



MEDIA CLIPS – March 9, 2018

Prospect McMahon exuding confidence at 1B

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Mar. 8th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- There are still lessons for rookie **Ryan McMahon**, but at least this spring they aren't the hard, painful ones.

McMahon, with a clear shot to become the Rockies' first baseman, went 0-for-3 in Thursday's **3-2 walk-off win** over the Reds at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick. But he is hitting .353 with three doubles and a homer in 34 at-bats over 13 games. He struck out twice Thursday -- equaling his previous Cactus League total.

His hits have included some flares and balls that found spots through the infield, which is totally fine for a guy who didn't have much on his side in previous Spring Trainings -- 1-for-29 with 13 strikeouts from 2015-17. So McMahon appreciates the positive numbers from a swing that's not where he expects it to be when the season opens.

"It's OK," McMahon said. "Every Spring Training, you've got to come in and kind of teach yourself how to hit. I feel good, feel like my direction is good. I've got to fine-tune a few things and get that rhythm back."

McMahon admitted he was "a little frustrated" with his contact and spent extra time in the batting cage before Wednesday's 5-4 victory over the Rangers. The result was a line-drive single to center against **Clayton Blackburn** in his first at-bat, and another liner to center his third time up that hung just enough for **Drew Robinson** to rob him.

The 23-year-old earned his callup last season by hitting a combined .355 with a .403 on-base percentage, a .583 slugging percentage and 20 home runs at Double-A Hartford and Triple-A Albuquerque. He went 3-for-19 (.158) in 17 Major League games, but the Rockies were more focused on the benefit of him being with a team making a postseason push than putting him on the field consistently.

McMahon has returned more confident and performed more competitively this spring.

"Overall, you're seeing a quality at-bat," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "Looks to me he's seeing the ball well. He's swinging at strikes, taking balls. The approach is such where he's using the whole field. He's thinking up the middle, the other way. Something soft he can turn on. A lot of his hits are up the middle, which is good to see.

"It's good to see that he's feeling comfortable. You go back to a couple springs ago when I wasn't here, he had a couple hapless at-bats and maybe no hits. And maybe last year it was sort of the same. We sent him out of camp early, so this has been a gradual progression for him."

The Rockies did not re-sign **Mark Reynolds**, last year's primary first baseman and a 30-homer hitter. Reynolds remains available (as does their longtime outfield star, **Carlos Gonzalez**). But with a full 40-man roster and no injuries that will cost significant regular-season time, Colorado's efforts are going to evaluating talent it has developed. It's a big chance for players like McMahon, the organization's **No. 2 prospect** according to MLB Pipeline.

McMahon is also gaining experience against a wide array of arms. Several hits have come off pitchers who haven't reached or have barely touched the Majors, but he also has knocks off vets such as the Cubs' **Kyle Hendricks** and the Mariners' **Mike Leake**, as well as emerging pitchers like the D-backs' **Braden Shipley** and the Reds' **Cody Reed**. And he is facing many of these pitchers for the first time.

McMahon said he feels best when he puts himself in a position where he can reach pitches on either corner of the plate as if they're down the middle. Searching for that point while also figuring out the pitcher is beneficial.

"It's almost a better challenge and better for your swing in the long run to face a guy you don't know really how his stuff moves," McMahon said. "Then you really have to do your swing to the best of your ability. But it doesn't really matter who's throwing. You're just trying to find that feel."

Source: Rox, CarGo agree to one-year deal

**By Oliver Macklin and Matt Kelly MLB.com @basebollie and@mattkellyMLB
7:52 AM ET**

Carlos Gonzalez is on the verge of a return to Colorado.

The Rockies and Gonzalez have an agreement "in principle" on a one-year deal and "are working through final contract language," a source confirmed to MLB.com's Jon Paul Morosi on Friday. The deal has yet to be finalized.

The Rockies have not confirmed the negotiations, which were first reported by MLB Network insider Jon Heyman.

Gonzalez has spent the last nine seasons in a Rockies uniform. The right fielder has hit 215 home runs and earned three All-Star Game selections during his tenure in Denver, though he is coming off one of the toughest seasons of his career in which he .262/.339/.423 with 14 home runs in 136 games. Gonzalez did have a strong final month of the season, slashing .377/.484/.766 with 12 doubles and six homers from Sept. 1 through the end of the regular season. He had been linked to multiple other clubs this offseason, including the Orioles, White Sox, Royals, Astros and Blue Jays.

Freeland takes step forward in latest rotation bid

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Mar. 8th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Rockies left-hander **Kyle Freeland** wasn't efficient, but being effective was a step in the right direction on Thursday afternoon.

Freeland, trying to overcome multi-run outings in his first two Cactus League performances, walked two and gave up three hits but yielded just one run over three innings. He fanned three batters and forced a double-play grounder during a **3-2 walk-off win** over the Reds at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick.

The pitch count soared to 51 (28 strikes), which cost him a chance to pitch into the fourth. But after allowing five runs on eight hits over five innings in his previous two outings, Freeland was happier Thursday.

"I felt better today," Freeland said. "I felt much more on top of the ball, commanding the strike zone, occasionally falling behind but for the most part getting ahead. With the runners on, just stay calm, poised and do whatever I need to do to get out of it."

The rotation competition is early, but with **Jon Gray**, **Tyler Anderson** and **German Marquez** seeming solid, **Chad Bettis** serving the role of the staff's veteran and **Jeff Hoffman** currently nursing a sore right shoulder, Freeland and **Antonio Senzatela** look to be competing for the remaining spot. Senzatela has a 3.00 ERA with eight hits, seven strikeouts and three walks in three outings spanning nine innings.

Freeland and Senzatela each can claim to have addressed a shortcoming in his previous outing: On Thursday, Freeland limited the fastballs up in the zone that had been an issue, while Senzatela recorded his first walk-free appearance on Wednesday against the Rangers.

The only run Freeland allowed came on **Devin Mesoraco**'s RBI single after a **Rosell Herrera** single and a walk to **Eugenio Suarez**, who drew both of Freeland's free passes. But Freeland forced a **Cliff Pennington** double play to end the second and overcame his second walk by forcing a Mesoraco grounder to finish off the third.

To trim his pitch count, Freeland said the key is "just get strike one. It improves your chances of getting that batter out by a serious percentage."

Method behind the not-so-madness

One reason the Rockies are looking for a way to drop center fielder **Charlie Blackmon** from first to third in the batting order: Blackmon ranked second in the National League with a .379 batting average with runners on base. **DJ LeMahieu**, who hit second, was tied for fifth at .346 and **Nolan Arenado**, who hit third and fourth, was seventh at .345.

However, Blackmon had just 195 at-bats with runners on -- far fewer than LeMahieu's 263 and Arenado's 284. If Blackmon is hitting behind an effective top hitter and LeMahieu, it could maximize those chances.

In slugging with runners on, Blackmon's .682 led the NL and Arenado's .651 was third.

Injury update

Outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, recovering from right hand surgery he underwent just before Spring Training, reported feeling good after taking live batting practice against Minor Leaguers on Wednesday and hit off a pitching machine Thursday. He will have another such session and hopes to enter Cactus League play over the weekend.

Position competition

It was all about hustle for the outfield competitors. **Raimel Tapia** went 1-for-2 with a bunt single from the leadoff spot. **Mike Tauchman** finished 1-for-3, negated a possible double play by hustling to first and made a strong catch in left on a line drive. **David Dahl**, who took 10 at-bats between Tuesday night and Wednesday morning with a "B" game between two Cactus League contests, went 1-for-3.

Prospects at the end

Sam Hilliard, an outfielder who is the Rockies' **No. 12 prospect** per MLB Pipeline, delivered the game-winning RBI on a two-strike, two-out single past third base to lift his Cactus League average to .381 after a 2-for-2 day. No. 1 prospect **Brendan Rodgers** was 2-for-4 with a steal after entering as the shortstop, righty **Ryan Castellani** (No. 8) gave up one run on two hits in two innings and **Garrett Hampson** (No. 7) made a slick backhanded fielding play.

All were part of a prospect-dominated Class A Advanced Lancaster team that had several players earn Major League camp invites. Bud Black has managed the end of games with intent, since he could be seeing several of the players soon.

"We talk about all these steps we've got to take all the time, and these are little steps," Black said. "It's a Spring Training game, but in big league camp -- they've never been here before -- so we look for certain things because we want to know these players as they go through the system, to see what they can actually do."

The early bird

Salt River Fields at Talking Stick is urging the spring break crowd to arrive early for games to alleviate delays entering stadiums. Last Sunday, the largest crowd in park history watched the Cubs and D-backs. With screening processes in place, there were delays.

Up next: Righty **Jon Gray**, who has been experimenting with various phases of his motion, will make his third spring start, as the Indians visit at 1:10 p.m. MT on Friday. Among the relievers scheduled to pitch are lefty **Zac Rosscup** and righty **Jairo Diaz**, who are attempting to earn Opening Day roster spots.

Rockies won't fall into the postseason-ization of their bullpen. They want starting pitchers pitching. "I'd like my starters to pitch a lot of innings," Bud Black said. "You know why? If they're pitching a lot of innings, it means they're pitching well."

**By NICK GROKE | ngroke@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
March 8, 2018 at 5:33 pm**

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Jon Gray is eager to be a workhorse, ready to eat innings and carry the Rockies through a long season like a 21st-century Nolan Ryan. "I want to throw 200 innings," the right-hander said. "I know I can handle the workload."

But should he? The Rockies have a stable of starting pitchers who appear capable of pushing them to the postseason. Their run to the wild-card playoff game last season came on the arms of the youngest staff in club history. Those pitchers combined to throw far fewer innings than the 2009 rotation, which was the last time Colorado made it to the playoffs. Shorter starts from the starters has become a trend throughout baseball.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, National League champions last year, averaged less than six innings from their starters. That ranked 17th in baseball. The Rockies were one slot ahead of them.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said his strategy was intentional. "The way I manage a bullpen sort of plays into how people manage in the postseason," he said. That means calling to the bullpen early and often, looking for matchups from fresh arms before a starter falters, not after he does.

The Dodgers' rotation averaged only 86 pitches per start, the lowest number in the majors, according to The New York Times. They led the league with a 3.39 ERA.

"If you give me the choice of 150 innings and dominance or 200 innings and mediocrity, it's not even a question," Dodgers starter Alex Wood told The Times.

Gray's goal of pitching 200 innings goes against the grain. Rockies manager Bud Black does too. His idea of what a starter should do seems old school.

"I'd like my starters to pitch a lot of innings," Black said. "You know why? If they're pitching a lot of innings, it means they're pitching well and we want to leave them in the game. That's the basic premise of all this. Go five and you're pitching well? Hey, keep going. Still good? Hey, go another one."

In the playoffs, with the season's end in sight, managers tend to make more urgent moves. In the wild-card loss, Gray was pulled in the second inning having allowed four runs. Black used seven relievers after him. Arizona won, 11-8.

During the offseason, when the Rockies signed closer Wade Davis to a three-year, \$52 million contract and setup man Bryan Shaw to a three-year, \$27 million contract, and re-signed Jake McGee, they built a bullpen that should be able to carry more quality innings toward the end of games.

But that may not be the plan.

“The dynamic of our ‘pen looks good right now. But we need starters to allow bullpen guys to be healthy all year long,” said Rockies left-hander reliever Mike Dunn. “If you tax the ‘pen by June or July, what will it look like on the back half when you’re trying to make a playoff push?”

The 2017 Dodgers took advantage of a 10-day disabled list (five days shorter than previous seasons) and call-ups from the minor leagues to extend the health of their bullpen. They have the depth to shuttle pitchers in and out of the rotation and bullpen.

The Rockies appear to have similar bullpen depth. But their reality is different. Pitching half their 162 games at Coors Field requires a constant check on the availability and health of their relievers. One sideways start from a pitcher at the beginning of a long homestand can overtax the bullpen and wreck their readiness for days to come.

“To see how a bullpen would last for 162 games? You’re asking a lot out of guys,” Dunn said. “They’ll be more tired at the end. There are stretches of the season when you need starters to carry you. And stretches when the bullpen carries. It takes everybody.”

Kyle Freeland tightens the screws on his fastball; Sam Hilliard shines late for Rockies against Reds

"I felt much more on top of the ball, commanding the zone," Freeland said.

By NICK GROKE | ngroke@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

March 8, 2018 at 5:54 pm

Rockies 3, Reds 2

At Salt River Fields

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — An obvious outlier was listed on the Rockies batting order Thursday, with eight spots filled by prospects, rookies and bench players, and a ninth as Nolan Arenado.

Top prospect Brendan Rodgers, playing shortstop and second base, singled twice in four at-bats and left fielder Sam Hilliard doubled and hit the game-winning single to left in the Rockies' late 3-2 victory over the visiting Reds.

"It's good to see these guys in these situations. This is great experience," Colorado manager Bud Black said. "These are little steps, even though it's a spring training game, it's big-league camp. We look for these things. We want to know these players, to see what they can do."

Hilliard, 24, was a 15th-round draft pick in 2015 out of Wichita State. He hit .300 with an .847 OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage) at High-A Lancaster last season. Arenado went 0-for-2 with a walk.

On the mound: Lefty Kyle Freeland was scheduled for four innings but made it through only three after reaching a pitch-count limit in his third spring start. He gave up one run on three hits, but his goal, he said, was to locate a tailing fastball down in the zone.

"I felt much more on top of the ball, commanding the zone," Freeland said.

At the plate: Noel Cuevas, as a designated hitter, doubled on a sharp line drive to center field in the fourth inning to score catcher Tom Murphy. He also set down a successful sacrifice bunt.

Worth noting: Former Rockies prospect Rosell Herrera in the first inning singled, stole second base and scored on a single. ... Colorado reliever Bryan Shaw pitched a 1-2-3 fourth inning, all groundouts.

Up next: Rockies vs. Cleveland, at Salt River Fields, Friday, 1:10 p.m. Rockies RHP Jon Gray is scheduled for four innings against Cleveland RHP Corey Kluber.

How Bud Black is getting ahead of the curve in lineup structure
By Drew Creasman | Posted on March 8, 2018 | BSN Denver

It's a frightening moment in the life of any parent.

Your child, ever growing in intelligence and curiosity, looks up at you with innocent eyes and limitless potential and asks, "Mommy? Daddy? Where do runs come from?"

You fidget in your seat knowing that this moment was coming but still feeling utterly unprepared. You know you can't explain all the messy details, the inner workings of BABIP and WAR, but you fear the consequences of simplifying the entire conversation to, "Well sometimes the stork delivers home runs and RBI."

The truth is, it's complicated. Runs come in all shapes and sizes. They come from any place you can imagine, and maybe even places you never would have. Some argue they can be engineered through clever managing, manufactured out of thin air from speed and athleticism, and some belief systems even hold that a hidden, superpowered "clutch" gene may be a contributing factor to creating the currency of baseball.

Debate has raged all offseason over whether or not the Colorado Rockies have done enough to address their offensive woes of a season ago. Much of this debate has centered around whether it would have been wise to add a veteran bat like Logan Morrison, Lucas Duda, or even Carlos Santana versus an apparent faith in organizational players like Ryan McMahon, David Dahl, and Raimel Tapia.

As the Colorado Rockies 2017 season came to an end, a debate was raging about the use of Charlie Blackmon in the lead-off spot.

Lines were drawn, alliances were made, and the war rages on with many good arguments lost on all sides.

But while all that was happening, manager Bud Black was innovating in the realm of lineup construction while almost nobody noticed.

After the All-Star break, the Rockies manager decided to act, dramatically, on the emerging splits of his shortstop, Trevor Story. He was crushing left-handed pitching but that was being drown out by his miserable numbers against right-handed pitching, especially over the first month of the season.

By the end of 2017, Story slashed .216/.281/.386 for a .668 OPS against righties and .301/.380/.654 for a 1.034 against lefties. In most situations, this would lead a manager to simply bench the player in a traditional split, but Black couldn't afford to do that considering the insane value Story was provided at a premium defensive position.

This unique set of circumstances led to a unique scenario. Black left Story in the seventh or eighth spot in the lineup against right-handed pitching but put him right in the heart of the order against lefties. And it worked.

A manager's worst nightmare is that once you act upon the recognition of a trend, it will suddenly evaporate. Got a big game against a pitcher that one of your bench players has absolutely handled in his career? If you start him, the universe will surely laugh down on you as said bench player goes 0-for-4 with three strikeouts.

But Story continued to wreak havoc on lefties, of which there are many of the elite variety in the NL West, and on those days became the second most dangerous man in the lineup.

How much control does an MLB manager really have over the outcomes of games? Not much. And usually, those moments come in the form of pitching changes and—in the National League—pinch-hit appearances. But not in this case.

This move played a vital role in the Rockies September surge to hold onto a postseason spot and has been an under-discussed element of the offense. While the consensus is that Story is unlikely to struggle in 2018 as much as he did in 2017, the theory here shows that there is a way Colorado can get the most out of their young, volatile players while, to some degree, hiding their weaknesses.

We spoke to a few league sources and each confirmed that they could not recall a platoon operating quite like this; where the ballplayer is essentially platooning with himself.

We've said over and over again that the Rockies will be successful in **2018 not by focusing on outscoring opponents**, but rather by winning on the margins and allowing their phenomenal pitching staff and bullpen to go to work. The offense merely needs to be good enough.

We've discussed **how this could arise** out of young players taking highly anticipated steps forward, or how a return to health for a former All-Star could play a big role. We've talked about the **added athleticism, speed**, and defensive prowess. But there are even smaller ways to bet the most out of your run-scoring opportunities.

Maybe they don't even have to play that well, as long as they are played in the right situations.

Bud Black's willingness to be flexible with Story in 2017 is a great sign, but he will likely need to kick that gear into overdrive in 2018. David Dahl may end up having to hit in every different spot in the lineup. Guys like Ian Desmond, Pat Valaika, and Ryan McMahon are gonna have to move around the diamond a bit. Charlie Blackmon may need to get used to playing in a corner outfield spot or not leading off or both.

The bottom line is that the Colorado Rockies have the talent both in their lineup and on the mound to do some special things this season. But they're gonna have to be creative to get there.

Yency Almonte impressing Bud Black
By Rich Allen | Posted on March 8, 2018 | BSN Denver

Colorado Rockies pitching prospect Yency Almonte is impressing all the right people this spring training as he vies for a higher spot on the depth chart or, if he keeps producing like he has and the right dominos fall, a spot in the team's starting rotation.

The 23-year-old right-hander made his third appearance of the preseason on March 5, taking over for Adam Ottavino in the seventh inning of the team's contest with the Chicago Cubs. After three perfect innings against the Arizona Diamondbacks six days earlier, he picked up where left off and retired the first seven he faced, broken down into a three-pitch strikeout, two groundouts and four flyouts. He sat on the edges of the plate, primarily relying on his fastball that topped out at just over 95 mph on the day.

He ran into issues in the ninth, however, after a comebacker off the bat of Cubs catcher Ali Solis deflected off his throwing arm. Second baseman Garrett Hampson recovered to make the play, but Almonte lost precision afterward. The next hitter, Ryan Court, turned around a middle-middle fastball for a home run to center, and Almonte walked the following two hitters before being removed from the game. Amid concern that Almonte was injured by the one-hopper, Rockies manager Bud Black quelled concerns about both the pitcher's health and late collapse to the media in a postgame conference.

"He's fine," Black said. "He threw the ball great. Boy, those first two innings were crisp. The home run was on a fastball just right down the middle."

Court's home run accounts for only the second run and second extra-base hit Almonte has allowed in his now 7.1 innings of work so far in training camp. Of those, he retired the side in order in six innings. While he may be three or four spots out of an MLB rotation spot as the depth chart currently stands, his work and repertoire to this point has caught the eyes of Black and Co.

"Good tight slider, nice velocity to the fastball," Black said. "Really encouraged by how Yency has thrown this spring. He's much more confident, much more in control, he's throwing strikes, he's bouncing back from a little bit of a rough Fall League but he is in a really good place right now."

In 2017, Almonte dominated at Double-A Hartford to the tune of a flat 2.00 ERA and a .212 batting average against before earning a promotion to Triple-A Albuquerque in late July. In the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League, his numbers ballooned, and he struggled as a member of the Salt River Rafters in the Arizona Fall League as well. But he was still just one step from Denver, slating him for his big league debut in 2018 and adding to the list of young starting pitching weapons in purple pinstripes, and is finding early success trying to prove his worth in MLB camp.

With the volatility of not just starting pitching in general, but the fleet of sub-30-year-old arms the Rockies will rely on in the search for a second straight playoff berth, don't be surprised to hear Reed Saunders announce Almonte's name in the not-too-distant future. Especially if he keeps tearing through the Cactus League as March presses on.

Colorado Rockies injury update: Gerardo Parra nearing return

by Kevin Henry 17 hours ago | RoxPile

SCOTTSDALE — After undergoing surgery to remove a broken hamate bone in his right hand just before Spring Training, Colorado Rockies outfielder Gerardo Parra is nearing a return to the field for the first time in 2018.

The 30-year-old Parra is expected to compete for one of the starting corner outfield positions, where the Rockies are thick with talent at the moment. **Raimel Tapia, Mike Tauchman, David Dahl** and **Ian Desmond** are the other leading candidates to hold down the corner outfield spots, bookending All-Star center fielder **Charlie Blackmon**.

In an interview inside the Rockies clubhouse during Thursday's matinee between Colorado and the Cincinnati Reds, Parra told Rox Pile and other media members he was pain-free and nearing his return.

"I feel great," Parra said. "I got live BP (batting practice) yesterday (Wednesday) and hit off the machine today. I don't feel pain."

What are the next steps?

"Play baseball," Parra smiled. "I have another live BP tomorrow (Friday). After that, just start playing baseball."

In his second season with the Rockies in 2017, Parra had a bounceback campaign from a disappointing first year in Denver. He hit .309 with 10 homers and 71 RBI, including a torrid .571 in five June games **before straining his right quadriceps** in a June 6 home game against the Cleveland Indians. The injury kept him out of action until July 7.

While the hand surgery has shelved Parra this spring, he is thankful that the timing of the injury will still allow him to be ready for the start of the season.

"I'm happy because I'll be ready for Opening Day," Parra said. "We have a lot of time so I can take my time. I can't be frustrated because I know we have time before Opening Day. Just means I will work a little bit extra."

Parra has been keeping an eye on his teammates and noticing this year's team is full of talent, not only at the corner outfield spots but up and down the lineup.

“These guys play hard,” Parra said. “It’s fun to watch my teammates. We have a great team. Lot of young players who play hard. It’s not easy to make the team this year because we have a lot of talent.”

Parra is in the final year of a three-year, \$27.5 million contract with the Rockies. The club has a \$12 million option to keep him for the 2019 season.

Four Rockies prospects who could make a big (league) splash this season

By Chris Bohn - March 8, 2018 | Mile High Sports

Prospects are the future for any MLB team. The depth of an organization starts with the talent within their Minor League system.

The Rockies have had their fair share of stars come up through the system. Todd Helton, Matt Holliday and Nolan Arenado highlight the list of players to come through the Rockies farm system. Each had or are having impressive careers in the major leagues. This current Rockies team is full of young, talented, home-grown players including Arenado and Charlie Blackmon in the lineup and a bevy of promising young starting pitchers.

With all of that talent already on the big league roster, there are a few names that will be making themselves known sooner than later. There are some holes to fill for the 2018 season, first base chief among them. Here are some names to look out for that could help the Rockies thrive this season and make a strong playoff push.

Ryan McMahon

The 23-year-old infielder was drafted in the second round in 2013. He came up as a third baseman but made the move over to first base last season and showed he could handle the position well. Last season McMahon batted .355 with 20 home runs and 39 doubles in Double- and Triple-A combined.

The glaring hole in the Rockies roster going into 2018 this season is first base. Who will be taking the daily role as Colorado's first baseman? Yes, Ian Desmond could play the position. But with the Rockies (likely) moving on from Carlos Gonzalez, that opens up a corner outfield position that Desmond will most likely take; in comes McMahon.

McMahon's early Spring Training performance suggests that he is major league ready; look for the youngster to take over the position in 2018.

Brendan Rodgers

Rodgers was drafted in the first round, out of high school, in 2015. Listed as a shortstop Rodgers can play both of the middle infield positions, which could help the Rockies both in the short- and long-term. Second baseman DJ LeMahieu is a free agent next year, and shortstop Trevor Story has struggled to maintain offensive consistency. Rodgers could be an

option at either position. Last season he had a very respectable year playing in both Single- and Double-A ball, batting .336 with 18 home runs.

Offensively, he can hit for both power and average. Defensively, Rodgers has had some problems with range at the shortstop position which could push for a switch over to second. He probably won't reach the big leagues until September at the earliest, but be ready to see Rodgers at Coors Field sooner than later.

Sam Howard

This left-handed, 24-year-old pitcher has been in the system since 2014. Howard pitched to a 3.32 ERA splitting time in Double- and Triple-A last season. In 127 innings pitched, he had 104 strikeouts with just 43 walks. With a fastball that can reach up to 95 mph, Howard pounds the strike zone and follows up the power with a good change-up.

He has posted a 3.00 ERA over 6.0 innings so far in Spring Training. As Bud Black looks for his "No. 8" starter Howard could make an appearance sometime in 2018.

Tom Murphy

Murphy missed most of last season behind the plate with a broken arm but had an impressive 2016 season in the minors and flashed some potential at the big-league level. He has showcased his power at the plate in Triple-A (19 home runs in '16) and figures to be a promising could backup catcher for the Rockies after call ups in September or if Tony Wolters or Chris Iannetta are injured.

Long-term Murphy profiles as a starter, so how quickly he can press Iannetta for that job will be something to keep an eye on.

The Rockies already have a stacked lineup along with promising young pitching. These prospects could be in for something very special when given the chance to contribute.

Bud Black stares down the next Rockies peak
By Derek Kessinger - March 8, 2018 | Mile High Sports

After making the 2017 National League Wild Card Game, the Colorado Rockies found themselves at their season's peak. While they advanced no further, the team's climb from obscurity to playoff relevance was elating. Now they have their sights set on other mountains — taller ones — as they look to embark upon a World Series run. To make this climb, the Rockies must find a way to power through the approaching adversity of another baseball season.

It's always harder the second time. Just ask Colorado Rockies manager Bud Black.

Black has had only a small taste of the postseason as a manager. In ten seasons as a Major League skipper, he has coached just one playoff game — the Rockies' 2017 Wild Card game loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks.

It's not that Black is unfamiliar with the postseason. He has two World Series rings. The first came with the Kansas City Royals in 1985. He was the losing pitcher in one of those games, but his team came out on top. The other ring came in 2002, as a pitching coach for the Anaheim Angels in 2002.

Those experiences have laid the foundation for Black's success as a manager. The only true veteran head coach in Denver major sports, he has the respect of people around the game. He has the pedigree to elevate a team, as he did for the Rockies last year. He even won Manager of the Year with a San Diego Padres team that failed to make the playoffs in 2010.

He also knows something about failing to get beyond initial success.

While the Rockies were celebrating their playoff berth in 2007 after the legendary play-in game, Black was left dejected in the Padres' dugout. He managed through one of the worst collapses in baseball history. For all of the surprise and joy 'Rocktober' brought to Denver, the sorrow was equal in San Diego.

Black then had to come back to Spring Training the next year and try to rally the troops. The Padres never competed for a World Series under Black — they didn't even make the playoffs.

This is the fate Black hopes to avoid with this team.

The first time you succeed can seem deceptively simple. The idea that an athlete could look at a string of success and say, "that was easy," is a sure sign of problems ahead.

Just ask Nathan MacKinnon, who was the NHL Rookie of the Year during a Colorado Avalanche playoff run. He's never made the playoffs since and suffered on a historically bad team. Only by MacKinnon basically taking on the weight of the entire team has allowed the Avalanche to compete for a playoff spot again.

It's harder the second time.

The Colorado Rockies had a fairly easy run to the playoffs last year. They started off strong and recovered from second-half struggles to mount a challenge for that Wild Card berth. They even rallied in that game, before finally succumbing in the 11-8 loss.

The Rockies will try to avoid that trap in 2018. However, you couldn't blame the Rockies for thinking they should at least be able to match those results from last year. They're a young team without a lot of experience in these sorts of things.

This is where they need Bud Black to navigate the more treacherous road ahead.

Pitchers can be inconsistent. Hitters can slump.

In each of these areas, the Rockies will need a manager who can tell them that "it's hard now, but we can make this work together." They need to be able to rise above adversity to reach a higher peak.

Last year should not be as good as it gets for the Rockies — and no one wants to rise above that first peak more than Black.

Heyman | Rockies reunion still possible for CarGo
By Jon Heyman | March 8, 2018 | FanRagSports.com

The **Colorado Rockies** are staying in contact with their longtime star Carlos Gonzalez, and there's still a chance they could bring him back.

Gonzalez is talking to a couple of teams but apparently hasn't been able to procure a deal to his liking. So a reunion for the three-time All-Star hasn't been ruled out.

Rockies superstar third baseman Nolan Arenado recently said the team missed CarGo, a seeming hint that he'd like to see him return. The Rockies haven't replaced him yet, but are hoping for a healthy year for talented youngster David Dahl and are interested to see what outfield prospect Raimel Tapia can do. They also have 2017 MVP candidate Charlie Blackmon, Ian Desmond and Gerardo Parra for the outfield, but there could room for CarGo, especially if Desmond plays some first base.

CarGo had an uncharacteristically rough season last year, hitting .262 with 14 home runs and 57 RBI, but he rallied and played well the last several weeks. From September 1 through the end of the season, he hit .377 with six home runs and 16 RBI over 93 plate appearances, posting a superb 1.250 OPS.

Gonzalez has been connected to a few teams, including the World Series-champion Houston Astros, but it isn't known where the outside interest lies now. He is one of several stars still seeking a job with three weeks to go before the season starts. It isn't known what the Rockies are offering – if anything – but there'd be reason to think he'd like to go back there, if possible.

Entering the offseason, it was thought he'd probably do a one-year deal off his rough 2017 season, and while not many would have predicted Colorado, it could still turn out that he stays a Rockie after all.