside-the-park homer.

San Jose Mercury News
Giants Extra
Blog by Alex Pavlovic

Some quick notes before I bury myself in frozen bananas ...

— Angel Pagan was out of the starting lineup because of a strained left hamstring. Pagan had previously missed time this season with a right hamstring strain. The speedy Pagan said he hopes this only keeps him out a day, but he wasn't sure if he would be able to play Monday because the strain bothers him while running.

"It takes away myself," he said. "I depend on my legs."

Pagan said the injury happened during Saturday's game when he was diving for a ball in the outfield. He felt it again as he approached third base on the inside-the-park homer. When he told us yesterday that he was "running out of gas" between second and third, he was really talking about the injury, one he had hoped to play through.

"I wasn't thinking of pain in that moment," he said. "I was thinking of getting to home plate and getting the win."

Pagan had not intended to watch the many replays of his game-winner, but his wife insisted that he watch the clip with his daughters, who wanted to see it over and over again.

"My kids were really proud of daddy," Pagan said, smiling.

As his kids watched daddy run, Pagan watched his teammates spill out of the dugout. He especially enjoyed Andres Torres' reaction.

"Andres almost beat me to the plate," Pagan said. "He almost slid ahead of me. Watching them come out of the dugout was very exciting and meant a lot."

— The game story leads with Brandon Belt, who had the big hit in Sunday's win. Belt is now hitting .354 in his last 16 games and has a .352 average this season with two outs.

According to FanGraphs, he is also off to the best defensive start out of National League first basemen, something the eye-test backs up.

There's plenty of Matt Cain in that game story, too. Cain admitted he thought he was looking at three innings today, but he ended up with five and a win.

— Mike Kickham will make the start Tuesday night. Somebody predicted that a few days back ...

Anyway, here's a story on Kickham and Vogelsong, in case you missed it.

— Marco Scutaro had two more hits and leads the league with 21 multi-hit games. Hunter Pence was 2 for 4 and is now third in the league with 24 extra-base hits.

— There's no other way to say this: Diamondbacks right-hander Ian Kennedy Affeldted himself.

— -Remember Wilson Valdez? He was a candidate to make the club this spring. Well, yesterday he signed with the Camden Riversharks, whoever they are. In retrospect, we probably shouldn't have been surprised that Nick Noonan won that competition.

— The matchups for the Bay Bridge Series:

Monday: Bumgarner (4-2, 2.89) vs. Straily (2-2, 5.73)

Tuesday: Kickham (0-0, 0.00) vs. Parker (2-6, 5.76)

Wednesday: Milone (3-5, 5.19) vs. Lincecum (3-4, 4.75)

Thursday: Griffin (5-3, 3.84) vs. Zito (3-3, 4.13)

Dan Brown will be here for the first two; I'll be back Wednesday. Until then, I leave you with two key links.

Brandon McCarthy is not your normal athlete, and more importantly, Munenori Kawasaki had the greatest postgame interview ever. Ever.

MLB.com

Cain battles until bats take advantage in finale win

Willie Bans

SAN FRANCISCO -- Three runs in the fifth, all unearned, and a Giants comeback -- all because of the wind?

The AT&T Park afternoon gusts aside, there was more to the 15th Giants comeback win of 2013. The 7-3 victory against the Rockies on Sunday resulted from a combination of a two-out wind-aided error by Colorado second baseman DJ LeMahieu in the fifth, and Matt Cain's resilience, despite a high walk total and pitch count.

With a 2-2 score, two out and Marco Scutaro on first in the fifth, Hunter Pence popped one up to second base, but LeMahieu lost it because of the wind, letting Pence reach first on an error and advancing Scutaro to third. The next batter, Brandon Belt, took advantage and clubbed a two-run double to deep center field, just over Dexter Fowler's glove for a 4-2 lead. Belt scored on Andres Torres' double to the right-field corner, making it 5-2.

Just like that, the Giants (28-22) took two out of three from the Rockies (27-23) in the finale of their six-game homestand.

"When it went up with the wind -- I saw other people catching fly balls -- I knew it wasn't going to stay straight, and once it got above the stadium, the wind took it," LeMahieu said. "I tried to keep my feet moving, but I misjudged it completely."

The Giants did not score in the series opener Friday and not until the sixth inning of their 10-inning win Saturday. On Sunday, they trailed until the fourth, when Belt (1-for-2, two walks, two runs) led off with a walk, Torres followed with a single to advance Belt to third, and Brandon Crawford plated Belt, reaching on a fielder's choice, tying it at 2 apiece.

Cain's 1-2-3 third and fourth innings -- and the fact that he allowed only two runs and two hits in five innings, despite five walks, all in the rough first and second frames -- seemed impossible the way his afternoon began.

Cain (4-2) loaded the bases on three walks to the first four batters, then the fifth, Michael Cuddyer, lined a two-run double to left field for a 2-0 Rockies lead. Pitching coach Dave Righetti visited the mound, then Cain struck out Todd Helton and got Wilin Rosario to line out to end the 38-pitch first frame.

In the second, Cain walked the first batter, and with one out, walked Fowler -- Cain's fifth walk, more than he had in any outing this season. But Cain struck out Rockies slugger Carlos Gonzalez to end the second -- his 65th pitch and the second of three strikeouts of Gonzalez.

San Francisco's bullpen was warming up, but Cain stayed in. The last time Cain walked five batters was Sept. 14, 2012. Before that, you'd have to go back to May 12, 2010.

Cain battled Sunday. Even when he allowed a leadoff double to Fowler in the fifth, he got three consecutive outs, the last one a close groundout by Troy Tulowitzki with Fowler sprinting home from third base.

"That game was all about Matt Cain and him settling down to give us five innings," manager Bruce Bochy said.

Added Colorado manager Walt Weiss: "I felt like we had Cain in trouble early, the first couple of innings. But to his credit, a lot like he did at our place, he bent, but he didn't break. He's one of the better pitchers in the league, and there's a reason for it. He battles."

Of Rockies starter Jon Garland's five runs allowed, only two were earned, but he wasn't perfect. San Francisco tallied seven hits and four walks, and chased Garland (3-6) after five innings, adding two runs in the seventh on Pence's two-run double off reliever Edgmer Escalona.

Center fielder and leadoff hitter Angel Pagan got the day off because of a left hamstring strain, so left fielder Gregor Blanco filled his spots, and Torres got the start in left. Batting seventh, Torres went 2-for-4 with one RBI. He has eight hits in his last 18 at-bats with four doubles and three RBIs.

"I just try to be myself," Torres said. "Whenever they need me, I want to help."

The Rockies have two of the game's top hitters in Gonzalez and Tulowitzki, but they combined to go 0-for-9 with six strikeouts and one walk in the series finale. Gonzalez has struggled against Cain, entering with a .114 average in 35 at-bats.

"Give Cain credit for making really good pitches," said catcher Buster Posey, who hit a solo homer in the second inning.

Cain -- and the wind. Credit belongs where credit is due.

MLB.com

Giants tab prospect Kickham for Vogelsong's start Willie Bans

SAN FRANCISCO -- And the filling-in-for-Ryan-Vogelsong winner is ... Michael Kickham.

The 24-year-old lefty will be called up from Triple-A Fresno to make Tuesday's start against Oakland, manager Bruce Bochy announced after Sunday's 7-3 win.

"He's been throwing the ball as well as anybody down there -- better, really," Bochy said of the club's **12th-ranked prospect**, according to MLB.com.

Kickham takes Vogelsong's spot in the rotation after Vogelsong went on the 15-day disabled list May 21 because of a fractured right hand. The Giants do not plan to make the roster move until they have to Tuesday.

Bochy said he's impressed with how Kickham has pitched lately. In his past five starts, he's allowed six earned runs in 31 1/3 innings with 29 strikeouts and nine walks. In 10 starts with the Grizzlies, Kickham is 3-4 with a 4.33 ERA.

The Giants will be able to keep the bullpen as is, with rotation candidate Chad Gaudin staying in the 'pen.

"He's a young kid that just settled in at Triple-A," Bochy said of Kickham. "We need some help here."

Casilla set for surgery at Stanford; no timeline set

SAN FRANCISCO -- Right-hander Santiago Casilla will undergo surgery to remove a cyst in his right tibia.

The Giants are hoping it takes place as soon as possible, and it is scheduled to take place at Stanford with an orthopedic oncologist, according to head trainer Dave Groeschner. The team's medical staff will wait for the outcome of the surgery before projecting Casilla's time for recovery, Groeschner said.

Groeschner added that Casilla missed a small amount of time last season because of the problem, but he still pitched afterward, including the postseason.

The cyst is "getting bigger" and "causes him discomfort," Groeschner said, adding that Casilla is fine walking around, but cannot push off the mound like he needs to.

The 32-year-old Casilla, who signed a three-year, \$15 million contract extension during the offseason, was 3-2 with a 1.89 ERA, one save and a .167 batting average against in 21 games before the Giants placed him on the 15-day disabled list Tuesday.

Pagan's left hamstring holds him out of lineup for finale

SAN FRANCISCO -- Not only did Angel Pagan hit the Giants' first walk-off inside-the-park home run in 83 years Saturday, but, it turns out, he did it with a left hamstring problem.

The issue, which popped up earlier in the 6-5 win while fielding a ball in center field, was significant enough that Pagan sat during Sunday's series finale against the Rockies.

Whereas Pagan's right hamstring injury earlier this season affected his hitting, this issue affects his running, and it did even during his incredible feat Saturday.

"If you noticed, between second and third, I stumbled," Pagan said. "But when you play with heart, you don't think about the pain. If you blow out your leg, you blow out your leg."

Pagan said he feels some discomfort, and although he could have played Sunday, he does not want to push it.

Meanwhile, he has enjoyed doing something he rarely does: watching replays. He only watched Saturday's game-winning play because of his family.

"My wife was so proud," he said, adding that his children "were amazed with what daddy did."

Worth noting

- Buster Posey went 2-for-4 with a solo homer run and two runs Sunday, stretching his hitting streak to 10 games.
- Saturday's 6-5 comeback win in the 10th was the first of the Giants' 4,408 games in San Francisco in which they won by overcoming both a deficit of at least four runs and a deficit in extra innings.

MLB.com

Bumgarner, Straily ready to start Bay Bridge Series

Joey Nowak

An exciting Interleague series between two Bay Area rivals and playoff contenders this week has an added bit of allure with one team in position to flip the script on the all-time series.

The A's head into their cross-bay series with the Giants on Monday with a narrow two-game lead in the all-time series (47-45). But with a four-game set that lasts until Thursday, the Giants have the chance to turn the tables.

San Francisco has won four of six and the A's have won eight of their last nine. The first pitch for the Memorial Day matinee on Monday is scheduled for 1:05 p.m. PT at O.co Coliseum in Oakland.

"I've often said that people in the Bay Area, it's an exciting time in the baseball season for them, because everyone's watching," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You can say all you want that it's just another team, another four games, and it is another team and another four games, but in the Bay Area it takes on more importance than that. Everyone's watching. Stands are packed, whether it's our place or their place. It's a raucous crowd, our side and their side. It's kind of cool."

Giants lefty Madison Bumgarner squares off Monday against A's right-hander Dan Straily. The first two games of the series will take place in Oakland, before shifting across the Bay to AT&T Park for the final two games on Wednesday and Thursday.

For the first time this year, the Interleague series that feature prime rivals such as the Giants and A's, will be played in the two-game series back-to-back format rather than two separate three-game sets.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy says he doesn't have a preference, but Melvin enjoys the series so much that he'd prefer the six-game format.

"But with Interleague the way it is, it's just the way it is now," he said. "Heck, we play the Reds four games."

Monday kicks off a stretch of 18 games for the defending World Series champion Giants that includes 14 on the road. Granted, o.Co Coliseum isn't far, but it still provides a challenge. Bochy said for the Giants to have success during that stretch, consistency with pitching and on defense is key.

"We gotta catch the ball," Bochy said. "We gotta tighten up this defense. We're still not where we need to be. We're still making a few too many mistakes. It just puts more pressure on the pitcher, you're adding pitches, you're putting more guys on base. You give a team more outs, you're giving them some kind of advantage."

Athletics: Straily coming off career-best start

Straily turned in the best performance of his season, and perhaps his career, on Tuesday, when he held the Rangers scoreless on two hits and no walks with five strikeouts in seven innings.

In his four previous starts since taking over for the injured Brett Anderson -- who will be sidelined for at least another month with a stress fracture in his right foot -- Straily walked 12 batters and surrendered 19 runs in just 19 1/3 innings. On Tuesday, he didn't issue any free passes, only reaching a three-ball count twice. He didn't allow a runner past first base and faced just one over the minimum, fanning five along the way.

"He was getting ahead early, throwing a lot of strikes," said catcher John Jaso after the game. "I think this is kind of a good learning time, because he can have confidence in pounding the strike zone and getting really good hitters out by throwing quality strikes and trusting your stuff."

Said Straily: "I won't say I've ever lacked confidence, but this was the most confident I ever felt out there."

Giants: Bumgarner has history versus Oakland

- Bumgarner, 4-2 this year with a 2.89 ERA, has made six Interleague starts in his career, spanning 35 2/3 innings. He's 2-2 with a 4.79 ERA, but one of those wins came against the A's.
- The Giants have 11 one-run victories this year and seven losses in games decided by a single run. They entered Sunday tied for the Major League lead (with the D-backs, Reds and Indians) for the most one-run victories.

Worth noting

The A's and Giants both won 94 games last year, and Melvin admitted he's thought about the what-if factor, had his club beaten Justin Verlander in Game 5 of the ALDS and gone on to face the Giants in the World Series.

"I do," he said. "It would've been really exciting. It's tough to do that, because the way it plays out is the way it plays out, but it would've been cool. The way it played out last year, the way both teams played down the stretch, the excitement of baseball in the Bay Area, it would've been really neat."

CSNBayArea.com

Giants win, but Bochy wants improvement in three areas

Joe Stiglich

SAN FRANCISCO – Giants manager Bruce Bochy identified some key factors for his team Sunday morning as it prepares to tackle one of the most challenging portions of its schedule.

He wants the Giants to start commanding leads early so they're not always battling from behind. He wants his starting pitchers to go deep into games on a consistent basis. And he'd like his normally air-tight defense to stop kicking the ball around like a hacky sack.

Seems like stuff from Baseball 101, no?

But it's proven a challenge for the defending World Series champs, who nonetheless pocketed a 7-3 victory over the Colorado Rockies on Sunday and took two of three from a team they began the day tied with for first place.

Give credit to the Giants. They found a way to win despite Matt Cain needing 107 pitches to get through five innings. They fell behind early – as they did in every game of this three-game series – yet pulled through for their 15th come-from-behind win out of 28 victories.

Bochy is quick to pat his team on the back for showing such grit. He'd just like his players to make things easier on themselves.

"It's going to start with our pitching as it normally does," Bochy said. "I'd like to see us (play) more like the team that we are -- get some quality starts and score early."

Now would be a good time to start doing that on a regular basis.

The Giants play 14 of their next 18 games on the road, and they'll match up with some of the majors' best teams. It starts Monday with the four-game Bay Bridge Series against the A's (28-23). Then they play three at St. Louis (32-17) before coming home for two against Toronto (21-29), which has disappointed but entered the season expected to be an A.L. East contender.

Following that is a nine-game road trip against Arizona (28-22), Pittsburgh (31-19) and Atlanta (30-18).

That's a tall order for any team, but especially one sporting a 9-13 road mark as the Giants are.

"It'll be a good challenge for us," catcher Buster Posey said. "That's something everyone embraces. To get where we want to go, we gotta beat the good teams."

Cain put together one of the oddest pitching lines you will see, going five innings and allowing two runs on just two hits with a season-high five walks. Bochy had reliever Sandy Rosario warming up as early as the second inning, and even Cain was thinking "I might run out of pitches sometime in the third."

He was at 65 pitches through two innings, but he righted himself and retired 11 of his final 12 hitters, twice stranding a runner at third base.

"He was close to coming out in the first and second innings, (considering) the number of pitches," Bochy said. "It shows you how tough the makeup is of Matt Cain. And how strong he is, to log that many pitches in the first couple innings and make it through five."

Cain said he takes comfort knowing that his hitters show a knack for digging out of holes, but he added:

“They’d probably really enjoy it if we would not get behind as much as we’ve been doing.”

He was referring to a starting rotation that carries a 4.66 ERA, 13th out of 15 N.L. teams.

But any pitching success will go hand-in-hand with consistent glove work, and the Giants need to support their pitching with better all-around defense.

“We’ve got to really tighten up this defense,” Bochy said. “We’re still not where we need to be.”

There’s no time like the next 18 games to start putting it all together.

Center fielder Angel Pagan, who sat Sunday with a sore left hamstring, said he was questionable to return Monday against the A’s. Pagan hurt his hamstring chasing a ball in Saturday’s game and aggravated it making his historic dash around the bases on a walkoff inside-the-park homer in the 10th inning. Pagan said he stumbled between second and third base and hurt the hamstring more.

On Saturday, Pagan said he wasn’t going to rush to a TV so he could see highlights of his inside-the-parker. But he wound up watching it with his family.

“My kids were really proud of Daddy,” he said. “That’s the only reason why I watched it many times.”

CSNBayArea.com

Giants to replace Vogelsong with Triple-A arm

Joe Stiglich

SAN FRANCISCO – The Giants will call up left-hander Mike Kickham from Triple-A Fresno to start Tuesday against the A’s in place of injured Ryan Vogelsong.

Kickham, 24, will join the team Monday before making his major league debut in Game 2 of the Bay Bridge Series at O.co Coliseum. The 6-foot-4 left-hander has come on strong lately in Fresno’s rotation. Though he is just 3-4 with a 4.33 ERA overall in 10 starts this season, Kickham is 3-1 with a 1.72 ERA in May.

He held Oklahoma City to one run in 6 1/3 innings in his last start Thursday, and he’ll be on his regular rest pitching Tuesday.

The Missouri native was ranked the Giants’ No. 5 prospect in Baseball America’s preseason ratings, and that publication voted him as having the best slider in the farm system.

“He’s been the best pitcher down there, and he’s a left-hander we think a lot of,” Giants manager Bruce Bochy said. “I look forward to watching him. If he goes out there and pitches the way he’s been pitching, he’ll be fine.”

With Vogelsong expected to miss several weeks recovering from a fractured right hand, the opportunity is there for Kickham to stick in the rotation for a while.

He appeared in two spring training games with the big club, allowing one run in three innings.

Giants catcher Buster Posey caught Kickham in bullpen sessions during the spring but not in any games.

“He’s got good stuff, that’s about all I remember,” Posey said.

The Giants won’t add him to the 25-man roster – and make a corresponding move – until Tuesday.

CSNBayArea.com

Instant Replay: Giants take rubber match with Colorado

Joe Stiglich

SAN FRANCISCO – First impressions can be deceiving.

Matt Cain looked to be in a world of hurt early in the Giants 7-3 victory over the Colorado Rockies on Sunday. He gave up two runs before many fans had found their seats and he walked five in the first two innings. But Cain hung in and gave the Giants a chance to battle their way back.

The result was San Francisco’s 15th come-from-behind win in 28 victories overall this season.

After dropping Friday’s opener to the Rockies, the Giants rebounded to take two of three from a division rival that has been an early surprise this season.

Unlike Saturday’s walk-off thriller, the Giants took control with a three-run fifth inning Sunday that gave them a 5-2 lead. All in all, it was an encouraging way for the Giants (28-22) to enter a four-game series with the cross-bay rival A’s beginning Monday.

Starting pitching report

Cain’s final line: 5 innings, 2 runs, 2 hits, 5 walks, 6 strikeouts.

No use trying to make sense of it. Just realize he threw 38 pitches in a two-run first inning, and he was up to 65 pitches after the second.

Then, with the bullpen on early alert, the Giants ace steadied the ship and gutted his way through five innings without allowing any more damage. The five walks were a season high. But Cain (4-2) seemed rejuvenated after escaping a second-inning jam with runners on the corners and one out.

He retired 11 of his last 12 batters, and he stranded another runner at third with one out in the fifth, striking out Carlos Gonzalez and getting cleanup man Troy Tulowitzki on a soft comebacker.

Think Gonzalez was happy to see Cain leave the game? The Rockies outfielder came in 5 for 9 with two homers in this series, but he went down swinging in all three at-bats against Cain. For his career, Gonzalez is 4 for 38 with 14 strikeouts against the right-hander.

Bullpen report

George Kontos worked his way out of trouble in the sixth.

Chad Gaudin also flirted with damage when he put two runners on to start the seventh. But he recorded two outs and then handed the ball to Javier Lopez, who struck out Charlie Blackmon looking to end the threat.

Sandy Rosario gave up a run in the eighth.

With the announcement that Santiago Casilla will have surgery on his right leg, it appears Gaudin takes on a more significant relief role in the late innings. Machi also is being used in key situations.

At the plate

A couple of innocent looking pop-ups off the bat of Hunter Pence wound up doing big damage. His fifth-inning pop got lost in the sun by Rockies second baseman D.J. LeMahieu and fell in with two outs to extend the inning (it was ruled an error).

The Giants capitalized by scoring three runs. Brandon Belt drove a two-run double deep to center to give the Giants a 4-2 lead, and Andres Torres followed with a run-scoring double of his own.

Pence did it again in the sixth, when his bloop fell just in front of a sliding Charlie Blackmon in right field and went for a two-run double and a 7-2 Giants lead.

Buster Posey is clicking right now. He homered to left off Jon Garland (3-6) in the second to get the Giants on the board. He lined a single up the middle in the sixth and hit the ball on the screws on a third-inning lineout.

Marco Scutaro had two hits and is batting .324.

In the field

Manager Bruce Bochy talked before the game of the need for the Giants to play tighter defense. They turned in an errorless game Sunday, highlighted by first baseman Brandon Belt's diving stop of a Todd Helton grounder and flip to Cain to end the third.

Attendance

A sellout crowd of 42,597 showed up on Barry Zito Bobblehead day. Zito also took part in a pregame Memorial weekend salute to troops.

Up next

Monday's 1:05 p.m. opener pits lefty Madison Bumgarner against Dan Straily, the only game where the pitching matchup obviously tilts in the Giants' favor.

San Francisco has yet to announce a Tuesday starter to oppose the A's Jarrod Parker.

Tim Lincecum takes the ball Wednesday against Tommy Milone, and Barry Zito opposes A.J. Griffin on Thursday.

CSNBayArea.com

Casilla to undergo surgery on leg

Joe Stiglich

SAN FRANCISCO – Giants reliever Santiago Casilla will undergo surgery in the next week to remove a cyst in his right leg, manager Bruce Bochy confirmed Sunday.

It's been assumed for some time that Casilla would have surgery to deal with an injury that has bothered him going back to last season. Casilla was placed on the 15-day disabled list Tuesday but pitched sparingly in the games leading up to that as his leg was hurting him.

It was originally announced that Casilla's cyst was in his right knee, but Giants head trainer Dave Groeschner clarified Sunday that the cyst is actually in the tibia bone below the knee itself.

Casilla's procedure will take place at Stanford Medical Center. Groeschner said he wouldn't have a timetable for Casilla to pitch until after the surgery is done, but he added that Casilla's leg would "be immobilized at least a few weeks afterward."

Casilla is 3-2 with a 1.89 ERA in 21 appearances this season, and filling his role as a right-handed setup man figures to be some combination of Jean Machi, Chad Gaudin and George Kontos.

CSNBayArea.com

Pagan day-to-day with sore hamstring

Joe Stiglich

SAN FRANCISCO – Angel Pagan is out of Sunday’s lineup due to a sore left hamstring, an injury that was bothering him even as he completed his inside-the-park home run that won Saturday’s game for the Giants.

Giants manager Bruce Bochy described the injury as mild and listed Pagan as day-to-day. He said the center fielder tweaked his hamstring during Saturday’s game while going for a ball in the gap. That didn’t stop the speedy switch-hitter from sprinting around the bases in the bottom of the 10th for a two-run homer that was the major leagues’ first walk-off inside-the-park homer since 2004.

“I guess it’s pretty amazing he scored on an inside-the-parker when had that hamstring there,” Bochy said before Sunday’s series finale against the Colorado Rockies.

[REPLAY: Inside-the-park home run wins it for Giants]

[RELATED: Perfect storm lifts Giants to victory]

Pagan was getting treatment and not available for comment before the game. Gregor Blanco drew Sunday’s start in center field and hit leadoff in Pagan’s place.

Pagan was hampered by a groin strain on his right side in early May.

--Bochy still has not announced who will start Tuesday’s game against the A’s in place of right-hander Ryan Vogelsong. Assistant general manager Bobby Evans told Sirius/XM radio that the candidates were Triple-A Fresno starters Chris Heston, Mike Kickham and Shane Loux.

Bochy said an announcement might come after Sunday’s game.

Santa Rosa Press Democrat

These Giants are winning with offense

Lowell Cohn

SAN FRANCISCO -- Today, the Giants embark on an epic road trip.

It may not seem epic at first considering they're driving across the Bay Bridge to Oakland for two games. After that, they return home for two more games with the A's. Nothing intimidating about that.

It's just that, including the A's games, the Giants play — get this — 14 of their next 18 games on the road. That involves multiple changes of underwear or many trips to the hotel laundromat, or both. And it involves pretty scary teams.

The Giants will play some of the best outfits in the majors on the upcoming trip which is more like a quest or maybe a sojourn. Some of the bloodcurdling opponents are: Oakland, St. Louis, Arizona, Pittsburgh and Atlanta. It's a murderers' row and, although we haven't yet reached June, this trip could be season-defining, in the season-affirming or season-deflating sense. The definition of the trip is strictly up to the Giants.

Are the Giants capable of success on this trip?

It's the essential question and it's relevant right now. And it's important to mention fans are worried about the Giants who have not been able to run away from the National League West, even though they are the world champions. There's a general woe-is-us tone on sports radio and blogs.

Well, wait a minute. The Giants are tied with the Diamondbacks for first place in their division. That's not shabby. It's a lot better than where the ritzy and highly-overpriced Dodgers currently reside, in the cellar near the coal pile with the lights out and the elevator on the fritz.

The Giants' philosophy — and it qualifies as a philosophy — is and has been simple: Hang around the top of the division during the regular season. Win a lot at home and hold your own on the road. Get into the playoffs as a division champ or a wildcard team. Just get in.

And then everything starts again, everything recalibrates. The Giants, who may not seem lethal in the regular season, become lethal in the playoffs. In the postseason, pitching always dominates, and the Giants' pitching, in theory and usually in practice, is as dominant as it gets.

So, please don't moan or despair. Well, you can if you want, but just don't do it about the Giants. And now, to make you think out of the box, here are some wrinkles concerning the Giants.

You and I and everyone else consider them a pitching team. In fact, that's what I just told you when discussing the playoffs. But before Sunday's 7-3 win over the Rockies, Giants' starters had the third-worst earned run average in the National League — 4.68. This is highly un-Giants and could be a reason to worry if you feel a need to worry.

Except for one thing. The Giants are hitting like mad. Coming into Sunday's game, they led the NL in batting — .271. And they were fifth in runs scored. After Sunday's come-from-behind win, 15 of their 28 wins were come-from-behind jobs. In the past, the Giants were not like that. They fell behind and stayed behind.

That means, at least for now, you need to think about the Giants in a totally new way. As weird as this sounds — and it sounds very weird — the Giants are currently not a pitching-first team.

They don't really have a fifth starter, although lefty Michael Kickham will make the trip from Fresno to Oakland and start against the A's on Tuesday. Ryan Vogelsong has a busted finger. And Barry Zito and

Tim Lincecum have been mediocre — Lincecum more so than Zito, and that makes you wonder if he ever again will be Tim Lincecum.

But Madison Bumgarner is superb, a pleasure to watch, and Matt Cain started the season poorly but got the win Sunday and has won his last four starts.

If the Giants are not a pitching-first team, what are they?

The Giants currently are a hitting-first team. Look up the batting numbers for Marco Scutaro, Pablo Sandoval, Buster Posey, Hunter Pence, Brandon Belt and Brandon Crawford and you'll be impressed, maybe blown away.

So, the Giants are playing out of character, but they still are winning. Is that good?

Here's what manager Bruce Bochy said after Sunday's game: "If I had my choice, sure, I'd have it the other way, get an early lead and pitch well."

In other words, he wants the Giants to be the Giants as we understand them.

He also spoke about the Giants' comeback wins and their hitting, did this before the game:

"They're relentless. They go hard for nine innings or like (Saturday) extra innings. They keep going hard. They keep fighting. That's the way you have to play the game. When you do it enough times, you get the confidence that you can do it and that you're not out of a game and, when you don't do it, it goes the other way. 'Oh no we're in trouble.' That's what you want to stay away from. We've done it so many times this year the confidence grows that you can do it. That life in the dugout stays there."

So, we come back to the original question: Are the Giants capable of success on their highest-degree-of-difficulty road trip?

Heck yeah. The way they are hitting and eliminating deficits they can beat anyone. But this is clear, and you can engrave it in stone. If the Giants want to go all the way again — into the playoffs, through the early rounds, into the World Series, and win the World Series — they must revert to form, to who they really are. That means great pitchers surrounded by a supporting cast of good-to-very-good (Sandoval)-to-great (Posey) hitters.

It's how the team is meant to be.

Santa Rosa Press Democrat
Belt's double key as Giants rescue Cain in win over Rockies
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Brandon Belt hit a tiebreaking, two-run double in the fifth inning to back a shaky outing by Matt Cain, and the San Francisco Giants rallied past the Colorado Rockies 7-3 Sunday.

Buster Posey homered and Andres Torres added two hits and an RBI to help the Giants close a six-game homestand with consecutive wins. The defending World Series champions play 14 of their next

18 games on the road.

Cain (4-2) matched his season high of five walks but allowed only two runs and two hits in five innings. He is 4-0 with a 3.49 ERA in his last five outings after beginning the season 0-2 with a 6.49 ERA

in his first six starts.

Cain walked five of his first 10 batters but retired 11 of his 12 and improved to 17-7 against the Rockies. Six pitchers combined for one-run relief, keeping San Francisco tied with Arizona for the NL

West lead.

In his first appearance at AT&T Park, Jon Garland (3-6) allowed five runs — two earned — seven hits and four walks in five innings. While the Rockies swept a three-game series from the Giants in

Denver two weeks ago, Colorado is 1-5 this year in San Francisco, where the Rockies have lost 12 of their last 15.

Slugger Carlos Gonzalez struck out three times with runners in scoring position after homering in his previous three games. Cleanup hitter Troy Tulowitzki went hitless after drawing a walk in his first

plate appearance while Dexter Fowler reached base four times but scored just once.

Michael Cuddyer hit a two-run double in the first for Colorado. Posey's seventh homer trimmed the deficit to 2-1 in the second, and Brandon Crawford tied it when he hit into a run-scoring forceout in the fourth.

Belt walked in his first two plate appearances before doubling off Garland to break a 2-all tie. The drive followed a two-out fielding error by second baseman D.J. LeMahieu on Hunter Pence's high popup to short right field.

Torres' RBI double drove in Belt for a 5-2 lead. Pence added a two-run double in the eighth against Edgmer Escalona.

Reliever Casilla will have surgery

San Francisco reliever Santiago Casilla will undergo surgery this week to remove a cyst from inside a bone in his right leg. Casilla has been pitching with the cyst since last season. "That will hopefully correct what's going on over there," manager Bruce Bochy said. The timetable for recovery won't be known until after the operation.

Pagan rests ailing hamstring

Centerfielder Angel Pagan was held out of the Giants lineup because of a sore left hamstring, one day after hitting a

game-ending inside-the-park home run. Bochy said Pagan aggravated his hamstring earlier in the game before his walkoff hit.

ESPN.com

Solving the Braves' bullpen issue

Buster Olney

There are a lot of ways to evaluate talent, and maybe the worst is be the good ol' fashion Pulse of the Room check. But you walk into the clubhouse and the Atlanta Braves are *loaded*.

The 23-year-old Freddie Freeman sits at his locker and chats with the 25-year-old Justin Upton and the 23-year-old Jason Heyward, and you realize these three players already have 6,500 plate appearances in their career. They are just getting started.

Craig Kimbrel walks by, the creator of one of the greatest seasons of relief pitching in history in 2012, when he became the first pitcher ever to strike out more than half the batters he faced; Kimbrel is 24 years old. Mike Minor has been one of baseball's best pitchers over the last 10 months; he's 25 years old. Kris Medlen is 27 years old, Julio Teheran is 22.

A veteran player in the room acknowledges the potential of the group with a nod and a laugh. "Dude, we are *gooooood*, he said quietly, emphasizing the potential with that long, understated syllable.

The first time shortstop Andrelton Simmons realized that he had an unusually strong arm, in his life experience, was when he was an 8-year-old pitcher and he felt the gawks of opposing hitters and coaches as he racked up strikeouts. The No. 2 pitcher on his childhood team: Didi Gregorius, the shortstop for the Diamondbacks. Simmons is now 23 years old and in the eyes of some Braves, he already is the sport's best defender. Former Braves third baseman Chipper Jones wrote in a direct message Sunday that Simmons reminds him of Andruw Jones in how smooth he is, how effortless everything seems to look, including throwing. Rafael Furcal had a powerful arm and seemed to use his whole body to launch the ball, but with Simmons, the act of throwing looks as natural as the roll of waves on a beach.

At age 26, Evan Gattis has less than two months in the big leagues, but already might be the most dangerous pinch-hitter in the game, in 2013; in 2014, he is likely to be Atlanta's frontline catcher. This has all been a whirlwind for him, all of the attention about his past and his unusual bare-knuckles style of hitting. I mentioned to him that on a particularly cold day recently, the game announcers had said it had to be really cold because Gattis was wearing long sleeves. Gattis chuckled at the whole legend thing; he's having a great time, but he is looking forward to the day, he said, when "it gets back to being about baseball."

The Braves' older guys are talented, too, from the 29-year-old Brian McCann to the 28-year-old Chris Johnson, to the 37-year-old Tim Hudson. Atlanta has a deep bench, deep rotation, power up and down the lineup. "They may be the best team in baseball," said a rival GM last week. "They've got a growing to do, and they're already really good."

But on Sunday Night Baseball, the Braves' one glaring issue was exposed: They need more bullpen help; Manager Fredi Gonzalez will need more options. Gonzalez doesn't necessarily need them today, or even in June or July or August, but they will be needed eventually, inevitably.

Teheran didn't have his best stuff against the Mets on Sunday, going through a couple of blasts of wildness though sorting it all out, and after Dan Uggla crushed a monster home run into the second deck in left field in the seventh inning, the Braves had a 2-1 lead. With two outs and runners on base, Gonzalez called on the only lefty in his bullpen, Luis Avilan.

Jonny Venters was one of the best lefty relievers in 2011 and 2012, making the All-Star team, but he never threw a pitch this season before having Tommy John surgery; some of his teammates sensed last year that he was breaking down. Eric O'Flaherty was also one of the best lefties, but he broke down, after years of heavy workload.

So Avilan now has to move up to the 7th and 8th inning duty, and he jammed Daniel Murphy so bad that all Murphy could do was lift a little looper to the mound, an inning-ended popout. When the 8th inning started, the right-handed hitting Justin Turner was inserted as a pinch-hitter, with the right-handed hitting David Wright scheduled to bat behind him, so Gonzalez called on right-hander Cory Gearrin, who is now the primary set-up man.

Turner singled, and Gearrin struck out Wright. Now the left-handed hitting Lucas Duda was coming to bat, having had some good swings on the night, including a line drive home run. In the past, Gonzalez had the luxury of reflexively going to the mound to call on another lefty.

But there is no other lefty. There is no Venters, no O'Flaherty. There is only Avilan. Gearrin remained in the game.

Duda lifted a double inside the left field line, and after John Buck singled home the tying run, Mets manager Terry Collins inserted left-handed pinch-hitter Mike Baxter for Marlon Byrd -- without fear, of course, because Gonzalez didn't have a counter move available.

Gearrin hit Baxter with a pitch, bringing the left-handed hitting Ike Davis to the plate, with just three hits in his previous 47 at-bats, and no RBI since May 9. Davis has been terrible against all pitchers, but especially against lefties.

However Gonzalez had no lefties. He doesn't have Venters, he doesn't have O'Flaherty, and he had used Avilan. He stuck with Gearrin.

And Davis hit a hard single through the right side, scoring two runs, setting off something of a happy explosion in the Mets' dugout -- which is where, before the game, Davis had met with owner Jeff Wilpon, general manager Sandy Alderson and manager Terry Collins to talk about Davis's slump. It was a discussion, Davis said later, about getting back to having fun again. A game-winning two-run single in the eighth that was fun, although somewhat weird for Davis. He accepted the hugs of teammates but added through a smile, "That was awkward. I *have* gotten a hit before."

The Braves have a nice early lead this morning in the National League East, and all that talent is going to grow through the long summer. But they also have that nagging issue of bullpen depth that will manifest itself in the seventh and eighth innings until it is patched. Maybe Medlen will be the fix, shifting into that role after Brandon Beachy comes back. Maybe the Braves will make a trade, for someone like the Marlins' Mike Dunn. Maybe the fix will be Alex Wood, a 6-foot-4 left-hander who was the Braves' No. 2 pick in the 2012 draft out of the University of Georgia; he has a little unusual motion in his delivery, a little funkiness, and so far in Class AA this season, he has a 1.26 ERA and just 15 walks and 1 homer allowed in 57 innings. Maybe he can be a missing piece for the Braves -- and maybe sooner rather than later.

They are *gooooood*, and could be great. But the manager will need more options, in order to dent October.

Around the league

- *From ESPN Stats and Info, on Stephen Strasburg, who was dominant Sunday:*

Stephen Strasburg recorded his 7th career game with 9 strikeouts and zero walks, tied for 2nd in MLB history by a player before turning 25 years old.

From ESPN Stats and Info, how Strasburg won:

A) He dominated righties: they went 1-for-10 with 5 K. His K% of 45.5 against them was his 2nd-highest this season.

B) He got hitters to swing at bad pitches: zone% (43.8) was his 2nd-lowest of the season while his swing% on pitches out of the zone (36.5) was his most this season.

C) A good curveball: 27 curveballs tied his most this season. He recorded 4 of 9 K with the pitch (also tying his season high). Entering the day, Phillies were hitting .168 against curveballs, 27th in MLB.

- On Sunday, Patrick Corbin recorded his 8th consecutive win to begin the season, tied for 2nd-longest streak by a Diamondbacks starter in franchise history. The Diamondbacks are 10-0 in Corbin's starts this season.

From ESPN Stats and Info: Corbin's slider has been incredibly effective for him this season – he's racked up 41 of his 56 strikeouts with the pitch, and he's used it to get both righties and lefties. The interesting thing is that Corbin has been getting a ton of strikes and strikeouts with the pitch despite rarely throwing it in the strike zone. No pitcher has thrown breaking pitches outside the zone at a higher rate, and no pitcher has gotten more whiffs per swing on breaking balls than Corbin.

OTHER NOTABLE PITCHING PERFORMANCES

- Max Scherzer, Detroit Tigers: 2nd Tigers pitcher to start 7-0 or better in last 25 years (Jeremy Bonderman - 2007).
- Shaun Marcum, New York Mets: career-high 12 K; 4th different pitcher in Mets history to get a no-decision or loss in a 12-K, 0 BB game (Dwight Gooden, Sid Fernandez, Matt Harvey).
- Shelby Miller, St. Louis Cardinals: allowed 3 ER or fewer in all 11 career starts.
- Bartolo Colon, Oakland Athletics: 7 IP, season-high 9 K (most K since July 19, 2011 at Rays).

From ELIAS: This marks the first time since 2005 that four starting pitchers have started a season 7-and-0 or better (Max Scherzer, Matt Moore, Clay Buchholz and Patrick Corbin).

- *From ESPN Stats and Info about CC Sabathia:* He allowed 7+ ER for the first time since August 6, 2011 vs the Red Sox. The Yankees fall to 1-9 in Sabathia's last 10 ROAD starts at Tampa Bay.

"I'm hurting the team," Sabathia said. "It's just everything. Not being able to make pitches with two strikes, fastball command, location. I just need to work and make certain I can get better and try to help the team"

Sabathia actually had his best fastball velocity of the season-- 90.6 mph. But the stat that did him in ... He allowed as many HR with his fastball (2) as he got swings-and-misses with it.

Memorial Day Note

Sandy Alderson served in the Marine Corps, and when he was with the Oakland Athletics, there was a recruiting poster among the items in his officer -- one of those Uncle Sam Wants You posters -- and as Billy Beane recalled the other day, the person used for the picture in the poster was none other than Sandy Alderson, who had excelled in all parts of his training. "I think Sandy's service means more to him

than any other [affiliation] he's had in his life," Beane said the other day. "Dartmouth, Harvard Law, baseball... None of that has meant as much to him."

I talked to Sandy on Sunday about his service, and about Memorial Day and what it means to him.

And today will be better than yesterday.

USA Today
Interleague play's new look: Home-and-home vs. 'rival'
Paul White

Back before interleague play was an everyday occurrence, this was the week baseball focused on something that no longer is a novelty.

What can be unofficially called "Natural Rivals Week" begins Monday in the first season of baseball's realigned two 15-team leagues. It's four days of games under the new schedule format to salvage the tradition — does anything that began in 1997 qualify as tradition? — of annual home-and-home series such as New York Yankees-Mets, Chicago Cubs-White Sox and San Francisco Giants-Oakland Athletics.

This year, though, teams play their natural rivals four times instead of the previous six. And the four games will be played consecutively, two games in one ballpark Monday and Tuesday and two more in the other stadium Wednesday and Thursday.

This year's schedule, which has at least one interleague matchup at all times, also has resulted in more two-game series, but this week doesn't bother most players, even the ones who don't get to make a "road trip" by bus across town.

"Two-game sets can make it difficult for travel," Pittsburgh Pirates relief pitcher Jason Grilli says. "But for us, Detroit's just a 45-minute flight. It's a non-factor. I'd rather do this than make a West Coast trip."

Thanks to geography, especially in the western half of the country, some pairings aren't so natural.

Arizona Diamondbacks-Texas Rangers and Houston Astros-Colorado Rockies are the only matchups that involve changing time zones. And then there are not-so-obvious combos like Atlanta Braves-Toronto Blue Jays and Boston Red Sox-Philadelphia Phillies.

"That's a little tougher," says Grilli, who played for Colorado when the Rockies were matched up with the Seattle Mariners. "For two games? Yeah. But, look, the choice is sleeping on the plane or staying awake on the plane. As long as we're not flying the plane, we should be able to get our rest."

This year's schedule calls for an increase to 20 interleague games for every team. Previously, the 14 AL teams played 18 and the 16 NL teams played either 15 or 18. Also, for the first time, the schedule is more equal with all teams in a division playing the identical interleague opponents with the exception of the natural rivals.

And while interleague play might still offend some traditionalists, it almost brought back something all but lost over the past few decades — the holiday doubleheader.

Texas and Arizona will play two games Monday (Memorial Day) in Phoenix and take Tuesday off. It's not a traditional doubleheader but rather a day-night twinbill with separate admissions.