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GIANTS ROAR OUT OF THE GATE

New York opens 11–3 as Antonelli and Mays lead the charge

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THE GIANTS ROAR OUT OF THE GATE

The defending National League champion New York Giants have wasted little time reminding the rest of the league that last year's pennant was no fluke. After fourteen games, Leo Durocher's club sits at 11-3, just one game behind the surprising Cincinnati Reds, who have sprinted to a 13-3 start. Brooklyn, expected by many to dominate the league once again, trails New York by 2½ games after a somewhat uneven opening month. The Giants have been winning with balance. Their offense has produced timely hitting while the pitching staff has been among the league's best, giving the club confidence every time it takes the field.

ANTONELLI EMERGES AS THE ACE

No Giant has been more impressive than Johnny Antonelli. Already off to the excellent start you mentioned earlier, Antonelli has established himself as the stopper in Durocher's rotation. Every club needs an ace capable of ending a losing streak or extending a winning one, and through April he has looked every bit the pitcher New York acquired to lead its staff. If he maintains anything close to this pace, the Giants will remain in the thick of the pennant race all summer.

APRIL BY THE NUMBERS

The Giants finished April 11–3, batting .296 with 144 hits and 18 home runs in 14 games. New York scored 87 runs while allowing 38, a run differential of +49.

Willie Mays led the attack with a .421 average, five home runs and 19 runs batted in. Don Mueller hit .420; Alvin Dark batted .338; Hank Thompson hit four home runs and drove in 15.

The pitching staff posted a 2.29 ERA. Antonelli opened 3–0 with a 0.69 ERA in 26 innings, while Ruben Gomez was 2–1 with a 1.96 ERA.

MAYS LEADS A DEEP LINEUP

One encouraging sign has been that the Giants haven't depended on one hitter. With Willie Mays back for his first full season after military service, opposing pitchers once again have to navigate one of baseball's most dangerous lineups. Rather than relying solely on home runs, New York has played fundamentally sound baseball—getting on base, advancing runners, and receiving contributions throughout the batting order. That balance is often what separates contenders from pretenders during the long National League season.

THE REDS ARE THE EARLY SURPRISE

The biggest story outside New York has been Cincinnati. Expected by few to contend, the Reds have opened with a remarkable 13-3 record, winning eight of their last ten games and briefly seizing first place. Whether they can sustain that pace over 154 games remains to be seen, but they have certainly forced the Giants and Dodgers to take notice. Meanwhile, Brooklyn remains dangerous despite its slower-than-expected beginning. Few observers expect the Dodgers to stay quiet for long.

AROUND THE LEAGUES

In the American League, Cleveland has stormed to a 10-2 record, holding a two-game lead over Chicago and a 2½-game advantage over the Yankees. Early individual stars include: Cleveland's outstanding pitching staff, led by Mike Garcia (1.08 ERA) and Early Wynn (3-0). White Sox right-hander Virgil Trucks, already with three victories and two shutouts. Baltimore outfielder Sam Mele, whose torrid bat has produced an American League-best 1.275 OPS through the season's opening weeks.

APRIL SCORECARD AND PENNANT OUTLOOK

Replay Notes Record: 11-3 Standing: 2nd Place, 1 game behind Cincinnati. Player of the Month: Johnny Antonelli Biggest Surprise: Cincinnati's blistering 13-3 start. Pennant Outlook: Excellent. Fourteen games is far too early to draw firm conclusions, but New York has played like a championship club. If Antonelli continues to anchor the rotation and the offense remains balanced, the Giants should remain serious pennant contenders well into September.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE LINEUP

Mays was hardly alone in April. The Giants received a .420 average from Don Mueller, a .338 mark from captain Alvin Dark and a .327 performance from Hank Thompson. Whitey Lockman also contributed at a .322 clip. Five regulars above .320 made the order difficult to navigate.

Thompson supplied four home runs and 15 RBI; Lockman added eight RBI; Mueller collected 21 hits in 50 at-bats. Mays had 24 hits in 57 at-bats, establishing a pace that immediately made him a player to watch.

PITCHING SETS THE TONE

Across 126 innings, the Giants staff allowed 96 hits and only 32 earned runs. The 2.29 earned-run average and 1.20 WHIP illustrate how little room opposing hitters found.

Antonelli worked 26 innings and surrendered just two earned runs, striking out 20. Gomez contributed 23 innings with a 1.96 ERA, and Sal Maglie logged 28 innings with a 2.57 ERA. Marv Grissom opened with ten scoreless innings.

LOOKING TOWARD MAY

At 11–3, New York is only one game behind Cincinnati. The April sample is small, but the Giants have demonstrated the combination of timely offense and exceptional starting pitching that could make them formidable all summer.

Next month: can the Reds hold first place, and can Mays and Antonelli keep up their remarkable opening pace?