



MEDIA CLIPS – March 4, 2018

Dahl busts slump with second homer

Outfield candidate had been 0-for-15 prior to Friday; Davis, McGee debut

By Owen Perkins Special to MLB.com

Mar. 3rd, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- One hit doesn't necessarily count as a slump buster. But deep homers to dead center field in back-to-back at-bats? For David Dahl, who accomplished the feat Friday and Saturday, he can confidently lay his slump to rest.

Bringing an 0-for-15 spring into Friday's game against the D-backs, Dahl entered the game midway, walked in his first at-bat, then homered to center in his second at-bat. On Saturday, he was starting in center and hitting cleanup, and he launched a solo shot over the center-field fence in his first trip to the plate, giving him back-to-back round-trippers.

Dahl ended up going 1-for-3 in the Rockies' 6-5 loss to the Brewers.

"I just kind of forgot what happened last week and started a new week of games," Dahl said of his turning the corner. "Just try not to think at all, get ready to hit, have fun playing."

The decision to step back from what may have been overthinking on his part came from some advice manager Bud Black gave him before Friday's game.

"Bud told me to watch some film for the first four innings, just relax up there, pick up some things," Dahl said. "I walked out here and he said I was on deck, so it was kind of like, 'Get in the game without thinking,' and I think that really helped me get up there and walk, and I just carried that with me."

Dahl came into camp as a strong candidate for the fourth outfielder's slot. He was a favorite to start in 2017, after hitting .315 with seven homers and 24 RBIs in 63 games during his rookie season in 2016, but he ended up on the disabled list after sustaining a stress reaction in his rib cage during Spring Training.

"It was good to see another well-hit ball," Black said after Dahl's second homer. "The swings are better. It's good to see the confidence is growing after the last two days, which is always good for a player."

To Dahl's credit, he didn't let the 0-for-15 get him down, keeping his focus on the priorities he set as he competes for a roster spot.

"My body feels great as far as health, so that's a plus," Dahl said. "First and foremost, that's kind of what I wanted to see, just how my back felt, because I hadn't faced live pitching in so long, but it feels really good. It's a long Spring Training, so you just try to get as many at-bats and try to get back into it."

Back of the bullpen debuts

Set-up man Jake McGee and closer Wade Davis both made their Cactus League debuts Saturday, pitching a pair of scoreless innings to follow Kyle Freeland's three innings of three-run ball.

McGee allowed a hit and a walk while striking out one in the fourth frame, and Davis pitched a 1-2-3 fifth, using seven pitches to induce a pair of groundouts and a popout to center.

"[Davis] looked sharp -- we saw a couple different breaking balls, located the fast ball -- he looked fine," Black said. "Jake showed really good arm speed, the fastball was crisp, and he mixed in a couple breaking balls, which was great."

Davis was 4-2 with a 2.30 ERA in 2017 and converted a Cubs record 32 consecutive saves.

"[You want to] see where you're at physically, get out there, and throw some strikes," Davis said of his spring approach. "I felt really good."

Gone fishin'

Earlier in the day, Davis won the First Annual Rockies Casting Contest as part of a team with Triple-A pitcher Shane Broyles.

"Wade Davis said that he could throw a lure in somebody's mouth from a great distance," Black said. "And he ended up winning!"

Up next

The Rockies travel to Tempe to take on the Angels Sunday at 1:10 p.m. MT with right-hander Jon Gray earning his second start. Watch live on MLB.TV.

Glove Day tour makes final stop with Rockies

By Owen Perkins Special to MLB.com

Mar. 3rd, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The Rockies were the last stop on Wilson's 15-club "Glove Day" tour through the Cactus League, but judging by the constant thumping sounds throughout the training facility as players eagerly took to breaking in their new gloves, the wait was well worth it.

Glove guru Shigeaki Aso was there to meet more than a dozen Rockies players and prospects who have deals with Wilson, and he worked with each of them to fit them with a glove that fits their needs and provide insight on how best to break in and care for the gloves.

For first-base hopeful **Ryan McMahon**, he looks forward to Wilson's arrival and the comfortable feel of their mitts.

"I trust them to bring good gloves, and I usually like the 2K, so as soon as I saw it, I said, 'That's the one I'm getting,'" McMahon said.

MLB Pipeline's **No. 1 Rockies prospect, Brendan Rodgers**, took another route, asking for some custom features that would help his glove stand out the way he hopes his spring performance stands out in a crowded Colorado camp -- a bright blue infielder's glove with a couple of personal touches.

"I kind of wanted a glove out of the ordinary," Rodgers said. "I put 'Skinner Strong' on it. That's my buddy [Joe Skinner] who passed away from cancer two years ago. I have a tattoo in honor of him, so I put it on my glove. I have it on my bat. I thought it would be nice to have that."

Rodgers and Skinner grew up playing baseball together from about age 12 until his death at age 17. That kind of touch accentuates how personal a player's glove can be -- ultimately the most individualized and enduring piece of equipment they rely on every day.

"I beat on it all day, as much as I can," Rodgers said of his habits when breaking in a glove. "Catch balls with it, play catch with it, warm up, do pretty much everything I can with it."

Most of the custom requests are along those lines, essentially "cosmetic," as Aso puts it, but he constantly culls feedback from players as he works to design every professional model Wilson glove.

"For a catcher's mitt, I talked with Ivan Rodriguez, and he doesn't like a plastic piece for a thumb guard," Aso recalled. "He said we need to implement something on the catcher's mitt, so I put a special [leather] piece in. Then the thumb will not break."

In starting pitcher **Kyle Freeland's** case, the glove he wears is a family affair. He put in some custom requests, scattering in some Rockies purple highlights and having his name embroidered on the glove, but otherwise, he has a tried and true preference.

"My dad actually has an original Wilson A2000 that he'll still play catch with," Freeland said. "He turned me on to it when I was young, and I've been using it ever since. Every glove I've played with has been an A2000. I haven't had this model with this webbing. I've had the **Clayton Kershaw** one before and the trapeze webbing, but this is new to me."

Though they'll experiment with minor changes and the occasional bold cosmetic, ultimately these players keep coming back to Wilson for the familiar comfort it gives them as they approach their job.

"I'm confident with it," catcher **Tom Murphy** said of his Wilson 1790. "I always feel like I have a good chance with that glove in my hand, so it's an easy decision for me."

Valaika, O'Malley dealing with injuries

Rockies bench candidates afflicted by oblique issue, broken hand

By Owen Perkins Special to MLB.com

Mar. 3rd, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The heart of the Rockies' bench has taken a hit during the first eight days of Cactus League games, with Colorado's two most proven and versatile bench candidates -- **Pat Valaika** and **Shawn O'Malley** -- experiencing injuries that could keep them out for most of March.

Coming into spring, the four-man bench was to be anchored by Valaika, who has big league starts at first, second, third, short, and left field. Valaika has only made two Cactus League starts in the field, and manager Bud Black revealed Saturday that the utility man is suffering from an oblique strain.

"He's a little bit banged up," Black said. "He has a little bit of an oblique injury. That's why you haven't seen him in there. He's probably going to continue to be out of the lineup for the next couple weeks, at least."

If Valaika comes back in the nearside of that window, he could still position himself to make the Opening Day roster, but being down for any more than two weeks with only three plus weeks remaining in Spring Training could make it tough for him to be ready in time.

Valaika's status would have elevated O'Malley's odds of making the club as a natural infielder who has played more in the outfield during his three big league seasons than in the infield, giving the Rockies the ideal makeup in a bench player who can help at virtually any position.

However, O'Malley broke his left hand on a diving play in the third inning Friday and will undergo surgery on Tuesday with Dr. Donald Sheridan in Scottsdale to repair the fractured left metacarpal -- the middle finger bone, below the knuckle. Sheridan also performed the surgery on **Ian Desmond's** broken hand last March.

"I jumped for a ball and came down awkward on my hand," O'Malley said. "I was starting to get my legs underneath me and get comfortable. Yesterday was the first day I felt like I was starting to piece everything together. Legs and arm and everything coming around. So it's frustrating, but it is what it is. Can't change it now, just get healthy and get back out there."

Black projected at least four to six weeks for O'Malley to be back in action, with the best reasonable scenario putting him back in games in six weeks. The timing is very close to when Desmond broke his hand last year on March 12 and was activated April 30.

"He's got big league time, he's versatile, he's got a skill set that plays," Black said of O'Malley. "It's unfortunate this happens, because he's a guy we were looking at, at least to figure in some mix with us this year, whether it's Opening Day or somewhere during the regular season. He was a good player to complement the group that we have."

The pair of injuries throws the Rockies' bench competition wide open. **Raimel Tapia** and **David Dahl** have been competing for the fourth outfield position, and odds improve that they could both make the team behind a starting outfield of Desmond in left, **Charlie Blackmon** in center, and **Gerardo Parra** in right. Parra is at least a week away from returning from his own minor hand surgery.

After Valaika and O'Malley, the infield options include **Brendan Rodgers**, 21, ranked as the Rockies' **No. 1 Prospect** by MLB Pipeline. Rodgers, who was their No. 1 pick in the 2015 Draft, played at Class A Lancaster and Double-A Hartford in 2017 and hit .336 combined, earning him a spot in last year's Futures Game.

Daniel Castro, 25, is another infield candidate, having played parts of two seasons with the Braves. Castro hit .306 in 115 games at Triple-A Albuquerque last year and earned a Minor League Gold Glove.

Tony Wolters, who is competing for a backup catcher role, could see his stock rise with his potential to play the infield in a pinch. He played four games at second and one at third in 2017.

Ryan McMahon has been getting a careful look at first base as the Rockies consider him for a starting role, but he is putting in time at third in Spring Training, and appeared in four games at second and three at third for the Rockies last year.

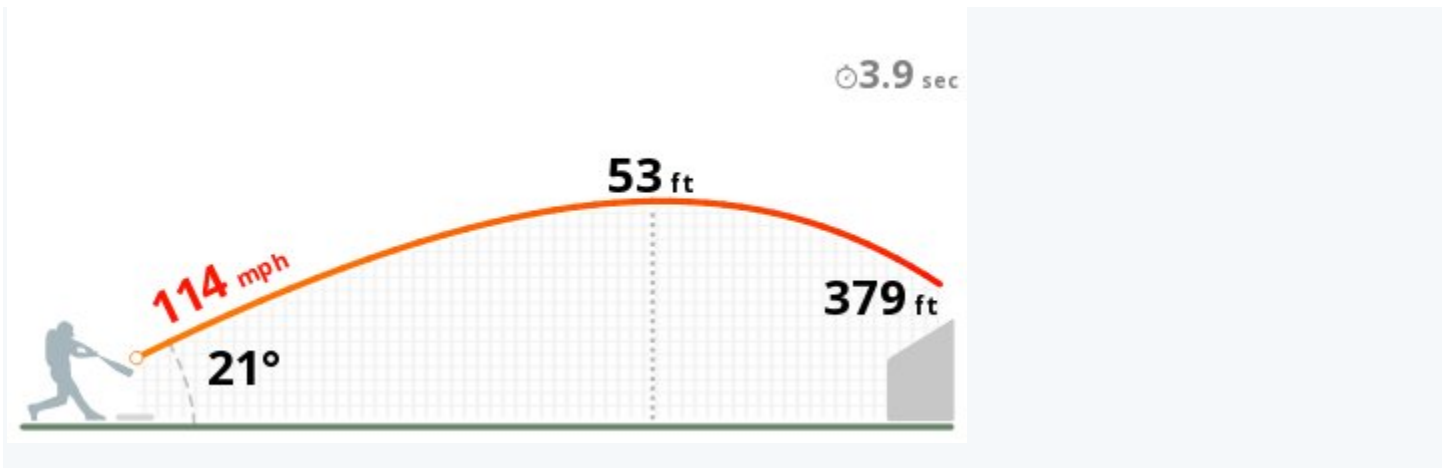
If McMahon makes the roster, he can play first and backup in the infield, with Desmond earning increased time at first -- the position he was signed to play with the Rockies. Parra has appeared in 25 big league games at first, including 20 starts.

McMahon among top prospect performers

By Jack Baer MLB.com

Mar. 3rd, 2018

• No. 41 overall prospect **Ryan McMahon** started at first base for the Rockies and went deep for his first career Spring Training home run. Currently trying to make the Opening Day lineup at first base, McMahon's homer showed an exit velocity that wasn't seen from the team even at Coors Field last year.



Rockies are suddenly searching for utility infielders after injuries to Pat Valaika and Shawn O'Malley

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

PUBLISHED: March 3, 2018 at 11:13 am | UPDATED: March 3, 2018 at 4:32 pm

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The Rockies are suddenly searching for infielders after learning Saturday a second utility man will miss the remainder of spring training.

First, Pat Valaika, Colorado's primary pinch-hitter and backup infielder last season, suffered an oblique strain a week ago and will miss 2-3 weeks, manager Bud Black said Saturday. Valaika suffered the injury swinging during batting practice.

And veteran Shawn O'Malley, the club learned, has a broken left hand that will require surgery, scheduled for Tuesday in Scottsdale. He will miss 4-6 weeks — and his shot at making the opening-day roster has ended.

"You never want to be put on the shelf," Valaika said. "I'm antsy already."

Valaika considers his injury a day-to-day predicament, he said. But his injury, a tricky ailment to diagnose and one that makes swinging a bat difficult, puts Valaika in doubt for opening day. If his timeline extends to three weeks, it would allow him only two or three Cactus League games before the Season starts on March 29.

"From what I hear, it's going well," Valaika said of his recovery. "But these things are easy to aggravate."

As a rookie in 2017, Valaika proved a valuable piece off Colorado's bench. He played five positions and was used as a designated hitter in inter-league games. He hit 13 home runs and an .817 OPS in a breakout year as a backup.

O'Malley on Friday injured his left hand diving for a ball up the middle in the third inning against Arizona. He made the stop and threw out a runner first, but he landed with his hand under his body. He was then escorted to the clubhouse with head athletic trainer Keith Dugger.

The Rockies signed O'Malley in December to a minor-league contract in part to fill the role once held by Alexi Amarista. He had played well through the early days of spring training and on Friday helped record four of the Rockies' first five outs.

"It's why we signed him. He has a skillset that plays," Black said. "It's unfortunate this happened. He was a guy we were looking at to figure in with us this year, on opening day or the regular season."

The Rockies' remaining utility infielders in spring training include Daniel Castro, who signed a minor-league deal in November after spending time with the Braves in 2017; and minor-leaguers Garrett Hampson and Brian Mundell. None of the three are on the club's 40-man roster.

Ryan McMahon, who seems on pace to start at first base, has also played at third and second. Ian Desmond, who likely is penciled in to start in the outfield, can play shortstop. And backup catcher Tony Wolters was a middle infielder before converting to backstop.

Wade Davis debuts with the Rockies by sprinting through a dominating inning

"I felt good. I felt really good," Davis said. "Hopefully in a couple outings I'm ready to compete and the season hits."

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

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Brewers 6, Rockies 5

At Salt River Fields

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Wade Davis, Colorado's new \$52 million closer, sprinted so quickly through his Rockies debut Saturday he hardly broke a sweat at Salt River Fields. So he grabbed a pair of red sneakers from his locker and went to work out afterward.

In one inning against Milwaukee, Davis threw just seven total pitches to Christian Yelich, Hernan Perez and Travis Shaw. Each was a strike in a three up, three down appearance.

"I felt good. I felt really good," Davis said. "Hopefully in a couple outings I'm ready to compete and the season hits."

Davis threw cutters, curves and fastballs, to both sides of the plate. Yelich grounded out meekly to first base. Perez's grounder to third base was back-handed by Daniel Castro for an impressive put-out. And Shaw flied out to center.

The right-hander said his goal in an initial spring appearance was to test his physical limits and throw strikes. He accomplished the latter. But he was not upset by his lack of time on the mound.

"Not really, no. That was good," Davis said. "Just keep getting better with my stuff and make sure everything is sharp."

On the mound: Left-hander Jake McGee also made his spring debut, throwing 20 pitches in a scoreless inning. But he carried a different outlook than Davis.

"Sometimes you throw less than 10 pitches and it feels like you didn't really do anything," McGee said. He gave up a hit and a walk but no other damage in the fourth.

"I want to throw a lot of strikes and fill up the zone," McGee said. "This is something to build off of."

Starter Kyle Freeland gave up three runs on five hits over three innings, the damage coming from a solo homer by Eric Thames to lead off the second inning and consecutive doubles from Keon Broxton and Yelich to open the third.

"I need to continue working on getting my fastball down in the zone," Freeland said. "I'm around the zone, filling the zone. It's just not consistent in the bottom of the zone, where I want to live."

Freeland seems likely for a rotation spot to open the season, with competition coming from Jeff Hoffman, Antonio Senzatela and German Marquez.

At the plate: Outfielder David Dahl homered in a second consecutive game, sending a fastball from right-hander Zach Davies to the center field backdrop.

"I called it," first baseman Ryan McMahon said. "I said yesterday that Dahl might start hitting three homers every game."

McMahon, too, homered, his first of the spring, to right field. The Brewers were spotting him off-speed pitches down in the zone that he flailed at at first. But "I finally got down on one," he said. "It was a good feeling."

Footnotes. Trevor Story's first home run of the spring reached the beach blankets in left field... The Brewers picked on Triple-A starter Ryan Castellani in the eighth inning, scoring three runs in a rally to victory. Tyrone Taylor started the onslaught with a solo home run to center field... Right fielder Mike Tauchman went 2-for-3... Catcher Anthonhy Bemboom homered in the sixth immediately after McMahon.

Rockies don't expect Nolan Arenado's work load to decrease

TIM BOOTH (AP Sports Writer)
The Associated Press | Mar 2, 2018, 11:54 AM

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) -- Nolan Arenado chuckled at the idea of ever taking the field every day for the Colorado Rockies and playing all 162 games.

In theory, it's possible. The reality of being the third baseman for the Rockies is something else.

"I played 160 one year. That was way too hard in Denver," he said.

Still, Arenado is bucking a trend while developing into one of the premier players in the National League. Rather than making sure he's getting days of rest built into his schedule, Arenado almost refuses to step out of the lineup. Arenado has played at least 157 games in each of the past three seasons. Only two position players league wide - Eric Hosmer and Joey Votto - have played more games than the 476 total regular-season games for Arenado during those three seasons.

It's a point of pride for the Rockies' young star, who turns 27 next month and finished fourth in the MVP voting last season. And he's doing it playing half the season at elevation where it's more difficult for the body to fully recover.

"You look around the league, you shouldn't have guys leading the league in at-bats or games played who play in Denver. It shouldn't happen," Colorado outfielder Charlie Blackmon said.

It's hard to be better than Arenado was in 2017. He had a career-best .309 batting average. He reached the 130 RBIs plateau for the third straight season and clubbed another 37 home runs. His OPS was also a career-best .959. If anything, what Arenado accomplished in 2017 validated his previous two seasons when he burst on the scene with back-to-back 40 home run seasons for the Rockies.

Over the past three seasons, Arenado is hitting a combined .297 with 120 home runs and 393 RBIs.

During this three-year run, Arenado has figured out how to keep himself in the lineup. He learned from watching former teammates Troy Tulowitzki and Carlos Gonzalez, the latter of whom he said recently he would like to see back in Colorado this season, and how they prepped for the season. Arenado figured out sitting in the ice bath wouldn't be enough and added additional recovery methods - massage, acupuncture - to his routine.

"I'm a big believer that if you're on the field long enough the numbers will be there in the end," Arenado said. "I just try and focus on taking care of myself and being ready to go every day. I never like days off. I have a guilty conscious to be honest with you. I feel guilty when I take days and stuff like that. I never want to. When I take a day I feel guilty I'm letting someone down and I don't want to be doing that."

While Arenado may feel guilty about sitting a day, Colorado manager Bud Black said the fatigue is something his staff watches closely.

"He's proven the durability and he's sort of built to play," Black said. "Some players are truly built to play and wired mentally to handle that. He's one of those players. Do we keep an eye on all our guys? Absolutely, especially where we play. But he's shown that ability to stay fresh, to stay in a good spot physically and mentally to play every day so I think the continued usage will probably be very similar to what it's been."

One of the ways Arenado stays fresh is his affinity for Wiffle ball . Arenado plays it regularly with his family in Southern California during the offseason. He's even special ordered bats from the manufacturer that he uses for the family games.

Arenado joked that maybe in his next contract - he's due to be a free agent after the 2019 season - he may put in a request for a Wiffle ball field at his house.

"You go back to your childhood a little bit. When we were kids that's what we did. We still love it now to this day," Arenado said. "It brings you back to home. That's what we do when we're home. It's a routine we've always had. We play Wiffle ball with our boys. That's what we do."

Colorado Rockies face critical road tests early with April schedule

by Kevin Henry 4 hours ago | RoxPile

If the Colorado Rockies are truly going to contend for the National League West title in 2018, as well as another postseason berth, the first full month of the season could play a big role in those hopes being fulfilled or dashed.

In April, the Rockies open the season with some of their historically toughest road tests packed into the month. The season begins with back-to-back road challenges against division foes Arizona and San Diego. Other road trips against Washington, Pittsburgh and Miami are included in the month.

Since 2010, the road trips listed above have produced some not-so-glittering records for the Rockies...

At Arizona – 26-49

At Miami/Florida – 8-20

At Pittsburgh – 10-16

At San Diego – 36-39

At Washington – 14-12

That's a total mark of 94-136 or winning percentage of .408. Colorado manager **Bud Black** will tell you that past performance does not indicate how the current team will fare. However, no matter who has been at the plate or on the mound for the Rockies when they touch down in any of the destinations listed above, it's been trouble.

That includes trips east, which saw the Rockies produce these numbers at the plate last season...

2017 at PNC Park237/.306/.299 (outscored 13-9 overall, losing two of three)

2017 at Nationals Park252/.313/.379 (outscored the Nationals 15-11, winning two of three)

2017 at Marlins Park263/.368/.354 (outscored 15-9 in a three-game sweep)

As a reference point, the Rockies produced a .273/.338/.444 split overall last season, including .248/.312/.390 away from Coors Field.

Last season, in April (26 games), the Rockies produced a slash line of .247/.310/.440. Those were their lowest numbers of any month (except for a .413 slugging percentage posted in June).

Also last season, one of the keys to Colorado's early surge to the top of the division stands was a 16-10 mark in April. Much of that was thanks to their pitching, which limited opponents to a .254/.323/.419 in 992 plate appearances. Yes, those numbers were higher than Colorado's numbers at the plate. Yes, the Rockies were actually outscored in the month, 125-119. That included a blistering at home by the Nationals when Washington posted 43 runs in the final three games at Coors Field to **win three of four games from the Rockies**, who scored 21 runs in those same final three games. Scoring 21 runs will normally win you games, but not when your opponent scores in double digits each outing.

Some of last season's April success included winning three out of four to open the season in Milwaukee, three of four in their first visit to San Francisco, splitting a two-game series in Los Angeles against the Dodgers and winning two of three at Chase Field against the Diamondbacks.

Can the Rockies repeat those road success numbers in 2018 and get off to a hot start? They will have a chance against a (yet again) rebuilding Padres team and Marlins and Pirates organizations that sent away some of their most notable players in the offseason. Finding success on the road against these teams will be important if the Rockies don't want to find themselves playing catch-up in September.

Colorado Rockies: Reliever McGee says 'pen depth is key

by Luke Mullins 22 hours ago | RoxPile

It's that time of year again. The weather's getting warmer and there's Colorado Rockies baseball on the radio. Spring training is underway and while we catch our first glimpse of the 2018 Rockies, we are also getting to hear from the players, in many cases, for the first time this year.

While the free agent market may have moved at an incredibly slow pace, the Colorado Rockies **wasted no time** in shoring up their biggest need ... the bullpen.

They spent **record-breaking** amounts of money adding veteran closer **Wade Davis**, established set-up man **Bryan Shaw**, and retaining hard-throwing lefty **Jake McGee**.

As the regular season draws nearer, they're **hoping** it pays off.

Speaking to reporters at the spring training facility at Salt River Fields in Scottsdale, Ariz., McGee said he thinks the improved bullpen is going to be an important piece of the Rockies' success in 2018.

"I think our depth in our bullpen is gonna be our biggest key," McGee said.

McGee cited the versatility of many of the pitchers in the bullpen, including himself, Davis, and Shaw as well as lefty **Mike Dunn** and the appropriately-dubbed "Swiss Army Knife," **Chris Rusin**.

Despite the talent and money packed into the bullpen, McGee said he doesn't expect manager Bud Black to change the way he uses his bullpen (for example, pulling starters earlier in games).

That mentality shows the faith the Rockies have placed in their young starting staff, which will be counted on again this year to work in tandem with the bullpen to shut down opponents' lineups.

"I think Bud's gonna try to get as many outs as possible," McGee said. "Even if, ya know, we're gonna have to go one-plus more [innings] here and there, that's fine. If the starter goes six and a third instead of six innings, like, that'll save the outs for the bullpen in the long run."

McGee said he has been working on his curveball and plans to utilize it more this season. Don't start thinking that means he's done touching the upper-90s, however.

"I'm always gonna stick with my fastball," McGee said.

Last season, McGee pitched for the United States in the World Baseball Classic during spring training, providing a very different preseason experience than the typical spring training.

With no WBC to worry about this year, McGee has been able to follow a more standard schedule in his preparation. He said the later start this year helps him better prepare for the season.

The Rockies hope this preparation will produce in-game results during the regular season.

With David Dahl's first dinger of the year, lest we forget Mike Tauchman
By Casey Light - March 3, 2018 | Mile High Sports

It took seven games and 16 at-bats, but David Dahl could finally breathe a sigh of relief. At the same time, Mike Tauchman may have had the air sucked out of his chest just a little.

With a swing on a 84-mph changeup over the heart of the plate, Dahl smoked Ryan Atkinson's offering over the center field fence at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick for his first hit of the 2018 Cactus League.

The hit was a long time coming for the left-handed-hitting outfielder who owns one significant Major League Baseball record for batting, yet did not record a big-league hit in 2017 and was looking like his first hit in Spring Training might never come.

Dahl burst onto the MLB scene in July 2016, tying Cincinnati's Chuck Aleno (1941) for the most consecutive games with a hit to start a major-league career with 17. He finished his rookie season with an impressive .315 average over 222 at-bats, compiling 23 extra-base hits and 24 RBI. The next great Colorado Rockies outfielder was ready to knock down the door to Coors Field, it seemed.

But in Spring Training 2017 an all-too familiar situation surfaced for Dahl, who had not yet turned 23. A rib injury, which turned into a back injury, derailed nearly all of his follow-up campaign to his outstanding rookie season. Dahl made just 77 at-bats last year — none at the major-league level — as he attempted to overcome a third major injury in five years. In 2013 it was a hamstring. In 2015 it was a lacerated spleen. In 2017, the stress fracture in his rib and the resulting back spasms.

Based on his even/odd injury schedule, 2018 was supposed to be a good year for Dahl. He returned to Scottsdale healthy and ready to pick up where he left off with the big club at the end of 2016 and chomping at the bit to re-join a roster that had reached the playoffs in 2017. But an 0-for-15 slump to start Cactus League play wasn't how things were supposed to go.

Meanwhile, Tauchman, another left-handed-hitting outfielder, had been going about his business with good success this spring. Tauchman was 5-for-15 entering Friday's game against the Arizona Diamondbacks, including a home run and a triple. He added another hit and took a base on balls in the Rockies' 15-6 victory, scoring twice. It has been a solid start to

the spring for the 27-year-old who is still looking to catch on with the big-league club full-time despite a career .301 average in the minors.

Tauchman finally broke through to the majors last year, appearing in 31 games for the Rockies. He compiled six hits, including a triple, and two RBI in his 27 at bats — a .222 average. He struck out 10 times in 32 trips to the plate. Not the meteoric start Dahl experienced, but nothing to be ashamed of.

Through that many at-bats in 2016, Dahl was hitting .370 with a pair of home runs and a double, though. He was just 10 games into that MLB-record 17-game hitting streak. And he was just 22 years old at the time.

Through the first week of Cactus League play in 2018, it appeared that Dahl might not yet be ready to return to the big club. The home run Friday, and a sharp RBI single in his next at-bat, assuaged some of those concerns. They also make life that much harder for Tauchman.

Tauchman and Dahl, together, create a bit of a quandary for the Colorado Rockies.

With so much in common (power-hitting lefties who can play any outfield position), both have been fighting a logjam in the outfield at the big league level, while fighting personal battles to boot. Dahl with his injuries. Tauchman the long, slow grind through the minors.

Each one has shown breakout potential.

Dahl became a Rockies darling with that superb start to his major league career. His .307 combined average in the minors, plus his 802 total bases in 386 games, suggest he could be the long-term replacement for Charlie Blackmon should the Rockies be forced to part ways with their All-Star centerfielder, either by trade or free agency at the end of the 2018 season, because they simply cannot afford to pay both Blackmon and franchise cornerstone Nolan Arenado in the years to come.

But Tauchman, too, has the potential to take over that (or any) outfield spot should Blackmon depart. He doesn't have the career power numbers in the minors as Dahl (fewer bases in 108 more games, less than half as many home runs in nearly 300 more at-bats). Yet, 2017 was a big year in Triple-A Albuquerque where he hit .331 and more than doubled his minor-league home run total with 16 for the Isotopes.

Both are fighting Raimel Tapia for Bud Black's fourth outfielder roster spot in 2018.

Tapia brings his own intriguing flair to the competition. A speedy, rangy left-hander that looks the part of a prototypical leadoff hitter. Tapia has nearly 200 MLB at-bats to his name from 2016 and '17, and won't be easily giving up his claim to that final spot on the big-league club. He's hitting .286 with three extra-base hits through the early part of Spring Training this year.

Fans flock to Tapia because of his curly, bright blond hair, wild running style, and electric smile. But despite his big personality and blazing speed, Tapia still lacks the base-stealing ability and defensive consistency that would earn him the job.

Dahl inured himself to the Rockies' faithful with that monster start of his pro career. His health has proved to be his biggest enemy in his journey to a full-time major league roster spot.

Tauchman, meanwhile, has flown mostly under the radar compared to those two. Yet, he has done more than enough to be in the mix for the Opening Day roster in 2018.

Black is expected to keep just four position players on his bench to start 2018. A utility infielder (Pat Valaika), a backup catcher (Tony Wolters), a backup outfielder (Dahl, Tauchman or Tapia), and one more utility position for a versatile infield/outfield type.

Dahl, if healthy, entered Spring Training as the presumed leader in the chase for that outfield spot. That's what a MLB-record hitting streak and .315 average in your rookie season will do for you. But his rocky start to 2018 began raising serious doubts about that. The home run and RBI single on Friday might be just what he needs to kickstart things.

Tauchman, meanwhile, now has to shine all the brighter to overshadow Dahl.

That's the nature of life on the fringe of a MLB roster, where one game and two at-bats can swing the conversation.

Rockies will continue long-term contract talks with big three, just don't expect to hear about it
By Casey Light - March 4, 2018 | Mile High Sports

Do not fret, Rockies fans.

There may not be smoke, but that doesn't mean there's no fire.

With 2018 Cactus League play well underway, most of the focus for the Colorado Rockies organization is on exceeding the 87 wins and National League Wild Card berth earned in the 2017 season. But General Manager Jeff Bridich acknowledged at Cactus League Media Day in mid-February that he and his team could be working on a trio of very pressing long-term matters, even into the season.

All of the hype and high expectations surrounding the 2018 Rockies season is tempered by the reality that this very well could be the final season Nolan Arenado, Charlie Blackmon and DJ LeMahieu are all on the field together in purple pinstripes.

Arenado is under team control through 2019, while Blackmon and LeMahieu are slated to become unrestricted free agents after this season. Blackmon and LeMahieu each signed one-year contracts this offseason to avoid arbitration, but the 2017 and 2016 batting champions, respectively, should be looking at long-term contracts in the eight- or even nine-figure range. Arenado, meanwhile, could fetch upwards of \$350 million — depending on the market — on his deal.

Bridich says that contract conversations with the team's biggest contributors will not necessarily wait until the offseason; however, he also says fans and the media shouldn't expect information regarding those conversations to be made public.

"All the guys who are coming up on free agency or soon to be over the next couple of years," Bridich told various media on Feb. 20, "as I've said before, those are conversations to be had. And we'll certainly cross those T's and dot those I's with the players, with the agents, but it will not from the club perspective be public conversation. And really, that's out of respect for the process. That's out of respect for the player. That's out of respect to the organization and the rest of the players in the organization and what our goals are and what we aim to stay focused on."

Bridich and his trio of All-Stars are presently focused on competing in a stacked National League West division that sent three teams to the playoffs in 2017. Arenado and Blackmon finished fourth and fifth in NL MVP voting last season, each picking up a Silver Slugger award to go along with Blackmon's batting title and MLB-record 103 RBI from the leadoff spot

(104 total). LeMahieu, meanwhile, earned his second career Gold Glove and hit above .300 for the third consecutive season.

The Rockies made out like bandits in 2017 paying salaries of \$11.75 million (Arenado), \$7.3 million (Blackmon) and \$4.8 million (LeMahieu) for those three. Yet the organization clearly appreciates and acknowledges their worth, and why they won't allow negotiations to become a public matter.

"It's just how I feel we should do business in this area. So, I'm not really going to comment on any sorts of these conversations over time," Bridich continued. "Publicly, I think these players know how much we respect them, how much we appreciate them. I think we've had good relationships and solid professional relationships with these guys. So, certainly they are people that we appreciate, players that we appreciate and those relationships mean that it's worthy to have these types of conversations. Apart from that, it's not going to be anything publicly that we'll comment on."

The Rockies in 2017 faced a similar situation with longtime right fielder Carlos Gonzalez. The 2010 batting champ and three-time All-Star was in a contract year, and while negotiations occurred, news of those conversations that happened during the spring did not leak to the public until August. Gonzalez struggled through the first four months of the season, hitting just .228 from April – July, and the pressure of playing for a new contract weighed heavily on the slugger. Gonzalez remains a free agent now two weeks into Spring Training.

Bridich addressed the concern about how looming contracts and contract negotiations could negatively affect a player during the season.

"Is there a concern that it could become a distraction? Sure," he said. "I think that's natural for human beings — we're all human beings involved in this, right? It can potentially be distracting."

He and his staff will be sensitive to those dangers, and put communication front and center throughout the process.

"I think that if you do get involved in certain conversations, contractual conversations, I think it's something to talk about upfront. I think you have to be on the same page as people and say, 'Look, is this something we need to talk about in terms of timeline and timeframe?' and all that kind of stuff. If you handle it that way, you're on the same page as people, you can figure it out."

Just don't expect any of the parties involved to be communicating that outwardly to the public.

There are bigger matters at hand to talk about in the short term. Matters like getting back to the playoffs and winning games once there.