The scoreboard said 6-1, then 6-4, then 7-4. The Houston Colt .45s were about to hand the Giants their first National League loss of the season.

Then Ed Bailey propelled a Don McMahon mistake 400 feet in an ominous direction, and the scoreboard busily corrected itself while eight feet tapped out a victory march across home plate.

"When you come from that far behind . . ." The voice was Giant manager Alvin Dark's. He didn't finish the sentence, but he didn't need to. The rest of the National League understood.

The Giants have it all.

No team in baseball can match the defending National League champs in power, hitting, or pitching. Where are there power hitters to match Mays, McCovey, Cepeda, Alou, and Bailey? Who has the hitting strength that can match this array, with Haller, Hiller, Davenport, and Kuenn added? What Big Four can equal Sanford, Marichal, Pierce, and O'Dell?

For years the Giants have lacked only confidence in themselves. If it hasn't been a "June Swoon," it's been their "late fate." The confidence that goes with winning a pennant should help the Giants to jell into a truly great team.

When Frank Howard swung, an instantaneous hush fell over the Colt Stadium throng. A white streak shot out toward deepest center, toward the farthest reaches of the ball park. With a force that resounded through the stadium, the ball collided with the fence 425 feet away from home plate.

The ball had yet to reach the top of its arc when the scoreboard restrained its 600-foot flight . . .

It isn't power the Dodgers lack, although this is the most frequent accusation made. Howard and Tommy Davis provide ample punch, along with a phalanx of other good hitters.

The problem, despite the presence of Drysdale, Koufax, and Podres, is pitching. There is no good prospect for a fourth starter except Bobby Miller (1-12 with the Mets last year). The problem is compounded by Dodger manager Walter Alston, who does a miserable job of handling pitchers. He overworks his relievers, pushes the panic button too easily, and does this lacking the needed depth. Only great team speed can keep this ball club in contention.

If the Reds are going to win, they're going to have to get top outputs from Pinson and Purkey. And, if the two big question marks recover, Cincy could make a real run at the flag.

As it stands, however, Pinson and Purkey are both doubtfuls. Not only Vada's appendectomy concerns the Reds, but also his poor 1962 showing. He never recovered from his slump in the 1961 World Series. And Purkey's sore arm may render him useless.

The St. Louis Cardinals have contrived in recent years to lose more ball games in more ways than any other pennant contender. If it isn't a lack of the long ball, it's weakness at shortstop, or a key error, or men left on base.

St. Louis has plenty of hitters—Boyer, Musial, White, Flood—but the Cards leave too many men on base. Perhaps newly-acquired Dick Groat and George Altman may spark the Redbirds.

We wrote last year that the Cardinals were the sentimental choice. It was a harsh lesson, but we've discarded the sentiment. At best, St. Louis is a darkhorse, and then only with its pitching potential.

Elsewhere the league weakens. Milwaukee is too old, Philadelphia is too young, and Pittsburgh too uncertain. These three will juggle, fifth, sixth, and seventh between them.

The Cubs should be eighth, only because the Colt .45s are weaker than last year. Houston won't hit 60 home runs this year as a team, but those days are waning fast and the Kiddie Corps will produce within four or five years.

The Mets will suit out again this year.