

# As Goldschmidt's inconsistent hitting continues, slugger searches for answers

By KEN ROSENTHAL and KATIE WOO

Before Saturday's game, Paul Goldschmidt sounded lost. During the game, he looked lost, striking out in his first four at-bats to extend his slump to 0-for-32.

Perhaps that was the worst of it. Goldschmidt avoided the first five-strikeout game of his career with a 103.5 mph single, then produced three more hard-hit balls Sunday, including a home run and game-tying single.

So, is Goldschmidt, 36, finally turning it around, or was his performance Sunday in the St. Louis Cardinals' 4-3 victory over

the Milwaukee Brewers merely another brief glimpse of what he once was in a season of fits and starts?

Not even he can say for sure. Goldschmidt has shown flashes at other times this season, going 2-for-5 with a two-run double at Citi Field on April 27, producing a four-hit game in Detroit three days later. But his overall numbers — a .197 batting average, three home runs and a .559 OPS that is far below his career 900 mark — tell a grim story.

Before each of the three night games in Milwaukee, Goldschmidt was on the field five hours before first pitch, taking extra batting practice. Cardinals manager Oli Marmol gave the seven-time All-Star his first day off of the season in the opener of the four-game series. Rather than take a mental break, Goldschmidt continued searching for answers.

Marmol said Goldschmidt was not happy with his lead, the gathering of momentum on his backside as he prepared to unleash his swing. Goldschmidt, according to Marmol, said he had never experienced the rhythm of his hands and hips being so out of sync, explaining to his manager, "It's hard to find a solution for something that has never been a problem."

Informed of Marmol's interpretation, Goldschmidt said, "I mean, I think there are a lot of different ways to describe it. That would probably be the easiest way."

And this was a new issue? Ah, I mean, I've always had times when I've struggled," the 34-year veteran continued. "This, whether it's longer or worse or it happens to be the first 40 games instead of the middle 40 ... I can't predict, but hopefully if I start playing better I'll be able to give you a better answer. Even if it's the best five hitting coaches in baseball."

The most obvious problem, Goldschmidt said, is that he is getting too rotational with his swing, "getting around the ball." The excess movement causes his swing to be a little longer and his bat to be in the zone not long enough. "You miss under the ball," Goldschmidt said. "Then when you're a little early, you miss on top of it."

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St. Louis Cardinals first baseman Paul Goldschmidt, the National League's MVP just two seasons ago, was batting just .197 with three home runs entering play on Monday.

in the second half last year. I'm trying to evaluate and see what is causing the swing to not be as efficient, as good as I would like."

Goldschmidt started slowly during his MVP season in 2022, batting only .146 with a .466 OPS in his first 11 games and hitting the first of his 35 home runs on April 29. But it's true that the first half of 2023 was the last time he was the force the Cardinals require from one of their two leading power threats. Last season, Goldschmidt's OPS was .844 in the first half and .763 after the All-Star break. His strikeout rate rose from 24 to 26% in the second half. In spring training this year, he hit one home run with a .477 OPS in 54 plate appearances and had a 37% strikeout rate. So far this season his strikeout rate is 32%, well above his previous career mark of 22%.

He has spent nearly a year now trying to find answers. Clearly, it's not a simple process.

"Hitting is simple, but it's not black and white," Goldschmidt said. "If you're going to get five hitting coaches randomly (to look at) any player's swing when they're going bad and say, 'Oh, what's causing this? Or how do you fix it?' you'll probably get five different answers. Even if it's the best five hitting coaches in baseball."

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causing that," Goldschmidt said. "As with all times when you're not playing well, it's, 'Let's try this. This has worked in the past. Give it some time. Oh, it looks a little better. But then that didn't really solve what was going on, let's try this.' That has kind of been what's happening. It's gotten a little better, then it gets a little worse, then it gets better, gets worse."

Maybe, after Sunday, he is getting a little better again. Goldschmidt said afterward that he has not felt a weight on his shoulders. Rather than worry only about himself, he focuses on fulfilling his other responsibilities as a teammate, whether it's playing good defense at first base or offering encouragement to others. Marmol, the Cardinals' coaches and his teammates revere him, viewing Goldschmidt as honest, genuine and selfless, all about the team.

It would be understandable if Goldschmidt was down mentally. But he said that is not the case.

"I'm great there. I wish that was the problem. I know how to work on that," he said, smiling. "In the moment, of course you're upset. When you get out, when you strike out with the bases loaded, you're not going to smile back to the dugout. That's that healthy competition. Even if you're hitting .350, you're going to be disappointed when you don't come through for the team."

"The most important thing is not carrying it over to the next at-bat, the next day. I think I've done a great job personally of doing that. I don't feel like I need to make a mental adjustment. I'll try to keep working, try to perform and try and play well and help us win."

He did it Sunday. The trick now is for Goldschmidt to make like he has in the past, and keep doing it again and again.

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