



MEDIA CLIPS – Dec. 3, 2018

Baseball Hall of Fame ballots: Tracking votes for former Rockies Larry Walker and Todd Helton Walker is in his ninth of ten years of ballot eligibility; Helton is making his first appearance on the ballot this year Kyle Newman | DenverPost.com | Dec. 3, 2018

In Colorado's 26 seasons of existence, the Rockies haven't yet produced a Hall of Fame player. Whether that changes anytime soon depends on how well outfielder Larry Walker and first baseman Todd Helton do in the 2018 balloting to get into Cooperstown.

Walker (72.7 career WAR, .313 average, 383 home runs and 58.7 JAWS, which measures a player's Hall of Fame worthiness) is in his ninth of ten seasons of ballot eligibility. Meanwhile, Helton (61.2/.316/369/53.9) is in his first season of eligibility.

Each likely faces an uphill climb to induction as the bias against hitters who played their careers within the elevation of Coors Field is palpable. Walker received just 34.1 percent of the vote last year, even though the outfielder's JAWS is higher than two of the four 2018 inductees in Vladimir Guerrero (50.3) and Jim Thome (57.2).

Follow along daily with Walker and Helton's bids for baseball immortality via the Hall of Fame vote tracker, provided by renowned ballot tracker Ryan Thibodaux.

Official results of the 2018 balloting will be announced Jan. 24, with any electees inducted July 29 in Cooperstown.

As of 12/3/18 at 9:15 a.m., 3.4 percent of the estimated 412 total ballots have been revealed. To earn selection into the Hall of Fame, a player will need 309 votes this year to attain the 75 percent election requirement.

Larry Walker

9 votes (42.9%)

Todd Helton

3 votes (21.4%)

Rockies' Jon Gray channeling anger of 2018 season into high hopes for '19
Talented right-hander must slay his big-game demons
Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Dec. 2, 2018

CENTENNIAL — Jon Gray's erratic, disconcerting 2018 season left him angry.

Angry that he was left off the Rockies' postseason roster, angry at his botched attempt to help the Rockies win their first National League West title, and angry about his growing reputation as a pitcher who melts down when the heat's turned up.

But make no mistake, his ire is directed at himself. His goal this offseason is to channel that fury into something positive and rebuild himself, physically and mentally, to harness his potential.

"I feel like that's what's going to push me forward," the 27-year-old right-hander said. "(Last season) sucked. It made me hate baseball a lot. I wasn't really having fun at all.

"I'm ready to be a part of things. I feel I missed out on too much. ... I'm ready to use it as motivation to make myself bigger and stronger. I'm going to throw the damn ball 100 miles an hour again."

To that end, Gray has been pushing himself through punishing offseason workouts, four times a week, at Landow Performance in Centennial, the training facility owned by Broncos strength-and-conditioning coach Loren Landow. Gray's goal is to add 20 pounds to his 6-foot-4 frame and check into spring training at 235 pounds.

If Gray is successful in his physical — and mental — rebuild, he could team with Kyle Freeland and German Marquez to give the 2019 Rockies one of the best front-end rotations in the National League. Pitching coach Steve Foster is confident he will do so.

"Do I think Jon can get better? Absolutely," said Foster, who goes so far as to draw parallels between Gray and a young Max Scherzer, who has gone on to win three Cy Young Awards. "Do I think Jon can move past last season? Absolutely. And I expect him to. Why do I believe that? Because I believe in the person. I've seen enough and I've spent enough time with Jon to believe he's going to be great in big moments in the future."

First though, Gray must slay his demons.

The meltdowns

Gray's 2017 season ended with a 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ -inning, four-run collapse in the NL wild-card game loss at Arizona. Tabbed as Colorado's 2018 opening-day starter, he once again flopped at Chase Field, lasting just four-plus innings in an 8-2 loss to the Diamondbacks. Then came his meltdown on the final Saturday of the regular season. Gray was pummeled for five runs and seven hits in two innings in a 12-2 loss to Washington at Coors Field. The defeat ended the Rockies' nine-game winning streak, forced them into an NL West tiebreaker with the Dodgers, and ultimately kept the Rockies from winning their first division crown in their 26-season history.

Gray went 10-4 with a 3.67 ERA and a 1.296 WHIP in 20 starts in 2017, the type of numbers expected from the third overall player selected in the 2013 draft. But he took a huge step backward this past season, going 12-9 with a 5.12 ERA and getting sent down to Triple-A Albuquerque for a tuneup at mid-season.

Will Adam Ottavino be swapping purple pinstripes for navy blue ones? Yankees showing interest in free-agent reliever.

He is well aware that there are fans and media who've written him off as a pitcher whose nerve doesn't match his physical skills. He disputes that perception.

"If that's what they want to believe, they can believe it," he said. "But I'm not afraid to get my (butt) kicked. I've got my (butt) kicked 1,000 times. I'm not afraid to get it kicked 1,001 times. It's not like that.

"If I'm down, I'm (ticked) off at myself. I'm not (ticked) off at the guy who hit the homer or that the umpire missed a call, I'm mad at myself for not doing better."

Reliever Adam Ottavino, now a coveted free agent, can relate to Gray's tribulations. Ottavino was left off the Rockies' 2017 playoff roster because of his bouts of wildness and ineffectiveness. He rebounded with the best season of his career, posting a 2.43 ERA with 112 strikeouts, the most ever by a Rockies relief pitcher.

“He’s at a point where his career can go really up from here, because he’s had success and he’s had failure,” Ottavino said. “But if he can come out of the failure, and come out of it a little bit more mentally tough, and with a little more diverse skill set, he’ll succeed.

“He already has the foundation of talent that’s hard to find. That makes his floor relatively high. But in games, he needs a little bit more of what Freeland has, and Marquez has, and that’s the ability to compete and not overthink, not fight yourself so much.”

At the end of the season, Ottavino witnessed something that left him feeling positive.

“When Jon was left off the playoff roster, I could see that he was (mad) about it, but it was placed in the right direction,” Ottavino recalled. “That’s how I felt the previous year. The last thing I said to Jon when the season was over was, ‘Hey, this offseason is big for you. Come back better than ever.’ And he was very forceful and said to me, ‘You better believe it.’”

Foster, meanwhile, bristles at the mounting criticism that came with Gray’s disappointing season.

“To just selectively pull out the 2018 season and say, ‘What’s wrong with Jon Gray?’ I don’t think that’s fair to Jon Gray,” Foster said. “His 2018 was an inconsistent season. That’s the easy word for Jon’s 2018 season. But in that inconsistency, there were moments of greatness, as well as moments of not very good.”

Building back velocity

What Gray desperately needs is finding a consistency that allows him to optimize his talent.

“Honestly, I think I’m a power pitcher,” he said. “I’m a guy that wipes people out with sliders. I pitch inside. I pitch up in the zone. That’s me. But if I have the ability to do other things, like throw curves, I think that’s going to help.”

But only if he gets his act together. Gray’s pitch mix changed from 2017 to 2018, and his velocity fell off as well, according to Fangraphs. In 2018, Gray threw his four-seam fastball 49.6 percent of the time, down from 57.4 percent in 2017. His

average fastball velocity dipped from 96.4 in 2017 to 95.3. In 2017, Gray threw his slider 27.5 percent of the time at 90.1 mph, vs. 34 percent of the time at 88 mph in 2018.

Gray connects his loss of velocity to a loss of weight and strength. Because he gets so keyed up, Gray hardly eats on game days. That formula worked OK in past years. For example, on Sept. 27, 2016, when he pitched a complete game and struck out 16 San Diego hitters, he was fueled only with a protein shake, a banana and Goldfish crackers.

But that formula backfired last season when his weight dropped from 235 to 215 pounds by the end of the season.

“I was having a hard time eating,” he said. “I was working with the chef with the Rockies and we got these rice and chicken bowls that I could kind of stomach down on start days. We had some shakes and some carb drinks. But it’s hard to maintain your weight if every five days you can’t eat. It’s something I have to change.”

Following Ottavino’s lead from last offseason, Gray plans to spend a few days in January at Driveline Baseball, a high-tech training and analysis facility in Kent, Wash. While Gray does not approach pitching from an analytical and video perspective with the same fervor as Ottavino does, Gray is determined to try and figure out a few things from a mechanical standpoint.

“Jon is trying to get back to what he feels is a more powerful presence on the mound,” Ottavino said. “Their initial calling card was helping guys with their velocity. If that’s what Jon’s looking for, he’s going to get some good ideas from them.”

Yet for Gray’s rebuild to be successful, it’s going to take not only strength of body and tweaks to his mechanics, it’s going to take strength of mind.

“What Jon has to get better at is short memory,” Foster said. “The weight gain and strength is crucial, too. But the short-term memory is critical if Jon wants to use last year as a learning year.”

Gray is confident his best is yet to come.

“I know what I can do and I know it’s not going away,” he said. “I have a lot more fight left in me. I don’t feel like I’ve even come close to being the pitcher that I can be. So that’s part of the fun, really. That’s part of the mystery and I can’t wait to unravel it.”

Jon Gray vs. Max Scherzer: A common thread?

Rockies right-hander Jon Gray is coming off a difficult 2018 season, but pitching coach Steve Foster is confident Gray will rebound. Foster said a apt comparison can be made between Gray’s first four major league seasons and the early career of Washington Nationals ace Max Scherzer, who has since won three Cy Young Awards.

“Scherzer had some things to learn, too,” Foster said. “And when I look at some of the things Jon has done, and consider that he’s had to pitch half of his games at Coors Field, I’m encouraged about Jon’s future. You look at Jon’s strikeout rate and it’s very similar. And Jon’s walk rate is actually better.”

Following is a snapshot of each pitchers’ first four big-league seasons:

Max Scherzer

Year	Age	Team	Rec.	ERA	G/S	WHIP	K/9	BB/9
2008	23	Ariz.	0-4	3.05	16/7	1.23	10.6	3.4
2009	24	Ariz.	9-11	4.12	30/30	1.34	9.2	3.3
2010	25	Det.	12-11	3.50	31/30	1.25	8.5	3.2
2011	26	Det.	15-9	4.43	33/33	1.35	8.0	2.6
Totals			36-35	3.92	110/100	1.33	8.7	3.09

Jon Gray

Year	Age	Team	Rec.	ERA	G/S	WHIP	K/9	BB/9
2015	23	Colo.	0-2	5.53	9/9	1.62	8.9	3.1
2016	24	Colo.	10-10	4.61	29/29	1.26	9.9	3.2
2017	25	Colo.	10-4	3.67	20/20	1.29	9.1	2.4
2018	26	Colo.	12-9	5.12	31/31	1.35	9.6	2.7
Totals			32-25	4.65	89/89	1.33	9.5	2.8

Rockies non-tender left-hander Sam Howard; 40-man roster now at 39
Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Nov. 30, 2018

As expected, the Rockies kept their 40-man roster largely intact as Friday's non-tenure deadline came and went. The club did not offer a contract to left-handed reliever Sam Howard, making him a free agent.

The move reduced Colorado's 40-man roster to 39.

All of Colorado's arbitration-eligible players received 2019 contract offers. That list includes: third basemen Nolan Arenado; catcher Tony Wolters; right-handers Chad Bettis, Jon Gray and Scott Oberg; and left-hander Tyler Anderson. Lefty reliever Chris Rusin avoided arbitration on Thursday, agreeing to a one-year, \$1.69 million contract.

Howard, 25, pitched in four games for the Rockies in 2018, posting a 2.25 ERA over four innings.

No, Rockies pundits, Noah Syndergaard is not the answer
Luke Zahlmann | MileHighSports.com | December 1, 2018

The Major League hot stove season produces rumors and theories from well beyond the realm of possibility. Noah Syndergaard to the Colorado Rockies as part of an offseason blockbuster is just another example.

A product of the Coors Field effect, the Rockies are constantly in need of pitching, regardless of who you consult. No longer can the team outwit its opposition, rather they are being relied upon to provide a balanced roster.

Syndergaard coming to the Rockies for prospects is not the acquisition the team needs.

Dubbed "Thor" for his 6-foot-6 frame and a triple-digit fastball that dwarfs all other MLB starters, Syndergaard has become more myth than reality.

Once acclaimed for his All-Star season in 2016 in which he pitched to a 2.60 ERA in 183.2 innings, the New York Mets' right-hander has begun a descent. No, Syndergaard has not fallen to the bottom of the pack, rather his reliability has become questionable.

Last season, due to a finger injury and a bout with hand, foot and mouth disease, Syndergaard accumulated 25 starts. In those starts, he pitched to the tune of a 3.03 ERA and a career-high 1.21 WHIP. The one stat that put Syndergaard atop the National League was his pair of complete games.

In 2017, Syndergaard made only seven starts the entire year after suffering a partially torn latissimus muscle in his throwing shoulder. Spanning four years, Syndergaard has only started 86 games. For comparison, his teammate Jacob deGrom has started 117.

Syndergaard is not a bad pitcher, nor has he ever been anything less than a good to great MLB starting pitcher. Therein lies the problem.

In the current MLB landscape, finding a starter with team control for multiple years and the upside of Syndergaard is not only rare but borderline unheard of. The only name in recent memory is that of Chris Sale. Both had three years left before unrestricted free agency as well.

The former ace of the Chicago White Sox was dealt to the Boston Red Sox as part of the club's rebuilding effort. Seeking the control of young players from atop the Red Sox farm system, the franchise garnered a large haul.

Headlined by the No. 1 prospect at the time, Yoan Moncada, the White Sox also acquired three other prospects including flamethrower Michael Kopech.

Using the Sale deal as a template, with Syndergaard serving as a smaller overall piece, the Rockies clearly lack the minor league flexibility to pull off a deal.

Led by infielder Brendan Rodgers, a top-10 prospect for much of 2018, the Rockies farm system has graduated several members in recent years. Headlined by German Marquez, Kyle Freeland and David Dahl, the club's farm system has gone from elite to middle-of-the-pack, by no fault of their own.

Rendered relatively untouchable by the franchise, Rodgers would likely avoid trade talks.

Left for the Mets to choose from are Riley Pint, the Rockies' fourth-overall pick in the 2016 Draft and a slew of infield and outfield prospects headlined by Ryan McMahon and Raimel Tapia.

Pint figures to be multiple years out, but McMahon and Tapia are slated to make an impact last year, pending any free agent acquisitions. With Rockies' veterans Carlos Gonzalez and D.J. LeMahieu set to depart in free agency and Ian Desmond struggling at first, bats are in demand for the club.

A package for Syndergaard would likely require the inclusion of Pint, along with a bat like McMahon and likely a smaller prospect along the lines of Yency Almonte. That package is far too rich for the Rockies to let go.

Syndergaard would figure to take control of the top of the Rockies' rotation, with the aforementioned Freeland and Marquez set to take the next two spots. That trio atop the rotation would surely set the Rockies' pitching staff up for longterm success.

Pitching was not the teams' problem last year though, nor does it project to be a glaring hole in the near future.

An offense that ranked 23rd in OPS+, a stat that adjusts to the given teams' ballpark, is the problem. Led by Desmond as a glaring hole at first, with their production from their catchers at the plate lacking as well, the offense has large needs.

If the Rockies are looking to make a large move in the trade market, J.T. Realmuto, with two years of team control remaining would make more sense. A trade with division rival Arizona for Paul Goldschmidt or Jose Abreu from the aforementioned White Sox to fill their hole at first would also be a greater addition.

Seeking to improve their fourth-best team ERA in franchise history, with nary a notable starter departing, is a far less pressing concern, especially when considering Syndergaard's price tag and injury problems.