



MEDIA CLIPS – March 6, 2018

Rockies still have much to prove in 2018

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Mar. 5th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The Rockies entered last season confident even though they faced questions about their starting rotation and, quite frankly, years of losing ways. A trip to the postseason -- the team's first since 2009 -- was a solid response.

But last year wasn't an acceptable final answer. In fact, questions abound.

Can a rotation driven last season by young pitchers and expert handling from first-year Rockies manager Bud Black stay a step ahead of foes? Will significant lineup changes -- possibly a new batting order -- push the offense forward? Will what seems to be the natural order of the National League West return with primarily the Giants pushing the Dodgers for the division crown, which has resided in Los Angeles for the last five seasons?

As last year proved, the Rockies don't mind facing questions.

"Guys are hungry," third baseman **Nolan Arenado** said. "It's no different. Guys are looking to prove themselves. Us veteran players, guys that have done this, they want to keep it going. When you get a taste of the playoffs like we did last year, we want that back again."

Last year ended with a wild, bitter 11-9 loss to the D-backs in the NL Wild Card Game. That night left Arenado not wanting to be seen in public for a few days. It was the only game that center fielder **Charlie Blackmon** didn't watch on video. He felt his poorly executed late bunt cut short a rally, even though it got him an RBI. It was the catalyst of a long offseason for right-hander **Jon Gray**, who flamed out of his first playoff start in 1 1/3 innings.

That was all well and good for the winter. But with a new season dawning, it would be quite presumptive to obsess over making amends for that one game, as if another chance in 2018 is a given. Even though it was a postseason trip out of what proved the toughest division in baseball, the Rockies still finished third. And the teams behind them added veteran offensive talent -- first baseman **Eric Hosmer** for the Padres, and outfielder **Andrew McCutchen** and third baseman **Evan Longoria** for the Giants.

"There's confidence from our guys from the sense that we know we have what we need to be successful, but our guys are too competitive to sit back and coast off of a Wild Card loss last year," Blackmon said.

What's the goal?

The Rockies have never won the NL West in their 25 seasons. While it would be nice to begin the postseason with a full series rather than a one-game showdown, the division matters less than advancing in the postseason and eclipsing the memory of the 2007 World Series trip as the franchise's high mark. It's not World Series or bust, but with the Rockies always attempting to balance their payroll and Blackmon and second baseman **DJ LeMahieu** in the final year of club control, plus Arenado eligible for free agency after 2019, this heart of the lineup might not have much time to bring a World Series dream to Colorado.

What's the plan?

General manager Jeff Bridich stunned many observers by signing free-agent closer **Wade Davis** for three years and \$52 million, plus setup men **Bryan Shaw** and **Jake McGee** for three years and \$27 million apiece. But it fits neatly into a plan allowed by the team's young starting pitchers. In 2021, righty **Chad Bettis** will be the first of the team's current rotation to become eligible for free agency. As long as the Rockies can win with an inexpensive rotation, they can put their resources into the bullpen.

The Rockies appear ready to test their self-sustainability plan among the regular position players. Developing first baseman **Ryan McMahon** and outfielders **David Dahl**, **Raimel Tapia** and **Mike Tauchman** has prompted the Rockies to not retain first baseman **Mark Reynolds** or right fielder **Carlos Gonzalez**. It's a gamble, but could pay off big if their younger players' Minor League numbers transfer to the Majors. It happened when the Rockies dealt **Troy Tulowitzki** to the Blue Jays and released **Jose Reyes** to insert **Trevor Story**, who has provided power and defense, but needs to hit for greater average.

What could go wrong?

Gray, lefty **Tyler Anderson** and Bettis are the rotation leaders. But Bettis, who turns 29 on April 26, is the oldest member, and the 2 1/3 innings that Gray and Anderson combined for in last year's Wild Card Game is the sum total of postseason experience for the starters. While 2017 rookies **German Marquez, Kyle Freeland, Antonio Senzatela** and **Jeff Hoffman** all had big moments, they'll be facing opponents with a year's worth of information.

But one person's fears is another man's opportunity. "All our guys got a really good feel of what they can do," Gray said. "That's just going to push them forward to want more, take that next step. That's the way it was for me after my first year. They're ready to prove they can be even better."

Who might surprise?

Dahl and Tapia topped prospect lists throughout their rise through the Minors, so if they emerge this season it might be a surprise only in that they haven't done it in the Majors over a full season. Dahl hit .315 with seven homers in 63 games in 2016 but didn't appear in the Majors last season because of a rib injury. Tapia, up and down between the Majors and Triple-A Albuquerque last year, hit .315 over his final 60 at-bats last year. Still, if they win regular jobs, the challenge will be to do it wire to wire.

"There is a difference between a Minor League pitcher and a big-league pitcher, especially an experienced big-league pitcher," Black said. "So when you're talking about McMahon, you're talking about Dahl, you're talking about Tapia, you're talking about Tauchman, all these fellows who are in camp getting a lot of at-bats, there is a difference when the season starts. The only way to get that experience is to play."

Tauchman feeling more confident at plate in '18

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Mar. 5th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Rockies outfielder **Mike Tauchman's** way of making sure he's counted in has resurfaced this spring.

Tauchman, who did not play in Monday's 5-4 loss against the Cubs, has a .364/.481/.682 slash line, with a homer, two doubles and a triple in 10 Cactus League games. And, with manager Bud Black experimenting with lineups that would allow him to drop Charlie Blackmon from leadoff to the No. 3 spot, Tauchman is 3-for-7 with a double, a walk and a stolen base.

In Sunday's 7-6 loss to the Angels, Tauchman went 0-for-2 with a walk and a strikeout from the leadoff spot. Able to play all three outfield positions, the speedy Tauchman ranged from right field to right-center to rob **Zack Cozart** of possible extra bases.

With **Gerardo Parra** recovering from right hand surgery (he could be back in a week or so), the Rockies have primarily used **Raimel Tapia** in the leadoff spot, where he is 4-for-18 with a double, a homer, eight strikeouts and no walks in the top spot in the order. Veteran **Ian Desmond** has made two appearances at the top of the lineup, and **David Dahl** has made one (1-for-3).

But Tauchman, whose climb through the Minors was not accompanied by prospect hype, is performing well enough for consideration for the roster and occasional starts. A former 10th-round pick who has hit for average at every level, Tauchman put into action adjustments in his swing and homered a career-high 16 times at Triple-A Albuquerque last season to earn his first big league call-up.

"It's been huge," Tauchman said. "I feel a lot more confident this year at the plate. The opportunity to face more quality Major League arms is huge, because then you can evaluate what you're doing and what adjustments need to be made."

With talented young players who offer many lineup options, and plenty of spring left to do the sorting, it's not clear how, or if, Tauchman, 27, will fit on the Opening Day roster or in the batting order. But, he has demonstrated ability that will be useful to the Major League club.

"In big league camp last year, he played good defense, showed some speed, showed the bat-to-ball skill, and when the season began in Albuquerque, he just took off and was a focal point of a lot of our player development people," said Black, who placed Tauchman on the roster for the National League Wild Card game.

Tools that work in the leadoff spot -- and a well-thought method -- could help Tauchman's cause.

"The key is that I put my body in a position to hit every pitch, regardless of the count," Tauchman said. "That way, I'm truly locked in on my zone and tracking the baseball and swinging at hittable pitches. For me, the count is kind of irrelevant in that way. I'm just trying to get my best swing off."

Injury update

Black said right-handed rotation competitor **Jeff Hoffman** -- scratched before Sunday's game because of right shoulder soreness -- has improved, but will not be in a game for another week to 10 days.

Lab work

The first four batters right-handed reliever **Adam Ottavino** faced in the sixth against the Cubs were left-handed, and he yielded two singles and a walk. But he coaxed the first righty he saw, **Mark Zagunis**, into a double play to end the scoreless frame.

Pluses and minuses

Rockies starter **Tyler Anderson** threw 52 pitches in two innings, with his last pitch being hammered by **Anthony Rizzo** for a home run. He walked three and gave up two runs on three hits. "He got the ball up -- I've seen a little bit of that with some of our guys," Black said. "But, what I like, is that he held his stuff for 50-plus pitches here early in the spring, which is a good sign."

Left-hander **Mike Dunn**, in his Rockies' Cactus League debut, also yielded a homer, to **Ian Happ**.

"I liked his stuff," Black said. "The ball was coming out really good, the velocity numbers were great, the action on his pitches was his norm. I saw what I wanted to see from him as far as his stuff."

Right-hander **Yency Almonte**, the Rockies' No. 10 prospect, was perfect for 1 1/3 innings until he was hit by **Ali Solis'** liner on the outside of the right arm to start the ninth. Almonte served up **Ryan Court's** game-deciding homer after being attended to by trainers, and walked the next two before leaving. "He's fine -- he threw the ball great," Black said. "Boy, those first two innings were crisp."

Up next

Right-hander **German Marquez**, who threw two scoreless innings with two strikeouts in his first spring outing, is scheduled for three innings against the Mariners on Tuesday at Peoria, Ariz., at 6:40 p.m. MT. Left-hander **Sam Howard**, the **Rockies' No. 17 prospect** according to MLB Pipeline, also is scheduled to pitch. **Watch the game live** on MLB.TV.

Antonio Senzatela is expanding his pitch arsenal. His spot with the Rockies depends on it.
We have to get the curve and the change in the mix,” Colorado manager Bud Black said.

By Nick Groke / Denver Post | Mar. 5th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Antonio Senzatela’s future was foretold on the face of Yasiel Puig late on a Friday night at Coors Field last September. Senzatela, the Rockies’ 22-year-old rookie right-hander, pitching in relief against the World Series-bound Dodgers, suddenly spun a wild card.

Puig saw the scouting report. He knew Senzatela leans on his fastball like a tree needs sunlight. In his first season, after jumping two levels from Double-A to the bigs, Senzatela threw fastballs more than 70 percent of the time. Then he dropped a curve.

“And you know Puig, he doesn’t hide anything,” Rockies director of pitching Mark Wiley recalled. Puig turned to his dugout with his hands out and shoulders up wondering what he saw. “And the next pitch, Antonio threw another one. And Puig is like, ‘That’s bull!’ He’s thinking dead fastball. Then he got two curveballs and he doesn’t know where to go.”

In one inning of bullpen work, Senzatela flashed the kind of pitching prowess that gave the Rockies so much hope for more from the bearded, burly native of Venezuela. He’s now 23, with a chance to earn a spot in Colorado’s opening-day rotation. If only he can add to his arsenal.

“I’m playing like a kid,” he said. “I feel better because I have more experience. But it’s the same. I go out and throw hard and try to compete.”

[Senzatela’s first season started brilliantly](#). Through his first 10 starts, he had a 3.19 ERA and a National League-best 7-1 record. Then he faded, with an 8.10 ERA in June that bumped him to the bullpen. Professional hitters figured out his fastball.

Then he started learning. On the fly, Senzatela retaught himself to throw a curveball and a changeup. Both were rough rides that led him to a season-ending 4.68 ERA, a number that was Coors Field-proof (his park-adjusted statistics remain on the level, for the most part). The Rockies tasked him to learn even more in the winter, crafting his offseason regime around throwing changeups during 200-foot long-toss.

“The fastball-slider combo is big-league caliber. We have to get the curve and the change in the mix,” Colorado manager Bud Black said, “for the separation in velocity off his fastball. That’s his focus.”

Senzatela threw fastballs or sliders during about 93 percent of his pitches last season. That's the kind of top-heavy arsenal that often shepherds a starter into the bullpen. Rockies reliever Bryan Shaw, for instance, exclusively threw cutters (88 percent) and sliders (12 percent) last season. It works in short outings. Starters need something more.

The Rockies signed Senzatela as a 16-year-old out of Valencia, Venezuela, in 2011. He cruised through five years in the minors because his fastball was so dominating, a darting, powerful pitch that he grew comfortable locating to all four quadrants of the strike zone. His fastball was so good, the Rockies promoted him from Double-A to the majors after just 34 2/3 innings.

But his development lagged. His curveball was so wild, they took it away from him in the lower levels. He focused instead on fastballs and sliders. His potential remained.

"These kids sign with power arms. Nobody signs a guy because of a changeup," Wiley said. "Some kids have lived their whole lives on a fastball, and you have to teach them a whole new thing and add value to it."

Ideally, Black said, Senzatela will develop a plus-rated changeup to offset his fastball. The changeup is a simple weapon that can cause so much frustration with hitters. If done right, it looks like a fastball, with the same arm speed and spin rotation as the quicker pitch, but it is slowed down like sludge. That's perfect for a fastball pitcher.

"Everybody knows he's coming with a fastball," Wiley said. "And when he commands it, it's hard to hit. But you can make mistakes to major-league hitters with a fastball when they don't have to worry too much about anything else. With the arm strength he has, a changeup can be really valuable. Then you're not naked."

Senzatela is being helped along by fellow 23-year-old Venezuelan German Marquez, who throws his fastball only 65 percent of the time. Senzatela settled on two new facets to his changeup: using a three-finger grip to add more resistance and throwing them across four seams of the baseball, as he does with a fastball.

"It feels like a fastball coming out of my hand," Senzatela said. "I had to throw it a lot. They look good, sometimes bad. But most of the time it's good."

His curveball will come in to play, too. In his most recent outing, against Arizona, Senzatela forced himself to throw more changeups and curveballs, some more successful than others. He allowed one run on three hits in three innings.

Even after they become established in the majors, pitchers continue solidifying their repertoires and deliveries. Jon Gray added a new motion this spring. Marquez is trying to throw a changeup more often after relying on his curveball as a primary off-speed pitch last year.

Senzatela's development, though, is more necessary. He holds so much promise for a club that struggled for years to develop in-house pitching. Now they have an abundance. And Senzatela's place depends on expanding his arsenal.

"Pitchers are always trying to improve and tinker with their game," Black said. "Where you have to be careful, and we have to get this message across, is a lot of these young pitchers are competing for a spot on the team. We have to offset that with some things we're trying to develop in spring."

Charlie Blackmon, hitting third, flashes power in Rockies' Cactus Leaguer against the Cubs

By Nick Groke / Denver Post | Mar. 5th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — There is not much for Bud Black to worry about with his center fielder. Charlie Blackmon has been among the Rockies' most reliable players for four years. But Black is pushing Blackmon into new territory, sending the 31-year-old down two spots in his lineup, so there is some feeling out to do.

The idea is to hit Blackmon third, as a way to take advantage of his slugging power. And Blackmon on Monday hit his first home run in spring, a two-run shot in the first inning off Cubs starter Kyle Hendricks to right-center field.

"He got a changeup and got out front and squared it up. That was good," Black said. "Where we are right now, with things we want to see, we're seeing."

Blackmon hit 37 home runs last season, most among National League center fielders, and he led all of baseball in hits (213) and runs (137). The Rockies hope to increase his RBI total by hitting him third in the lineup. The idea is to put runners on base in front of him, then let Blackmon bring them around.

His homer scored DJ LeMahieu, who had singled in the previous at-bat.

On the mound: Lefty Tyler Anderson, in his second Cactus League start, was scheduled for three innings but survived just two. He was yanked after 52 pitches, one batter into the third inning. He gave up two runs on three hits and walked three.

"Like some of our guys, little bit of fastball command (issues)," Black said of Anderson's outing. "The fastball up. He didn't throw many pitches down. But what I like is he held his stuff through 50-plus pitches early in spring. That's a good sign. He got something out of it."

Anderson threw 31 pitches in the first inning. "It was a workout," Black said.

At the plate: Shortstop Trevor Story doubled twice, including a line drive down the left field line in the sixth inning off former Rockies pitcher Eddie Butler. He has three doubles this spring after hitting seven last year. Noel Cuevas also doubled off Butler. LeMahieu also had two hits.

Worth noting: Ryan Court's home run off Rox prospect Yency Almonte in the ninth inning pushed the Cubs to victory. Almonte threw "two crisp innings," Black said, but faltered in a third after he was hit in his arm by a line drive. Almonte was not injured, Black said.

Up next: Rockies at Mariners, Peoria Sports Complex, 6:40 p.m. AT&T TV. Rockies RHP German Marquez is scheduled for three innings against Seattle RHP Mike Leake.

Jeff Hoffman's shoulder injury is threatening his chances; Bryan Shaw debuts on the mound for Rockies
"We need to let this quiet down," Colorado manager Bud Black said.

By Nick Groke / Denver Post | Mar. 5th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Jeff Hoffman escaped serious damage to his shoulder, the Rockies right-hander hopes, but his chances of making the club's opening day roster are becoming slim.

Hoffman on Sunday was scratched from a scheduled appearance in Tempe but his shoulder was wrapped again Monday and the Rockies said they will keep him out of games for 7-10 days.

"We need to let this quiet down," Colorado manager Bud Black said. "It's a little bit of a frustrating point for Jeff and for us."

The Rockies are calling his injury shoulder soreness. Hoffman said Monday: "I don't think it's that serious."

But the Rockies are handling him carefully. A 10-day lay-off will likely require Hoffman to build back into shape from scratch. A mid-March return would might put him too far behind to find a spot on the opening day roster.

"We'll have him on a slow program the next couple of days," Black said.

Cut it out. The Rockies' newest set-up man debuted Monday against the Cubs as right-hander Bryan Shaw faced six batters in the fourth inning. His results were mixed — a walk and two hits, including Ian Happ's homer to center field on a 2-0 count.

Shaw was not concerned. "If you look at my trend, I don't tend to focus too heavily on results in spring," he said. "I think I have a 12.00 career spring training ERA."

Actually, it was 6.09 before this season, but Shaw had a 17.61 spring ERA last season before a stellar season with Cleveland with a 3.52 ERA.

"Ball was coming out good, had good life to it," said Shaw, who signed a three-yr, \$27 million deal with the Rockies in December. "I'm just trying to figure out the exact timing and get everything dialed in."

Shaw, who relies almost exclusively on a cutter as his primary pitch, threw three sliders, in part because he forgot to tell Colorado catcher Chris Iannetta not to call for them. He plans to start mixing in off-speed pitches, primarily a slider, halfway through his Cactus League schedule.

“The first two or three outings, I try to throw all cutters,” he said. “I try not to throw any off-speed pitches because it gets me to focus on location. Throwing sim(ulated) games is one thing. But once you get a different jersey out there, it’s a different feeling.”

Desmond tweak. Outfielder Ian Desmond, who struggled to one of his worst professional seasons last year, has lowered his hands in a new batting stance. Rockies’ coaches are trying to make him more comfortable at the plate.

“It’s going to take continued work to get his timing and balance,” Black said. “But so far, how he feels with it, is very good.”

Bud Black was everything the Rockies hoped for in first year

Black and his staff have raised expectations for their second season in Colorado

By Ryan Schoppe / Purple Row | Mar. 6th, 2018

After a successful first season under the guiding hand of Bud Black, the **Colorado Rockies** are returning an intact coaching staff in 2018. While Black and his staff may have made decisions that not everyone agreed with, the end result of a playoff berth in his first year exceeded expectations.

It's tough to gauge the success of a manager in baseball. Among sabermetricians, the thought is that even the best or worst managers only win or lose their teams a handful of games over an entire season. Unlike players, there's not an easy WAR formula for managers, and even the more obvious decisions like lineup only benefit a team around one win a year if perfectly optimized. Usually the easiest, and maybe even the best, way to measure a manager is comparing their team to their expected win totals.

This is imperfect because a team can outperform expected win totals in any given year for a number of reasons. But if a team consistently outperforms their runs totals it may be due to their manager making optimal decisions in close games and allowing them to win more than their fair share of those games that usually are split 50-50 in a season.

Using those standards, Bud Black had a solid first year for the Rockies. According to Baseball Prospectus, the Rockies first, second, and third order win totals were 87.6, 84.4, and 83.2. While the Rockies were slightly below their first order win total they outperformed their second and third order by a fair amount. If they can continue to do that, we may get an idea of how much Black is helping this Rockies team.

However, considering that PECOTA projected that the Rockies would win 74 games before last season and none of the other team projection systems seemed to like them much more, the fact that the Rockies vaulted into contention despite losing 60% of their starting rotation early in the season speaks well of the Rockies coaching staff.

On the field, there were two primary areas where the coaching staff demonstrated its value. For instance, Black proved his ability to handle a pitching staff and help develop the Rockies stable of young pitchers. But he did end up giving too many plate appearance to players like **Alexi Amarista** over younger more talented players.

While the Rockies were expecting to use a young pitching staff last season, injuries to the "veterans" early in the season resulted in four of the five members of their rotation being rookies. Usually that's a good recipe for disaster, and the

general expectations for the Rockies plummeted with each injury and resulting replacement with a rookie. However, under Black, the Rockies catapulted themselves into the playoff hunt behind their rookie starters.

One other big on-field improvement for the Rockies was their lack of bunting. While they still led the league in sacrifices last season with 62, over two-thirds of them were by the pitchers. The 20 bunts by position players meant the Rockies no longer lead the National League in non-pitcher bunts, a trend that was growing increasingly worrisome under Weiss. Of those 20 bunts, only seven of them were at Coors Field, a place where it's rarely a good idea statistically to be having your position players bunt. After three consecutive seasons of giving away 15 outs at Coors Field, it was encouraging to see the improvement.

Despite changing managers last offseason, the Rockies kept their pitching brain trust of **Darren Holmes** and Steve Foster intact as well as brought back third base coach Stu Cole. Mike Redmond, Tony Diaz and the two-headed hitting coach Duane Espy and **Jeff Salazar** were brought in as new coaches with Bud Black. If it's hard to judge the impact of a manager, it's even harder to judge the impact of individual coaches, so the fact that they all returned to the team this year is probably the biggest statement about their performance.

MLB should experiment with in-game headset use

The technology is available, so let's try it out.

By Ryan Schoppe / Purple Row | Mar. 6th, 2018

Bud Black thinks baseball should adopt headsets, and so do I.

Let me add that the possibilities of the person who gets to speak (the manager? the catcher? the pitcher?) and the person who gets to listen (the catcher? the hitter?) are intriguing.

While Major League Baseball examines **pace-of-play issues**, Black has opposed implementing a pitch clock and other recommendations that he sees as affecting the strategy of the game (see **here** and **here**). But he's more open to headsets.

As **he said** in April 2017, "Headsets . . . like the NFL. That's coming, and I don't see why it shouldn't come."

In arguing for this, he's following the lead of former Yankee's manager Joe Girardi, who's long **urged their adoption**. "I'm a big proponent of trying to introduce some type of communication through headphones. Like they do in the NFL," Girardi says. "I think you could speed the game up that way in certain instances."

This makes sense. As MLB.com's Anthony Castrovince **writes**, "The baseball industry is in the midst of a wide-ranging conversation about how to improve the pace of play. It is also waist deep in an information revolution, in which data is impacting the in-game blueprint like never before." Moreover, Commissioner Rob Manfred tends to be **tech friendly**.

Think of last year's **Apple Watch cheating incident** when the **Red Sox** played the **Yankees**. Technology is difficult to regulate, and it's not going away, so it makes sense that headsets would be part of this conversation. With that in mind, consider how headsets have been used in sports and their possibilities for baseball.

Background: The NFL and NCAA Baseball

Since 1994, professional football has used headsets that allow the coach to communicate with the quarterback through helmet radios. In 2008, this was expanded to include one defensive player per team. (Here's a nice **video history/explainer** from SBN Studios.) In short, the use of headsets clarified communication and helped speed up the game.

As it turns out, NCAA baseball, where the manager generally calls all the pitches, has been exploring the use of headsets. In January 2017, Teddy Cahill **reported** on The **American Baseball Coaches Association's Pace of Play Committee**, led by **Vanderbilt** coach **Tim Corbin**. The implementation of headsets is a primary topic of discussion.

Currently, **Coastal Carolina** and the **University of Georgia** use headsets to improve teaching because this technology allows coaches to talk to players during practice while events are unfolding rather than waiting to review video.

There are possibilities beyond teaching, however. Cahill notes:

Eventually, however, the technology could also be used to speed up games. An average of about 300 pitches are thrown every game and, in college, most coaches call the pitches from the bench. Relaying signals to their catchers takes time, which could be reduced with a headset. If a headset shaves even three seconds off the average time between pitches that would cut a total of 15 minutes off the length of a game.

That strikes me as something worth considering.

The Possibilities for Headsets in MLB

At this point, it's not even clear how MLB would use headsets, but here are three possible scenarios.

The Manager Communicates with the Catcher

Given that the catcher directs so much of what happens in baseball, this arrangement makes sense. Moreover, adding a headset to the catcher's helmet would probably be less distracting. The receiver would be positioned close to the catcher's ear, so neither the hitter nor the umpire could hear.

Bud Black **favors this approach**: "Instead of a catcher or a bench coach going through [various signs] to throw over to first or call for a pitchout, you'd just go, 'Pitchout,' and he hears you . . . I wouldn't push back on that, because that's strategic stuff. And with all the information we're getting, it might make sense to think hard about that one."

The Manager Communicates with the Hitter

This is Joe Girardi's **preferred arrangement**: "You could put [receiving devices], realistically, in your hitters' helmets . . . and you could say what you wanted and then it's not a sign from me, a sign to the third-base coach and then a sign to the player."

A criticism of this approach is that it would interrupt the hitter's concentration. And as with any new approach to the game, getting player buy-in is important.

The Catcher Communicates with the Pitcher

Kunj Shah quotes **Bless You Boys'** Cody Warner with this interesting possibility:

"Also could actually shift the majority of game calling from the catcher to the pitcher. You don't want the catcher telling the pitcher which pitch to throw, verbally. Not with the batter standing right there. So the pitcher would cover his mouth, say what he wants to throw, and the catcher would confirm with a nod or shakeoff. Opposite of the current system."

Honestly, I'm intrigued by the possibilities.

Pace of Play

Each of these is far from implementation, if not consideration. An endorsement of headset use may be found in their ability to speed up the game, which we know is an MBL priority. As Dave Sheinin **writes**:

The idea makes plenty of sense for baseball. Not only would it eliminate the elaborate schemes to steal the opposing catcher's signs by visual measures — which, as Girardi acknowledged, pretty much every team in baseball undertakes, with or without the use of technology — but it could also have the secondary effect of improving the sport's worsening pace-of-play and time-of-game issues, one of Manfred's most passionate crusades.

On the negative side, the players would need to approve this kind of change, and **Anthony Castrovine's reporting** suggests there's not much interest.

I've written **in favor of pitch clocks**, and I'm all for trying out headsets, which would address pace-of-play issues without being as visibly invasive as a pitch clock. MLB can use the minor-leagues as a laboratory for in-game headset use to see what comes of it. The technology is available. Let's use it.

Colorado Rockies should follow Nolan Arenado's mindset

By Olivia Greene / Rox Pile | Mar. 6th, 2018

No days off is the term that should be used when describing Rockies third basemen Nolan Arenado. Whether in baseball or other aspects of life it's a good mindset to have. With a team like this it should be plastered all over the clubhouse.

I've never seen a man that has been more passionate not only about bettering himself, but the team as a whole and his teammates than Arenado. This man never stops and most likely won't stop until he gets his goals accomplished. As of now, this should be exactly how the Rockies should feel. It's 2018 they're still fresh off a Wild Card loss that they fought hard to get to. Now where does that leave them?

As of now, everyone's minds are on these Spring Training games and all the battles that will happen over the course of March. That's fine and dandy, but I'm eager to see the regular season games as our Kevin Henry talked about how they have some **tough road games** coming up. Even though there are many young guys, this will be a true test of how this team works well together to obtain a common goal.

In order for them to reach that goal of winning, they should look to teammate Arenado for advise. If you have all these young guys playing their hearts out, like Nolan Arenado does, this team could do something big, which is what they're after: something big, something glorious, the World Series.

If you follow Nolan throughout the past few years, you have to notice that while watching a Rockies game, no matter what day, you're most likely going to see him in the hot corner. This is because he doesn't like sitting out. Over the past three years, the least amount of games he's been in for a season was in 2015, which was 157. There's only 162 in one season, so I'd say he's doing pretty good for himself.

Now, I'm not saying for these guys to win it all that they all have to play in almost every single game. I'm saying they should have the drive to want to get in and play their hardest to win. The Rockies have a good looking team... on paper, but they need to be good looking as well on the field itself.

The Rockies have got to be as passionate as Nolan Arenado in order to really feel the need to keep going after tough losses, to keep going after getting swept, and to keep going after being in a multi-game losing streak. I know everyone remembers when Nolan was in the dugout yelling in the dugout to former Rockies catcher **Nick Hundley**, it was a chilling moment to watch.

Final Thoughts

Last season during the Wild Card we all saw the drive to win in the Rockies. Perhaps they need that early on in April or later in July after the All-Star break, either way it's this mentality that can get them to another Wild Card game or even the NLDS. Taking after Nolan Arenado may be the best thing the Rockies could do.

To have someone as passionate and with so much tenacity as Arenado is the type of vibe that's needed in a clubhouse.

Having multiple players with the same agenda as him will get and hopefully keep the Rockies on top.

Colorado Rockies: Let's talk about Ryan McMahon

By Olivia Greene / Rox Pile | Mar. 6th, 2018

As we get closer and closer to the start of the regular season, it's just now starting to sink in for me that Ryan McMahon will be the Colorado Rockies starting first baseman. Yes, it's been hard for me to wrap that around my head even though I knew it'd be inevitable. So, with that being said, I think it's time we have a chat about Ryan McMahon.

I remember like it was yesterday, **Mark Reynolds** had made a large impact to the Rockies organization. He helped the Rockies playoff push and cemented his name along with **Charlie Blackmon** and **Nolan Arenado** in the home run column. For someone with low expectations, he surpassed them.

I honestly thought that Mark Reynolds would get an offer from the Rox, but nothing has come to fruition. I even blamed it on the market itself and cursed **Scott Boras** for his ways, but that didn't seem to be it either. It wasn't until yesterday when I read my colleague, Kevin Henry's article about how **Reynolds never had any type of offer**. This was heart shattering, I had serious hope that Jeff Bridich would offer him a contract, but no dice.

Since that is, now we have Ryan McMahon, the 23-year-old that the front office and coaching staff believe will impact the 2018 season. Now, in no way am I saying that McMahon can't meet expectations but, in my opinion, it's a little unsound as of now. I'm sure as the season progresses I'll come around, but you can't blame me for being cautious.

Last season, Ryan McMahon only got to play in 17 games with 24 plate appearances. This isn't the best sample size to look at, though I'd like to keep it in consideration. During that time, McMahon had 3 hits in 19 at-bats and 5 walks. Down in Scottsdale, he's proving himself with currently having a .500 batting average. That comes from the 7 hits and 3 RBI it's pretty good for just 14 at-bats.

These are good for now and they give a limited prediction on how he'll do this season. I want to get on the McMahon train, but I'm just not seeing all the hype right now. I'm enthusiastic about the youth movement... in the outfield, not as much at first base. I just had high hopes that the Rockies would want a veteran at first. However, since they went **all in on the bullpen**, it was probably out of the question as soon as those deals were inked.

Final Thoughts

In the end, I guess it's time that I get on the McMahon train. I'm still prudent about the whole idea in general. In my mind, I think about every possible outcome that comes with putting Ryan McMahon.

One scenario is that starting McMahon will pan out and all will be well. Others are to the tune of this coming back to biting the Rockies.

Either way, the Rockies will have to deal with what happens good or bad, hopefully good.

Colorado Rockies: David Dahl talks progress, spring attitude

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | Mar. 6th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE — It was spring training last season when David Dahl's career with the Colorado Rockies not only hit a speedbump, but took a complete detour as well. Now, one year removed from the rib injury that cost him the entire Major League season in 2017, Dahl is pushing to not only get his swing back but also reclaim his spot in the Colorado lineup.

In January, Dahl swung a bat for the first time since July 31, a minor league game that was as far as he progressed last season after suffering a stress reaction injury in his rib after just two 2017 spring training games. It's been a long road back for Dahl but says he is starting to feel more at ease in the box every day.

"It's coming around. It's about timing and pitch recognition," Dahl said in an exclusive interview with Rox Pile. "It's hard to put a timetable on it. It's about when my body gets in synch with the pitcher and start recognizing everything."

Dahl burst onto the scene with the Rockies in 2016, hitting .315 in 222 at-bats. That included seven home runs, 24 RBI and **a record-tying rookie hit streak**. It seems strange after seeing those stats, but the injury now has Dahl working to make the Opening Day roster in 2018.

His goals for spring, Dahl said, were simple.

"Showing that I'm healthy and that I have no issues. Of course, everyone's goal is to make the team. I just wanted to get back into it again," Dahl smiled.

The 23-year-old Dahl knows he is competing for a roster spot against players such as **Raimel Tapia** and **Mike Tauchman**, both players who saw in the time in the Rockies outfield last season while Dahl was shelved. Dahl now joins them trying to make a good impression on the Rockies staff this spring.

As a note, Colorado manager **Bud Black** has never managed Dahl in a Major League game, or had the opportunity to do so. That means Dahl must prove himself all over again. However, he is taking the competition and opportunity in stride.

"We have a lot of really good players competing for jobs," Dahl said. "I try to not worry too much about it. I just want to go out every day and do what I need to do to get better. Whatever happens, happens."

Colorado Rockies: Charlie Blackmon reveals his baseball nightmare

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | Mar. 6th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE — In an exclusive chat with me on Monday morning at the Colorado Rockies spring training facility, All-Star Charlie Blackmon admitted that he does have a nightmare when it comes to baseball. No, it probably is not one you would guess ... and it might even be similar to one you have had in the past.

Blackmon has been a nightmare for Rockies opponents for years now. Last season, he put together a historic campaign from the leadoff position, posting a career-high 37 home runs and 104 RBI while posting a slash line of .331/.399/.601 and an OPS of 1.000.

His season **placed him fifth in last year's MVP voting**, one spot behind teammate **Nolan Arenado**. This spring, Colorado manager **Bud Black** has experimented with a lineup that has Blackmon hitting third, one spot ahead of Arenado.

So what is Blackmon's nightmare? It has nothing to do with batting or fielding, the All-Star center fielder said.

"You might think it's striking out with the bases loaded," Blackmon smiled. "Honestly, I'm supposed to be on deck and I can't find my equipment. And then the guy who is hitting makes an out on the first pitch and I can't find my bat and my batting gloves and my shin guard and my helmet. Everyone is waiting for me to get in the box. Just being unprepared, it's like the 'missing your college final exam.' It's the baseball version of that."

While Blackmon said it may be a nightmare, it's also not one that haunts him every night. It certainly hasn't become more prominent since all of this talk about him moving down in the lineup has taken center stage this spring, he said.

"It's funny. I think about baseball a lot but rarely dream it," Blackmon said.

If you have watched any Rockies games and Blackmon's pre-hitting ritual, you know he is always out early to gauge the pitcher and take a few swings. He is always prepared so the nightmare hasn't happened ... yet.