



MEDIA CLIPS – March 11, 2018

Converted catcher Wolters putting in the work

Former infielder brings athleticism, desire to learn behind plate for Rockies

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Mar. 10th, 2018

PHOENIX -- Sometimes, **Tony Wolters** doesn't play much like a catcher, which is often good for the Rockies.

Wolters converted from the middle infield while in the Indians' organization. And although he has been a catcher -- at times the regular -- for the Rockies the past two seasons, it's clear he hasn't totally left the infield behind. Sure, Wolters realizes he must continue the years-long process of mastering the position's nuances.

But under game speed, old habits work to his advantage. When runners attempt to steal, his footwork, exchanges and arm angles often make him look like a second baseman in catcher's gear. And as the Giants learned last April 16, all that equipment can't stop him from contorting to **make a big defensive play**.

"It's not a standard position -- every catcher is different," Wolters said. "I played infield my whole life. I still think throwing to second, throwing to third, it feels like turning a double play. I don't want to lose that feeling. I try to not think about it."

In 77 defensive games last season, Wolters threw out 38.9 percent of the runners who tried to steal against him -- sixth-best in the National League. This spring, Wolters is trying to hold off a challenge from rookie **Tom Murphy** for playing time alongside veteran **Chris Iannetta**. The pure athletic ability that led the Indians to draft him in the third round in 2010 and enticed the Rockies to claim him off waivers before the 2016 season is his calling card.

Last season, Wolters led the Rockies with 66 starts. With then-new manager Bud Black operating as a harsh judge of calling pitches and bench coach/catching instructor Mike Redmond giving him a crash course on preferred techniques, along with being a second-year catcher calling games for a starting rotation that often included four rookies, there was

adventure. The stress showed in his batting average, which dropped from above .300 into June -- his early work in the No. 1 hole was partly responsible for **Charlie Blackmon's** eventual Major League record 103 leadoff RBIs -- to a final .240.

Wolters saw his playing time reduced when the club acquired **Jonathan Lucroy** (nearing deal the Athletics) at the non-waiver Trade Deadline.

The Rockies signed Iannetta for two years and \$8.5 million, but continue to develop Wolters. He receives high marks for communicating with and encouraging his pitchers, and is getting next-level instruction on pitch-calling.

"He's doing better; it doesn't happen overnight," Black said. "Growth and maturity take time. Tony, for me, from last year to this year, has made strides.

"They [catchers] have a lot going on. They have to answer to me. They have to answer to the catching coach, pitching coach, 13 pitchers, the hitting coach."

But there is give and take, with the Rockies not wanting to douse his inner athlete and Wolters realizing that some by-the-book techniques will serve him well as the years pass and the physical demands of catching take their toll.

"He gets the ball out of his glove, he gets it down to second, he's accurate and the release times are good," Black said.

"Will you teach it how Tony does? Maybe not. But Tony and Mike are working on some traditional catching principles that will help him over time."

Dahl, Tapia praise CarGo for his guidance

Gonzalez has helped young outfielders learn the big league ropes

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Mar. 10th, 2018

PHOENIX -- Rockies left-handed-hitting outfielders **David Dahl** and **Raimel Tapia** have more than Major League-quality tools and Minor League accomplishments in common. They have the blessing of **Carlos Gonzalez**.

When each received his first Major League callup in 2016, and during Tapia's six trips up from Triple-A Albuquerque last season, Gonzalez was there encouraging them.

Of course, Gonzalez has made making the 2018 Opening Day a little harder for both. Gonzalez was at the Rockies' complex Saturday taking a physical necessary to complete the one-year deal **he agreed to Friday**. But they have the same response to the mention of CarGo: They smile.

"He helped me when I came up, told me to be myself and eased me in," Dahl said. "It was very reassuring. He said I reminded him of a younger him. I thought that was pretty cool."

Tapia, who went 1-for-3 in the Rockies' 9-2 loss to the Brewers on Saturday, said Gonzalez reached out to him during his transition to right field at Coors.

"He would work with me in the outfield, say, 'You're the best. You're the best,'" Tapia said. "I am happy he is here. With CarGo here, there's more opportunity for the playoffs."

Tapia gained experience in a bench role last year, often pinch-hitting and pinch-running. After a slow start, he finished with a .288 overall average and .329 on-base percentage, plus five steals, in 70 games. Tapia came off the bench in the National League Wild Card Game.

Mike Tauchman, another lefty hitter, also filled that role late last season with the Rockies. Others whose talents could be of use are right-handed-hitting outfielder **Noel Cuevas** and lefty-hitting outfielder-first baseman **Jordan Patterson**.

Although Tapia was a regular in the Minors, he doesn't mind the bench role if available.

"I'm ready for pinch-hit, run the base or for defense, because I have confidence and I'm working hard," Tapia said.

Dahl was the team's top pick in 2012, and has been groomed to bring power and speed to the lineup. He said he anticipated being sent to Triple-A for regular time, although he demonstrated off-the-bench skill with a seventh-inning, two-run triple on Saturday.

After an 0-for-15 Cactus League start, Dahl has gone 8-for-23 (.348) with three homers over his past eight games.

"I don't know if that's what they want me to do; starting or probably going to Triple-A is my guess," said Dahl, who hit a two-run homer Friday. "But I can do what they want me to do.

"My swing feels a lot closer. I'm swinging at better pitches and taking some of the borderline ones."

Looks aren't always deceiving

Just one of the four runs the Brewers scored in three innings off lefty starter **Tyler Anderson** was earned. But Anderson, who gave up five hits, acknowledged he didn't pitch well. Shortstop **Brendan Rodgers'** error helped increase the first-inning pitch count to the high 30s. Then Anderson was back on the mound after a quick top of the second.

"It was like going out for a jog and trying to run five or six miles, when you only meant to run one," he said. "I made a lot of bad pitches that were up, and it's a pretty good offense. Sometimes there were flares that found spots, some were barrels that found spots."

Back to the lab

The Rockies sent seven players, mostly prospects, to Minor League camp: righty pitchers **Peter Lambert** (the organization's No. 5 prospect, **according to MLB Pipeline**), **Jesus Tinoco** (No. 14) and **Zach Jemiola**, catchers **Dom Nunez** (No. 22) and **Chris Rabago**, and outfielders **Sam Hilliard** (No. 12) and **Yonathan Daza** (No. 20).

Injury update

Righty reliever **Carlos Estevez**, who has been limited to one appearance because of a left oblique injury, threw 15 fastballs Friday -- his first session off the mound since the injury.

Up next

Outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, who underwent right hand surgery on Feb. 9 for a broken hamate bone, is set for his Spring Training debut on Sunday against the Dodgers at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick at 2:10 p.m. MT. Righty **German Marquez** will start. The game can be seen on **MLB.TV** or heard on **Gameday Audio**.

If even Charlie Blackmon can get lost in the stats, what do players think of MLB's numbers game?

"I don't really care about numbers," Ian Desmond said. "Wins are all that matter."

By NICK GROKE | ngroke@denverpost.com and PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

March 10, 2018 at 4:00 pm

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — From the third deck at Coors Field, Charlie Blackmon can look like a pin dot, dwarfed by his surroundings. He is a large center fielder, standing 6-foot-3 and 210 pounds, but within the nearly 3 acres of fair territory, Blackmon fades into the greenbelt.

He is even more lost in the numbers. Blackmon was an all-star and MVP candidate in the National League last year, his best season since breaking through to the majors in 2011 and one of the best in recent memory by a center fielder not named Mike Trout.

But some advance statistics aren't kind to Blackmon.

"That's why I stopped caring," he said.

Baseball is in the midst of the so-called Statcast Era, where high-resolution cameras and radar equipment in the stadiums track everything from player movement to the speed of a hit off the bat to the number of rotations in a curveball. Batting average and home runs are now spoken of with the same reverence as spin rate and launch angle. An alphabet soup of statistics such as xFIP and wOBA and wRC+ and SIERA have crept into casual lingo. They are flashed on screen during TV broadcasts and used to explain the game in a new way.

Advanced stats have given fans an entirely new perspective. The players, though, see those numbers from their own angle. Within their world, some stats are interesting and some are all but useless.

Take, for example, defensive statistics. Blackmon committed just four errors in 158 games last year, an impressive number in a traditional way to measure how well someone plays defense. He also ranked 11th, or below average, among center fielders in UZR (ultimate zone rating, which tries to quantify how many runs a defender saves or costs). Do either of those stats tell the story of his ability as a center fielder? What about route efficiency, one of the new numbers that measures his path and speed to flyballs?

"I think I'm a good defender," Blackmon said. "You can ask the guys on my team if I'm a good defender and they might tell you something different. But my defense doesn't necessarily match up with what some of what the metrics say."

The value of a catcher defensively has long been poorly understood. If he blocks a pitch in the dirt, you can say kudos. But what about the strike he stole by framing a pitch on the outside corner? And what about his psychological impact on a pitcher?

"Some of that is intangible," said Rockies catcher Chris Iannetta. "Maybe you had a conversation with a guy that changed his mentality and then he pitched a great game. Or another guy gets a hit in a certain situation, and maybe you helped him relax. You can't put that on a stat sheet."

That's not to say Iannetta dismisses the new statistics for catchers. He is not a stick in the mud. He is intimately aware of pitch-framing numbers and what they intend to illustrate. And he knows exactly how his ability to frame a pitch can affect a game. He just doesn't trust how the number is calculated.

"I'm not sold on the pitch-framing stat yet, just because it whipsaws year to year," he said. "There are so many pitches that you catch, there is no way they change that much, year to year. There is so much static, and so much subjectivity there, it's tough to quantify. I'm not sold on it as a measure of what we do back there."

Adam Ottavino is the Rockies' most metrically-inclined pitcher, a cerebral student of the numbers that help denote even minor differences from one pitcher to the next. He sees an ocean of difference between a slider and a slurve and he could easily find a post-playing career writing for Fangraphs with his grasp of the spin axis and "fielding independent pitching." He separates advanced stats into two groups. First, numbers a player can study after a season to judge their overall picture. That's where FIP (it tries to measure everything a pitcher did that did not need help from a fielder) and WPA (win probability added, a calculation of win expectancy) comes in. Second, stats he uses to help make himself better during a season.

"And then the only thing I really care about is walks," Ottavino said. "Because I know that if my walk total is good, then everything else will take care of itself."

Some players disregard just about any statistic.

“Wins. Wins are all that matter,” Ian Desmond said. “I don’t really care about numbers. If you win, that’s all that matters. If you win the World Series at the end of the year, who cares what your batting average was? Or your BABIP or anything else. The ultimate goal is to win the World Series, right? So wins are all that matter.”

Some players transcend the numbers. Third baseman Nolan Arenado passes the eye test and the stats exam. He was among the National League leaders last year in weighted on-base average (wOBA) and oohs and aaahs. Numbers can help us dive deep into some intricacies of the game, but they are not always necessary to appreciate what you see.

“He’s not sneaking up on you,” Blackmon said. “I’m sure every scouting report says, ‘Don’t let Nolan Arenado beat you.’ ”

Saunders: Rockies broadcaster Jerry Schemmel rides for veterans in inspiring film
Paws for Purple Hearts teaches veterans to train service dogs for other injured comrades
By PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
PUBLISHED: March 10, 2018 at 4:00 pm | UPDATED: March 10, 2018 at 4:30 pm

I just finished watching a documentary entitled "Ride: One Man's Venture for Veterans." Now I'm struggling to put into words how moved I was by this 48-minute film. But I'm determined to do it justice, because it's important.

"Ride," directed by Doug Hanes, is a simple story. It follows Jerry Schemmel's 468-mile bike ride last summer on U.S. Route 50, from the Colorado border near Grand Junction to the Kansas border. Schemmel hoped to beat the record time for the grueling ride. Spoiler alert: he misses the 32-hour, 9-minute mark by about an hour.

That doesn't matter. What does matter is why Schemmel, the voice of the Rockies on KOA radio since 2010, peddled night and day, and night and day again, to raise money for Paws for Purple Hearts. It's an organization that teaches veterans to train service dogs for other injured comrades. The organization's motto is "Warriors Helping Warriors."

"So far, we've raised \$260,000," Schemmel told me. "I'm amazed. I never dreamed we would raise that much."

Hopefully, this column can help raise a little more.

Schemmel, for those of you who don't know, survived the crash of United Airlines flight 232 on July 19, 1989 in Sioux City, Iowa. Of the 296 people on board, 112 perished, but Schemmel escaped the burning jet, reentered the wreckage and rescued an 11-month-old baby girl.

The plane crash shook Schemmel to the core and changed him forever. He battled through all stages of post traumatic stress disorder, including survivor's guilt. In the end, he discovered his personal relationship with God, and it's been his quest, ever since, to help others.

Schemmel's late father, Bill, who died in 2011, was a medic who served in Europe during World War II. Father and son shared a bond of wounded souls.

"My dad saw a lot of stuff," Schemmel said. "He was a man of few words, but what he said mattered to me."

In one of the most poignant moments of the documentary, Schemmel recalled how his dad helped him begin living again after Sioux City.

“You know what Jerry? You just need to keep moving,” Schemmel recalled, emotion swimming in his eyes. “I thought, ‘That’s pretty good advice from dad, maybe some of the best advice I’ve ever gotten.’”

“It means you don’t sit around and wallow in self-pity, which I did. You don’t sit around and watch TV and hope things get better, which I did. You take action. You get up out of that chair and do something. And like dad said, ‘You must keep moving.’ It might lead to something else. For me, it meant getting back on a bike and just start riding, and I never really looked back.”

The thread of the documentary follows Schemmel’s journey through small towns like Delta, over 11,312-foot Monarch Pass and down onto the Eastern Plains. Interspersed in the film are segments exploring the work of Paws for Purple Hearts. A heartrending moment describes a scene at Arlington National Cemetery where an Iraq War veteran named Greg Sipple recalls watching another vet, a man slipping toward suicide, come back to life because of the love of Patsy, a nine-month-old golden retriever.

“I could see in his eyes that his soul had returned,” Sipple says. “He was no longer despondent. ... A nine-month-old golden retriever changed his life.”

If you would like to watch “Ride: One Man’s Venture for Veterans,” it’s available on YouTube. If you want to contribute to Paws for Purple Hearts, please visit the website.

Trevor Story, aggressive but more selective, has been the big hit of Rockies' spring
Carlos Gonzalez appears at Salt River Fields, contract nearing completion
By PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
March 10, 2018 at 4:44 pm

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — There have been a number of encouraging signs for the Rockies this spring training: right-hander German Marquez's stuff and demeanor; outfield prospect Michael Tauchman's power; and righty reliever Jairo Diaz's white-hot fastball.

But nobody is having a better spring than shortstop Trevor Story, and if he can carry that into the regular season, Colorado's lineup will become substantially more dangerous.

"I'm happy with where I'm at in the box right now. I feel comfortable and I feel aggressive," said Story, who's batting .471 (8-for-17) with four doubles, two triples, a homer and a 1.118 OPS (on base, plus slugging). "I worked hard this offseason on my swing and I think it's in a good place. I felt good at the end of last season, and I wanted to keep that going."

Story finished the 2017 season batting .239 with 24 home runs and 82 RBIs, but he came on strong as the Rockies made a run to the postseason. In his final 23 games, Story hit .302 with five homers, eight doubles, two triples and 18 RBIs.

Cactus League statistics, however, can deceive. But in Story's case, there appears to be truth behind the gaudy numbers.

"The at-bats look very similar to what we saw (toward the end) of last season," manager Bud Black said Saturday. "By that I mean, controlling the strike zone, and the approach, depending on the situation."

Last season, Story led the National League with 191 strikeouts, the most in franchise history, and whiffed 38 percent of the time. In this spring's small sample size, he's struck out five times (29 percent) with four walks.

"I always want to be aggressive up at the plate, because it puts me in the right mind-set to select pitches," Story said. "The key is to drive the pitches I want and lay off the others. I feel like, for the most part, I'm doing that right now."

CarGo update. All-star outfielder Carlos Gonzalez was at the Rockies' spring training complex Saturday morning to take his physical. Gonzalez and the Rockies have agreed to terms on a one-year, \$8 million, free-agent contract, a major-league source confirmed. The contract contains no options, but there will be performance incentives tied into the deal. The Rockies could officially announce the deal Sunday, but there is no timetable as to when Gonzalez might play in a Cactus League game.

Tinoco's time. The Rockies cleaned out their big-league clubhouse Saturday, moving a number of players to the minor-league camp. Among the group was 6-foot-4, 225-pound right-hander Jesus Tinoco, who was part of the deadline trade that sent Troy Tulowitzki to Toronto in 2015.

Tinoco's numbers weren't pretty — five hits, including two homers, and five earned runs allowed over 3 ⅓ innings. But Black likes the potential of the 22-year-old Venezuelan.

"He's a big guy and he's strong, so there is some potential power to his game," Black said. "I know that they have done a lot of work on his delivery, to make it consistent and repeatable."

Tinoco will likely begin the season at Double-A Hartford.

Footnotes. In other moves, the Rockies optioned right-hander Zach Jemiola to Triple-A Albuquerque, and optioned catcher Chris Rabago and outfielder Yonathan Daza to Double-A Hartford. Also, right-hander Peter Lambert, catcher Dom Nuñez and outfielder

Sam Hilliard were reassigned to minor-league camp. ... Right-handed reliever Carlos Estevez, nursing a strained left oblique, threw 15 fastballs off the mound Friday. "It felt fine, but we are taking it slow, being cautious," said Estevez, who's been limited to one appearance.

Rockies transactions: Rockies option 4, assign 3 to minor league camp

The Rockies now have 50 players in major league camp

By Eric Garcia McKinley
on March 10, 2018 10:51 am

The **Rockies** announced a few transactions Saturday morning. They have optioned the following members of the 40-man roster:

- RHP **Zach Jemiola** (Triple-A Albuquerque)
- RHP **Jesus Tinoco** (Double-A Hartford)
- C Chris Robago (Double-A Hartford)
- OF **Yonathan Daza** (Double-A Hartford)

Each of the optioned players were recent adds to the 40-man roster. Jemiola pitched six innings for the Rockies thus far, while Tinoco has pitched just 3 $\frac{1}{3}$. **Daza** has played in 13 games, but he's only gotten 19 plate appearances. Still, he's hit well in those appearances, and he looks to be a possible source of outfield depth, especially since he's just about the only right-handed outfielder the Rockies employ.

The club has additionally trimmed the number of players in major-league by assigning the following players to the minor-league side:

- RPH Peter Lambert
- C Dom Nuñez
- OF Sam Hilliard

These non-roster invitees (**and PuRPs**) will get more playing time in minor-league camp as the regulars will look to get more playing time over the next few weeks.

Colorado Rockies: CarGo's return sends signal to Nolan Arenado

by Kevin Henry 5 hours ago | RoxPile

The Colorado Rockies made news by bringing back Carlos Gonzalez on a one-year contract, a move that is expected to be official sometime today, pending the results of a physical. The move was made to not only bolster the Colorado batting order but also take a step toward showing Nolan Arenado just how serious the franchise was about not only winning but also making sure that the All-Star third baseman is happy in the Mile High City.

Keeping Arenado in purple pinstripes is important to Colorado's future as a threat to win the National League West and keep Rocktober as a reachable goal. Knowing that the soon-to-be-27-year-old Platinum and Gold Glove-winning third baseman will be free to test the free agent market when his contract expires at the end of the 2019 season is a thought that no one who cares about the Rockies wants to think about.

With that in mind, Colorado management made a move that could not only potentially benefit the Rockies this season, but also in seasons to come. Bringing back CarGo in the locker room makes Nolan happy. It's that simple. **Hey, Arenado even said as much.** And if the Rockies can put \$8 million toward making Arenado happy, it could well be the best \$8 million Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich could spend.

When spring training began, Arenado **put the word out there** that he missed CarGo's presence in the locker room. You can be sure Colorado executives were reading and listening to the subtle message presented in there: If Nolan ain't happy, it may be all of the Rockies locker room who ain't happy heading into the 2020 season without #28 sitting in there.

So yes, Carlos Gonzalez is back and that may mean less Major League at-bats this season for younger players like **Raimel Tapia, David Dahl** and **Mike Tauchman**. However, a year of further development for the next generation of Rockies could well be worth it ... if CarGo plays like September 2017 CarGo played.

Make no mistake about it, CarGo's return has more impact on the Rockies 2018 season than any statistics will ever show. Boom or bust, Carlos Gonzalez has a far-reaching presence in the clubhouse, including in the mindset of a very important piece of Colorado's future.

Report: Lucroy turned down 3-year, \$21M offer from Rockies in November
by Brandon Wile · 2d ago | The Score

Jonathan Lucroy had ambitions of signing a lucrative contract this winter, but was forced to accept a one-year deal with the Oakland Athletics on Friday after his market failed to develop.

Had Lucroy accepted the original deal presented to him by the Colorado Rockies in November, his wallet would have been a little fatter, as he reportedly rejected a three-year, \$21-million contract in November to return to Denver, according to Bob Nightengale of USA TODAY Sports.

After Lucroy declined the offer, the Rockies proceeded to sign Chris Iannetta to a two-year, \$8.5-million deal.

Despite struggling through the first part of the season with the Texas Rangers, Lucroy played well following his trade to Colorado, hitting .310/.429/.437 with two home runs and six doubles in 46 games.

Dahl the lone bright spot in Rockies 9-2 loss
By Drew Creasman | Posted on March 10, 2018 | BSN Denver

For the second game in a row—and for the second game in a row after learning of the impending signing of Carlos Gonzalez—Colorado Rockies outfielder David Dahl provided most of the offense for the team he still very much intends to make, even as early as opening day.

It was an ugly start, but Dahl has been Colorado's most consistent hitter this week. In fact, he leads the team in hits for the month of March with eight and is hitting .320 with three home runs, 11 RBI, and four runs scored over those nine games.

He was the lone RBI-man, and really the lone bright spot for the Rockies in their 8-2 loss to the Milwaukee Brewers with his two-run, seventh-inning triple.

Tyler Anderson was not-at-all sharp in the first but the defense didn't do any favors behind him. He was tagged for four runs in the first inning, though only one of them earned.

The big, admittedly odd, mistake came after the Brewers had already taken a 1-0 lead on a Ryan Braun double, Anderson was lucky it didn't leave the ballpark with how center cut the pitch was and how hard it was hit. His luck quickly reversed when Braun made a poor decision to try for third on a groundball to shortstop Brendan Rodgers, and the youngster even unleashed a pretty good throw, but Nolan Arenado lost it in the chaos at third base and it ended up going down as a costly error. Braun scored and Domingo Santana ended up at second base.

This was one of the frustrating baseball moments where Rodgers actually made the right decision and didn't have terrible execution but still got greatly punished for it. All that said, his defense has lagged behind his offense since being drafted by the Rockies and though he made some solid plays later in this game, he has shown signs this spring that we still needs some work in order to become an everyday MLB shortstop.

Manny Pina would bring in Santana on a sac fly and Jonathan Villar would drive in the fourth run on the second double Anderson surrendered in the inning before the lefty finally escaped the inning.

After giving up a leadoff single to Lorenzo Cain in the second, Anderson bounced back and sat down the next, and final, six batters he faced in order.

Once again, Yency Almonte cruised through an easy inning but ran into some trouble in his second frame, giving up two runs on three hits but striking out two. He stayed on for a third inning but continued to struggle and was pulled after tallying one more strikeout but giving up another run on a pair of hits.

The Rockies take on the Los Angeles Dodgers on Sunday at 2:10 MST. German Marquez is scheduled to pitch.

Ottavino readies another weapon in his pitching arsenal for 2018
By Afternoon Drive with Goodman & Shapiro - March 10, 2018

While boasting one of the better bullpens in baseball, Rockies' manager Bud Black will have a complex puzzle to assemble weekly as he balances newcomers Wade Davis and Jake McGee with returning players like Adam Ottavino, who looks to build on his 2017 campaign after returning from the 'Tommy John' elbow surgery that he underwent in 2016.

In an interview with Eric Goodman and Les Shapiro of Mile High Sports AM 1340 | FM 104.7 inside the clubhouse of Salt River Fields at Talking Stick, Ottavino explains how he's looking to correct some issues from his underwhelming 2017 season in which he struggled to find a groove as the season progressed and finished with a 5.06 ERA.

"I got in some bad habits last season, delivery-wise, and I fixed those and worked on some new wrinkles, pitch-wise, and re-tightened up my mental game. A number of things," Ottavino said. "You just have to practice it; [you've] got to dedicate yourself to practicing the small things, doing the dry work. I was able to repeat it for about a five-year period really well. Last year, I was repeating something that wasn't the right thing, so just got back to basics this offseason, so I think I'm in a good spot."

Ottavino says that while he's been a two-ball pitcher for the majority of his career, there's been work on a third option, and he's bettering it to catch batters off-guard.

"I've been throwing a cutter for a few years, but this year I really took the time to figure out exactly what I wanted the pitch to do, and how I wanted to hold it consistently, and I'm hoping that yields a better result with that pitch gives me a third option," Ottavino said. "It's good if I have a third option; something that they haven't seen maybe late in the count. Otherwise you get a little, it's not like predictable, but they've seen your pitches, and if you keep throwing the same ones, they have a little better shot at hitting it. Big-league hitters are really good at pattern recognition, so I try to stay out of that."

Confidence in Ryan McMahon is growing in nearly every capacity
By Afternoon Drive with Goodman & Shapiro - March 10, 2018

Ryan McMahon, the 23-year-old infielder who came up for a 'cup of coffee' last season when he registered 24 plate appearances, is a strong candidate to start the Rockies' season as the Opening Day first baseman. Rockies manager Bud Black isn't quite ready to name McMahon his starter, but the club's No. 3 overall prospect is making a strong case for himself.

McMahon joined Eric Goodman and Les Shapiro on Mile High Sports AM 1340 | FM 104.7 to discuss the upcoming season and the pressure of joining an infield that boasts seven Gold Gloves between Nolan Arenado and DJ LeMahieu.

McMahon, who came up as a third baseman, was asked if he feels comfortable over at first.

"I feel great over there now; I'd call it my first position," he said.

Playing first base is different than the other infield spots thanks to the necessity of picking low throws out of the dirt, something former Rockies Todd Helton and Mark Reynolds excelled at.

"It's just reps, hopefully [the other infielders] are getting more confidence in me," McMahon said. He exudes confidence, and it has him close to claiming the starting job.

Goodman and Shapiro asked Black for his thoughts on McMahon's progress at first base. The skipper noted that McMahon was a quarterback in high school and is an 'athletic guy,' saying he is not terribly worried about McMahon's transition across the diamond. The transition to hitting MLB pitchers, however, could be. McMahon managed just three hits in 19 at-bats with the Rockies last season, a .158 average.

Pitching at the big-league level is considerably better than in Triple-A, however, and players often struggle to make the jump up to the majors right away. McMahon, who hit .374 in 70 games at Triple-A Albuquerque last season, would regularly be facing pitchers like the Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw and the Diamondbacks' Zack Greinke — two of the best in the game — if he makes the major league roster.

"I think the best way to get those guys is do the best version of yourself. They are going to make mistakes — not a lot — but you just got to be ready for that one and make sure you don't miss it," McMahon explained.

He was also quick to point out that he needs to prepare the best he can when facing these quality pitchers: “Our team is great about that. The way that these guys prepare, I think I am going to be fine in that department.”

So far McMahon has had a fantastic spring training, hitting .368 in 38 at-bats.

“Sometimes you feel like you have to re-teach yourself to hit, so just going through it and fine-tuning some things, but feeling good and going in the right direction,” said McMahon, about his spring thus far.

Stats in spring training are sometimes misleading and can be taken out of context. However, McMahon has showed he is capable of having success over the course of a season, as he hit .355 between Double- and Triple-A last season.

The MLB season is truly a grind, with fewer off-days throughout the season than other pro sports — and even the minor leagues. Baseball players have different theories on how to manage slumps, which are inevitable. McMahon doesn't have one specific philosophy, however. “Some days your swing is feeling good and you don't need to take as many swings in the cage, and you just kind of babysit yourself, manage it throughout the season,” he said.