



MEDIA CLIPS – February 8, 2018

Eyes on Castellani at Rockies' spring camp

Team's No. 6 prospect draws comparisons to Scherzer

By Thomas Harding / MLB.com | @harding_at_mlb | Feb. 7th, 2018

DENVER -- Right-handed pitching prospect **Ryan Castellani** could work his way into the Rockies' pitching plans this year, just three years after the team drafted him out of Brophy College Preparatory in Phoenix. It's good that during his senior year, Castellani's mother allowed him to further his baseball education in a most non-traditional way.

A couple of years before, Castellani's pitching tutor, Chris Sinacori, began making little adjustments in his delivery, such as raising his arms above his head at the start of the windup -- like big league star **Max Scherzer**. It wasn't until later that Castellani found out Sinacori had trained Scherzer. So Regina Castellani figured her son should see his pitching role model up close.

"I was surprised my mom let me do this, but she let me skip the first couple classes of school and I went to watch a bullpen of his," said Castellani, rated by MLB Pipeline as the Rockies' **No. 6 prospect**. "He's definitely a freak of nature, but we have our similarities."

Castellani turns 22 on April 1, but last season the Rockies invited him to Major League camp and had him pitch the entire season at Double-A Hartford. Those factors have made him part of the Rockies' 2018 depth picture, which means his work bears a close eye when Spring Training opens with the first workout of pitchers and catchers Wednesday at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The Rockies needed just eight starters while going 87-75 and earning the second National League Wild Card last year, and all but **Tyler Chatwood** (who signed with the Cubs) return. However, it's rare that the Rockies or any team can make it through a season without the starter total reaching double figures. That's where the depth comes in.

The 40-man Major League roster includes right-handers **Yency Almonte** and **Zach Jemiola** and lefty **Sam Howard** -- all of whom pitched at Triple-A Albuquerque. Additionally, lefty **Harrison Musgrave**, who nearly cracked the Opening Day rotation and suffered a season-ending finger injury early last season at Albuquerque, is back as a non-roster invitee.

But Castellani is in the picture, thanks to his accelerated pace.

Last year was a whirlwind. Castellani went from having birthday parties at Salt River Fields and watching games from the stands to actually working alongside Major Leaguers last year. He saw action in just two games and gave up four runs in three innings. In one of his Cactus League games, he yielded homers to Brewers **Jesus Aguilar** and **Nick Noonan**, each of whom have seen Major League time.

The learning continued at Hartford, where Castellani went 9-12 with a 4.81 ERA in 27 starts.

"Last year, at one point we had the youngest position player and the youngest pitcher in the Eastern League -- in [shortstop] **Brendan Rodgers** and Castellani," Rockies senior player development director Zach Wilson said. "He is still growing. He got some great experience last year. There were some long spurts of a lot of success, and then he had some spurts of challenges. Both those things are going to prepare him as he goes into this year."

In May and June, Castellani won four straight starts, and went eight innings the latter two, while posting a 2.67 ERA with 20 strikeouts to five walks. In his final five starts, he posted a 2.32 ERA with 26 strikeouts against nine walks. And he sparked Scherzer comparisons, with a fastball that sits 90-94 mph but can touch 96, a sweeping slider and a solid changeup.

"There are times where he can absolutely go out and dominate a game, and he looks like Scherzer -- there are similarities in his delivery and his arm slot, and the stuff," Wilson said. "Max has got a little more to his fastball. Listen, I'm talking about a true ace when I'm talking about Scherzer. Whether Castellani becomes that remains to be seen. He has the potential to do that, without question."

Castellani said he was able to throw some bullpen sessions with Scherzer before Scherzer moved from the Scottsdale area. Also, during last season, Castellani saw the big leagues up close, just to see how close he was.

"**Rafael Devers** was with the Red Sox, and I'd played against him in low-A and pitched against him plenty of times early in the season," Castellani said. "I went to a Yankees-Red Sox game and he was there in the lineup and hit a home run off **Aroldis Chapman** in the 12th inning.

"It shows you how close you are. 'OK, I know how to pitch to him, got him out, didn't get him out.' You learn a lot, then you see them in the big leagues and say, 'OK, I know what to do.'"

Castellani and the pitching hopefuls are but a few of the attractions of Spring Training. Other situations to watch are:

First base and corner outfield: As the roster stands, **Ian Desmond** can be the right-handed bat at first base -- which would take some pressure off Rockies No. 3 and **overall No. 41 prospect Ryan McMahon**, a left-handed hitter who can force his way into the lineup with a strong spring. Desmond also could swing to left field, with **Charlie Blackmon** in center and **Gerardo Parra** in right. Left-handed hitters **David Dahl**, **Raimel Tapia** and **Mike Tauchman** also are pushing for regular duty.

Catching competition: Veteran **Chris Iannetta** was signed as the No. 1 catcher, which leaves left-handed-hitting **Tony Wolters** -- who has spent most of the last two seasons in the Majors and started much of last year -- and right-handed-hitting **Tom Murphy**, who competed for No. 1 duties last year before suffering a wrist and forearm injury last spring. Wolters gives manager Bud Black a desirable right-left offensive combo. When healthy, Murphy provides top-end power.

Middle infield backup: A key concern is if shortstop **Trevor Story** is injured. The Rockies can go to **Pat Valaika**, a weapon as a pinch-hitter. Valaika played short in college, but has become more of a multi-position player. Desmond has long experience at the position, but the Rockies see him as a first baseman or corner outfielder, depending on what the lineup needs.

Non-roster Rockies **Daniel Castro** and **Shawn O'Malley** have Major League experience. It'll be interesting to see how close Rodgers -- the team's No. 1 prospect and No. 15 in the Minors according to MLB Pipeline -- is to being ready.

Tauchman hopes to continue ascent this spring
Lefty-hitting outfielder eyes roster spot at Rockies camp

By Thomas Harding / MLB.com | @harding_at_mlb | Feb. 6th, 2018

DENVER -- Rockies outfielder **Mike Tauchman** was drafted in the 10th round out of Bradley University in 2013, and he developed quickly enough to bat .286 while spending the entire 2016 season at Triple-A Albuquerque. He had exceeded everyone's expectations but his own.

The problem was Tauchman hit just one homer that season and had hit only eight in a productive Minor League career. But through studiousness, smart coaching and an intensity that carried him past more highly touted payers, Tauchman hit 16 homers, batted .331 and slugged .555 in 110 Triple-A games in 2017 and earned his first big league shot.

Tauchman, 27, a left-handed hitter who plays all three outfield positions, will enter Spring Training hoping to use his newfound power to try to earn a bigger slice of playing time.

"I've always felt I was a guy who plays with a lot of emotion and a little bit of an edge," said Tauchman, who credits his intensity to growing up playing quarterback, receiver, defensive back and kick returner in high school in football-obsessed Palatine, Ill. "When I play, I want people to say, 'That kid plays hard.' If the effort is there, this is the kind of game where effort gets rewarded."

Tauchman isn't the first name that comes up when forecasting the young outfielders who could emerge this season. **David Dahl** hit .315 with seven homers in 63 games in 2016 but missed last season with a rib injury, and **Raimel Tapia** went hitless in his first 15 Rockies at-bats last year but .360 in 146 at-bats the rest of the way. With **Charlie Blackmon**, **Gerardo Parra** and **Ian Desmond** (when not playing first base) also part of the picture, and with the team considering bringing back free-agent right fielder **Carlos Gonzalez**, Tauchman would be the definition of an unheralded competitor.

If the work that started last winter continues to pay off, Tauchman has a shot to be noticed.

In the Minors, Tauchman was always in a position to receive playing time, and staying healthy and hitting .301 in 494 games kept him on the field. But Tauchman, a well-put-together 6-foot-2 and 210 pounds, knew there was a gap between his physique and his power numbers.

Through his college hitting coach, Tauchman found Chicago-based Justin Stone, who had worked for the Chicago White Sox Academy developing young players before taking his video and analytics-based training methods to Elite Baseball Training, where young Chicagoland players developed into college prospects -- and pros began finding him.

Tauchman's average was a product of hands and bat control. But through watching video with Stone, Tauchman learned that his lower body was not firing in time to help his handsy swing put a charge into the ball. Improving the timing would improve bat speed and launch angle.

"There was a mechanical change that gave him more confidence, because he recognized he was going to be able to get the balls on the inner half and drive them over the right fielder's head and into the bleachers as opposed to hooking it over the second baseman," Stone said. "With that, there still has to come an attitude in play. He talked about [Albuquerque manager] Glenallen Hill's influence over him in having a killer instinct."

Tauchman had just 27 at-bats (six hits, including a triple) in 31 Major League games last season. He was used as a pinch-runner during the team's drive to the postseason, and his running led manager Bud Black to put him on the roster for the 11-8 loss to the D-backs in the National League Wild Card Game.

"What a great development story and personal story that is. He's put in a ton of work, our coaches have put in a ton of work, and he's turned himself into one of those dynamic players," Rockies senior player development director Zach Wilson said. "He can really play center field, and he really has an instinct to run the bases.

"He'll give you a 'plus' run time [faster than Major League average] every once in a while. But he'll go first to third -- he really has instincts for that -- has a feel for when to take the extra base, has a feel for when to take a dirt ball and advance. All those little things are so important to win a game."

Tauchman hopes his developing power gives the Rockies more options.

"If I show up in great shape and with my swing feeling how I want it to, I'm hoping to make the most out of the opportunities I can get," Tauchman said. "That's really all I can do."

Rockies heading to camp with similar plan

Bullpen restocked as club looks to build on Wild Card year

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

DENVER -- The Rockies took last year's trip to the postseason as confirmation in their building plan. In building the 2018 team, which begins Spring Training with the **first pitchers and catchers workout** on Valentine's Day, general manager Jeff Bridich stayed with what is working.

Since taking over as GM after the 2014 season, Bridich has adhered to clear principles -- develop a starting rotation and lineup core, then target key veterans for important bullpen roles and augment the lineup. After 2017 resulted in the Rockies' first postseason trip since '09 -- something they expected, although few outsiders did -- they have eschewed calls to add an experienced starter or a multiyear contract for a corner bat.

This offseason's big expenditures were in the bullpen, where the Rockies signed three-year contracts with closer **Wade Davis** (\$52 million), lefty **Jake McGee** (\$27 million) and righty **Bryan Shaw** (\$27 million). Contracts totaling \$104 million for the bullpen may seem like a splash, but it's more of a continuation.

Last year, the Rockies signed **Greg Holland** to a one-year deal, already had McGee in tow and traded for **Pat Neshek** at the non-waiver Trade Deadline. Essentially, the Rockies replaced setup men -- well, McGee replaced himself -- with similarly accomplished pitchers, and locked them up for three years so they don't have to keep revisiting the issue.

The plan was similar at catcher, where they traded with the Rangers for **Jonathan Lucroy** at the Trade Deadline last year and replaced him with **Chris Iannetta**, who returns where he started his career, for two years and \$8.5 million.

As for the rotation, the Rockies continue to value talent and competition over accomplishment elsewhere -- something that hasn't translated to success often in the team's previous 25 seasons. Righty **Jon Gray** (10-4, 3.67 ERA), lefty **Tyler Anderson** (6-6, 4.81) and righty **Chad Bettis** (2-4, 5.05 in nine starts after recovery from testicular cancer) have demonstrated when healthy that homegrown pitching works. Four rookies helped, and at times flourished last year -- righty **German Marquez** (11-7, 4.39), lefty **Kyle Freeland** (11-11, 4.10), righty **Antonio Senzatela** (10-5, 4.68) and righty **Jeff Hoffman** (6-5, 5.89). That's more starters than spots for the rotation, which means spring competition.

Behind them is even more youthful competition -- righty **Yency Almonte**, lefty **Sam Howard**, righty **Zach Jemiola** and lefty **Harrison Musgrave**, all of whom pitched at Triple-A Albuquerque last season, plus righty **Ryan Castellani**, who

pitched at Double-A Hartford at age 21. None has thrown in the Majors, but consider this: Last spring, Bettis left camp to begin chemotherapy, Gray was touch-and-go for Opening Day with a foot injury, and **Chris Rusin** had an oblique injury that moved him to the bullpen (where he was an asset). At no point did the Rockies comb other camps for starters, and Senzatela and Freeland made their debuts in the Major League rotation. So there is opportunity.

The homegrown pitching plan appears sustainable. Looking at the current rotation, the Rockies don't have to deal with free agency until Bettis is eligible after 2020 and Gray and Anderson become eligible after 2021.

The Rockies contemplated a big contract for the lineup by talking with former Indians first baseman **Carlos Santana**, but Colorado stayed on the sidelines as the Phillies signed him for three years at \$60 million. It's not as if the Rockies have been afraid of multiyear position players. Bridich signed outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, whose three-year, \$27.5 million deal ends this year, and versatile **Ian Desmond's** five-year, \$70 million contract is in its second season.

They still may sign a veteran, by re-signing outfielder **Carlos Gonzalez** or first baseman **Mark Reynolds**. But it's not certain the Rockies will sign either of them. If they do sign one, it could be for one year and not much more. So opportunity will be there for Rockies prospects.

The farm system has produced the bulk of the lineup -- leadoff man **Charlie Blackmon**, star third baseman **Nolan Arenado**, shortstop **Trevor Story** and even second baseman **DJ LeMahieu**, who was acquired from the Cubs before he became established. So who is next?

Ryan McMahon has a chance to earn left-handed at-bats at first base, after a solid year in Double-A and Triple-A. In the outfield, the Rockies have **Raimel Tapia**, who bounced between Triple-A and the Majors but was a key piece by season's end; **David Dahl**, who flashed power when called up in 2016 but didn't play in the Majors because of a rib issue last season; and **Mike Tauchman**, a 10th-round Draft pick who hit for average and displayed speed throughout his Minor League career, and added power last season to earn his first Major League callup.

Also, 2016 top Draft pick **Brendan Rodgers**, 20, a shortstop who has played some second base and will learn third just in case, will be in his first Major League camp. He is a fast mover who, with health and a good year, could be a candidate for the Majors sometime this season. The Rockies haven't reached their championship goals. But they're taking a team to Spring Training that indicates they believe they have a winning strategy.

Homegrown arms spearheading pitching culture

By Daniel Kramer / MLB.com | Feb. 2nd, 2018

DENVER -- **Jeff Hoffman** remembers the conversation vividly. During Spring Training in 2016, Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich told Hoffman and the other pitching prospects -- **Kyle Freeland, German Marquez, Tyler Anderson, Jon Gray** and **Antonio Senzatela** -- that the Rockies weren't seeking veteran starters.

"Bridich told us, 'We're doing this from within,' talking about the starting staff," Hoffman said. "He's really stayed true to his word on that side."

Two years later, and following a postseason appearance that was driven heavily by its youthful rotation, Colorado's hope is that with a creative front office, objective-minded coaches and a hungry pitching staff, 2017 was merely the first step for a blossoming pitching culture with the potential for sustained success. For an organization that has long been revered for its offensive prowess, the Rockies want to balance the narrative.

"I think we're on our way to doing that, and I think being a part of this organization now for -- this will be my eighth year -- seeing that develop from within ... it's been exhilarating," said **Chad Bettis**, who at 28 is the elder statesman of the group.

Under Bridich and director of pitching operations Mark Wiley, who was hired in 2012, the Rockies have formed a blueprint for the type of pitcher they seek: a power arm supplemented with a mental confidence to pitch at Coors Field. This player makeup is how they tailored their scouting, Drafts and trades.

The foundation for this ethos was established after the Rockies promoted Bridich to GM following the 2014 season, when he oversaw a pitching summit at Coors Field with pitching coach Steve Foster, bullpen coach Darren Holmes, vice president of scouting Bill Schmidt, senior director of player development Zach Wilson and Darryl Scott and Doug Linton (now operating pitching coordinators). That pow wow, which has become an annual gathering, established a series of pitching objectives that would be implemented throughout the organization.

When the club interviewed Bud Black for its managerial vacancy last offseason, Black offered a familiar face and relatable mind. Wiley was Black's pitching coach when he played for the Indians from 1988-90 and '95, and Black was hired in large part for his pitching expertise and ability to communicate with young players.

"These guys, prior to my arrival, set a standard for what was to become about how we went about the pitching side of the game," Black said. "I think we saw last year some results of that, some results of those changes in mindset, in attitude, in fundamental pitching and mechanics, philosophy -- all of those things. ... When I interviewed, it was a big part of the interview process."

INSTILLING PHILOSOPHIES EARLY

The Rockies' luxury is that so much of their pitching talent is homegrown, which helped them instill their philosophies and practices immediately. Bettis (2010), Anderson ('11), Gray ('13) and Freeland ('14) were Rockies Draft picks in the first two rounds. Colorado acquired Marquez and Hoffman via trade. The Rockies signed Senzatela in '11 as an international free agent. All seven made their MLB debuts with the Rockies.

Collectively, this unit (plus **Tyler Chatwood**, who signed with the Cubs as a free agent in December), went 63-56 for the 11th-best win percentage among starters (.529) while compiling a 4.59 ERA, the fifth-lowest mark in franchise history, in 2017.

"You can go out and buy experience. It's very expensive, but when you have young starters with the aptitude and the attitude that we have, and many of them come through our system, they've been taught our way," Foster said. "These are guys we're counting on."

Mental toughness is a vital part of the club's pitching makeup, and its prospects receive a healthy dose of groundwork. Many of the Rockies' Minor League affiliates play (or played) home games at hitter-friendly parks to prepare them for Coors Field, such as Class A Asheville (297 feet to right field), Double-A Hartford (308 feet) and Class A Advanced Modesto (319 feet), now a Mariners affiliate.

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"You have a lot of really hitter-friendly leagues, and that's kind of our thing," Anderson said. "At the end of the day, your numbers don't really matter. Don't be selfish about that. It's all about mental toughness."

Even Marquez, who spent time in the Rays' organization, acknowledged the Rockies' ambition with his mental development before making his MLB debut in 2016.

"Colorado was much faster-moving," Marquez said. "It was more old school. They really tried to advance everything. I can't speak for them, but from my perspective, they wanted me to get ready as soon as possible."

ATTACKING HITTERS

Tailoring personnel to have predominantly high-velocity arms -- last year's starters averaged 94.2 mph on their four-seam fastballs, second-highest in MLB -- the Rockies are building on swing-and-miss stuff, primarily via a four-seam-first approach that differs from successful clubs like the Astros and Indians, who have put a premium on offspeed pitches. However, the Rockies believe they can fit arms lacking high-end velocity, a la Anderson and Freeland, who each induced among the lowest average exit velocities the last two years, per **Statcast™**.

"It kind of goes hand in hand with playing here at Coors," Freeland said. "[Coaches] preach, 'Keep the ball on the ground.' Doing that, you want to pitch to contact and pitch in the bottom of the zone, where it's going to be very hard for a hitter to elevate that ball."

Added Gray: "I think everyone's offspeed can work. You've just got to find a way to make it look just like your fastball and make it look just like a strike as long as you can. If you can do that, you're going to get swings and misses. It doesn't have to be nasty. It just has to look like a strike."

The curveball is an essential part of Gray's repertoire, but he had never thrown one before Holmes taught him how to after the 2015 season. Such instruction was steered from the bulk of the club's original history due to the unpredictability of curveballs at altitude. Hoffman and Marquez each throw one, and Anderson throws a plus changeup. Senzatela offers a slider to go with his four-seamer, which he threw at a higher rate than any MLB starter (72.5 percent).

For years, the Rockies had an army of sinkerball starters that relied on high ground-ball rates, but they could be susceptible when those pitches didn't land, due to velocity (more home runs) or balls (more walks). From 2012-14, under former director of Major League pitching operations Bill Geivett, the Rockies posted the fourth-highest ground-ball rate (48.4 percent), but they also recorded the second-worst strikeout rate (15.7 percent) and the highest walk rate (8.6 percent).

Last year, Rockies starters posted an 18.9 percent strikeout rate and an 8.4 percent walk rate, both among the worst among postseason clubs. An admitted area of focus will be on command.

"I think it's our pitching staff -- with the exception of a couple guys -- historically and statistically, have a walk habit," Black said. "We have to do a better job of both coaching them and them making some adjustments in their game to be better strike throwers, especially in certain counts, to their hitters. All these things that we have to really clean that up."

ACCOUNTABILITY

Despite their youth -- their seven potential starters have an aggregate service time of just over 12 years -- the Rockies pride themselves on accountability. Bettis recounts a point system that was in place rewarding aspects of good pitching, from mechanics to defense to mental strength. Last year, the pitchers steered away from the scale. Advancing to the postseason, they figured, was its own reward.

"We've done that, and now it's time to expand and take it a step further in the sense of it doesn't need to necessarily be on paper anymore," Bettis said. "Because we're holding each other accountable on a more personable level -- not just something that you get a piece of paper that says, 'Oh, I wasn't very good today.' You know that after a game or you know if you did your job and the team got the win."

Added Wiley: "I would say there'll be more expectation as they move up. There's things they have to learn and have to adjust to. The Major Leagues is the best baseball in the world, and if [hitters] find a shortcoming with you, they will exploit it, so you've got to constantly make adjustments, learn new things. And that's what's happening, especially in our case, where we have a lot of young guys."

Rockies spring training preview: After Charlie Blackmon, the outfield presents Colorado with significant concern
Blackmon is the best hitting center fielder in the National League and among the best lead-off hitters

By Nick Groke / The Denver Post | Feb. 7th, 2018

The vast expanse of grass at Coors Field is home to the largest outfield in baseball. It is also where the Rockies find their greatest concern.

When Colorado's full squad officially reports for spring training on Feb. 19, their outfield will have at least two spots in play for roster machinations. And the pending nature of the position — this season and, especially, next — goes beyond just filling the corner spots. The Rockies need to find some power from outfielders.

After the Rockies let Carlos Gonzalez walk into free-agency this winter, they lost not only a corner outfield mainstay, they also lost a major home run threat.

Charlie Blackmon, an all-star and MVP candidate last season, returns to one of the most demanding positions in the game as the center fielder charged with manning Coors Field's center field. He was the only Rockies hitter last season with a four-digit OPS, at 1.000. His 142 OPS-plus, a park adjusted mark, was best on the team, better even than Nolan Arenado. He is the best hitting center fielder in the National League and among the best lead-off hitters.

No worries there, although Blackmon said last month he would be open to a move to the third spot in manager Bud Black's lineup, if that meant taking advantage of his power (66 home runs over the past two seasons).

That's where the certainty ends. The left and right corners will see several players vying for spots.

There are two veterans: lefty Gerardo Parra, in the final year of a three-year, \$27 million deal; and Ian Desmond, in the second season of five-year, \$70 million contract.

And two second-year players: 23-year-old David Dahl, who missed the entirety of 2017 with a rib injury after a promising, abbreviated rookie stint in 2016; and Raimel Tapia, 24, who shuttled between Triple-A and the majors last year.

The rub: Those four players combined for 19 home runs last season, not even five per by average.

And that's is about it. No other high-profile prospects waiting to break through.

And no CarGo. At 32, there is some question about his ability to rebound from a sideways season. That is perhaps why he remains unsigned a week from camp. Or, perhaps, he is the victim of an oddball hot stove season around the league.

But while Gonzalez's 2017 numbers reflect a horrid run through two-thirds of his season, he rebounded solidly in the final months to help lead the Rockies to a wild card game. And he is responsible for 79 home runs over the past three seasons. His power threat alone will be sorely missed in Colorado.

PLAYER PROFILES

Charlie Blackmon — Even Blackmon, one of the Rockies' steadiest and consistent producers since 2014, presents a pending issue. He will be eligible for free agency for the first time after this season. In his final year of arbitration, Blackmon settled on a one-year, \$14 million contract.

That could seem like a bargain by season's end. By wRC+ (weighted runs created, adjust for park factors) and WAR, Blackmon has been the second-best center fielder in baseball over the past two seasons, behind only the Angels' Mike Trout.

Gerardo Parra — His first season with the Rockies, in 2016, did not go well as he hit just .253 with a .671 OPS. It was his worst career year. He did not enjoy it, nor did Parra appreciate having to talk about it.

But the 30-year-old bounced back last year to hit .309/.793 in a return to form. His defense, too, helped the Rockies. He was their best defensive outfielder and he might be in line for a move to right.

Ian Desmond — A broken hand suffered in spring training last year, after he was hit by a pitch in a Cactus League game, really set Desmond back. And he paid for it all season. The Rockies like his versatility (he started his big-league career as a shortstop, moved to the outfield, then signed with Colorado to be their first baseman.

That defensive versatility, though, makes it difficult to peg him to a spot. Is he a platoon first baseman with rookie Ryan McMahon? Is he CarGo's full time replacement in right field? Is he a left fielder? A center fielder?

Desmond hit seven home runs last season. It won't be a power bat that carries him into a starting spot.

Others to watch:

Tapia has spent two seasons on the minor-league elevator. If the Rockies were certain he could be a significant contributor by now, why did they sign veteran Parra and Desmond? He may need more time to round into a big-leaguer, either as an understudy on the bench or as a full-timer in Triple-A. His speed on the base paths is a nice threat off the bench, but he only stole five bases in 70 games last season and hit just .288 with two home runs.

Dahl is the Rockies' biggest mystery. His breakout 2016 run as a 22-year-old, after a July call-up, saw him hit .315 with an .829 OPS. And suddenly the Rockies were drooling with at the potential. But his lost 2017 season was a bummer, owing to a weird stress reaction in a rib bone. He will be among the most-watched Rockies during spring training, with much to prove in the Cactus League.

The Rockies roster also includes Mike Tauchman, who hit .222 in 32 plate appearances last season; and prospects Yonathan Daza and Noel Cuevas.

Up next: The bullpen.

Rockies' Adam Ottavino: Players closely watching MLB vs. union offseason battle

Players union says some clubs are engaged in a "race to the bottom"

By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | Feb. 7th, 2018

Fans will celebrate the return of baseball next week when pitchers and catchers report for spring training, but it's the business side of baseball that's making headlines and creating hard feelings that could linger for years.

With an unprecedented number of high-profile free agents still without contracts, a war of words and accusations has broken out between Major League Baseball, the MLB Players Association and some high-powered agents.

Rockies reliever Adam Ottavino, the team's player representative, said Wednesday that players around the league are watching it unfold with keen interest.

"I don't know how this is all going to turn out, but I will say that everybody is paying close attention," said Ottavino, who's entering the final year of his contract. "What comes out of this will certainly be noticed by all 1,200 players in the union."

Tony Clark, executive director of the players' union, released a statement on Tuesday that said some clubs are engaged in a "race to the bottom" that "threatens the integrity of the game." In essence, Clark accused some teams of tanking and said that is one of the reasons why so many players remain unsigned.

A number of players responded on Twitter, including veteran Rockies catcher Chris Iannetta. Responding to a fan's comment, Iannetta tweeted: "This conversation isn't about money. It's about the integrity of the game and competition. ..."

According to ESPN Stats & Information, only nine players have received three-year contracts this offseason, compared to 27 a year ago. Teams have spent \$780 million on free agents this winter, compared to \$1.45 billion a year ago and \$2.53 billion during the 2015-16 offseason. Some of the most high-profile players — including Yu Darvish, Jake Arrieta, J.D. Martinez, Eric Hosmer, Mike Moustakas, Lance Lynn and Alex Cobb — remain unsigned. Martinez, a slugging outfielder, has reportedly turned down a five-year, \$125 million offer from Boston and is willing to sit out spring training waiting for a better contract.

MLB, to no one's surprise, defends its product.

“Our Clubs are committed to putting a winning product on the field for their fans,” MLB said in a statement. “Owners own teams for one reason: they want to win. In Baseball, it has always been true that Clubs go through cyclical, multi-year strategies directed at winning.”

The statement went on to say that while some of the best free agents remain unsigned, they have “substantial offers, some in nine figures...To lay responsibility on the Clubs for the failure of some agents to accurately assess the market is unfair, unwarranted, and inflammatory.”

Rockies spring training preview: Ryan McMahon? Ian Desmond? Big question marks at first base.
The rest of Colorado's infield looking golden

By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | Feb. 6th, 2018

The Rockies' infield isn't 24 karat, but it's pretty darn golden. Save for one position.

Third base? Glittering. Five-time Gold Glover and perennial MVP candidate Nolan Arenado roams there.

Shortstop? Promising. Trevor Story has terrific potential, now if only he can cut down on the ugly 38 percent strikeout rate that led to a National League high 191 whiffs in 2017.

Second base? In good hands. DJ LeMahieu slashed .310/.374/.409 and won his second Gold Glove. Some National media pundits slammed his selection to the All-Star Game, but it was his peers who voted him in, and they know how valuable he is his team.

First base? Here's where we find the huge question mark. Indeed, it ranks as the club's biggest puzzle as spring training draws near.

Veteran Mark Reynolds manned the post with aplomb last season (and hit 30 homers), but he remains a free agent, although he's said he wants to return to Colorado, at the right price. And while the winter rumor mill linked the Rockies to everyone from Carlos Santana (who signed with Philadelphia), to Eric Hosmer, to Logan Morrison, the Rockies have not made a move yet.

So where does that leave them? That question might not be solved until spring training wraps up.

It could be that Ian Desmond, who'll make \$22 million this season as Colorado's highest-paid player, will take over first base. That's the primary position general manager Jeff Bridich assigned Desmond after signing him to a five-year, \$70 million contract last winter.

Anyway you slice it, Desmond's first season in Colorado was a major disappointment. He opened the season on the disabled list after breaking his left hand late in spring training, and then a nagging right calf strain landed him on the disabled list twice during the season. All told, Desmond, considered something of an iron man during his career, played in just 95 games and hit .274 with seven homers and a sluggish .375 slugging percentage.

Desmond is perhaps the Rockies' best all-around athlete, but he never looked entirely comfortable at first base. In fact, he played better in left field, where he started 64 games, than he did at first, where he started 22.

Still, at the winter meetings in December, Bridich tried to put a positive spin on the situation.

“(Desmond’s) more versatile than he was, which is great,” Bridich said. “I think he showed he can play the outfield, but it was tough for him because he was hurt.”

As for Desmond’s disappointing season, Bridich said: “Some of it was bad luck and some of it was dealing with an injury he’s not used to having. He was not accustomed to missing much time. He and I joked about it at times out of sheer frustration.”

McMahon is also raw at first base. He made his major-league debut last August, but saw limited playing time, batting .157 (3-for-19) in just 17 games. His natural position is third place, a position he played in high school, but he saw playing time at first and second last season in the minors, hitting a combined .355 at Double-A and Triple-A.

“I feel really good and really comfortable at first, and I’ve been working out there all offseason,” McMahon said recently.

Super utility player Pat Valaika is also preparing to play first base, if he’s needed there, but right now the position is an open book.

Player Profiles

— **Arenado:** He wasn’t a finalist for National League MVP, but he should have been. He set career highs in hits (187), triples (seven), batting average (.309), on-base percentage (.373) and slugging percentage (.586). He slugged 37 home runs (19 at home, 18 on the road), tied his career high with 43 doubles and drove in 130 runs.

Arenado led all major-league third baseman with 20 defensive runs saved, and he led NL third baseman in total chances (423), assists (311) and double plays (39). He tied for first in fielding percentage, committing only nine errors in 423 total chances (.979 percentage).

He’s scheduled to become a free agent after the 2019 season.

— **Desmond:** He did give the slow-footed Rockies some speed on the basepaths, leading the club with 15 stolen bases in 19 attempts, and his 22 infield hits were tied for sixth in the NL. But that was negated by Desmond’s overall .627 groundball percentage. Wherever he ends up playing, the Rockies need more production.

— **LeMahieu:** Led all NL second baseman in total chances (720), assists (470), double plays (107) and fielding percentage (.989). He also hit .310, feasting off left-handers (.362, the sixth-highest average in the majors). From June 15 to the end of the season, the second baseman's .335 average ranked first in the National League.

LeMahieu is scheduled to become a free agent after this season, which is why you will see a lot of No. 1 prospect Brendan Rodgers, as well as McMahon, getting time at second during Cactus League games.

— **Story:** Manager Bud Black touted him for a Gold Glove and Bridich praised Story for his ability to keep his offensive woes separated from his on-field duties. Story's 1.8 defensive WAR ranked sixth among NL position players. Story has immense power. Despite a terrible first half, he still hit 24 home runs and drove in 82 runs. Despite his troubling strikeout rate, he showed better strike-zone discipline as the season progressed, and he looked like a more efficient offensive force during a 10-game hitting streak from Sept. 9-19, during which he batted .333, with five doubles, one triple and two home runs.

To Story's credit, he never allowed his offensive slump (.224 average before the All-Star Game) to leak into his defense. His 11 defensive runs saved were second most in the majors among shortstops, and according to Baseball Reference, he ranked sixth among NL position players with 1.8 defensive WAR.

— **Valaika:** Last season, Valaika started 16 games at shortstop, five at third base, three at second, two games in left field and one at first. He could see more time at first, and could even be used more in the outfield. He projects as Black's super-utility player.

He was the Rockies' best pinch hitter, leading all big-league pinch hitters in RBIs (16), runs (12), doubles (eight) and extra-base hits (12). He figures to be a key part of the team in 2018.

— **McMahon:** All eyes will be on the rookie this spring. Said Bridich: "Does he have the tools and the talent to be thought of as our starting first baseman? I think so."

There is reason to believe in McMahon, both on the bag and at the plate. In 314 plate appearances with Triple-A Albuquerque, McMahon slashed .374/.411/.612 with 39 extra base hits, including 14 homers. Last year in the minors, McMahon split time between first base (61 games), second (36), and third (26). Despite his various duties, McMahon committed only 12 errors, down from the 24 he made in 2016.

— **Others to watch:** Rodgers, a shortstop by trade, got an invite to big-league camp and will garner a lot of attention. There is a chance he'll make his debut in the second half of the season. Rodgers will be joined by these other invitees: Daniel Castro, Garrett Hampson, Brian Mundell and Shawn O'Malley.

Up next: The outfield

Rockies spring training preview: Is catcher Chris Iannetta up to the challenge?

Tony Wolters and Tom Murphy will compete for No. 2 job

By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | Feb. 6th, 2018

The last three times the Rockies qualified for the postseason — 2007, 2009 and 2017 — they shared a common theme. Down the stretch, those teams had a dynamic, veteran presence behind the plate.

In 2007 and '09, it was fiery Yorvit Torrealba. Last season, it was the sage Jonathan Lucroy. It looked as if the Rockies would re-sign Lucroy this winter, but when negotiations stalled, the Rockies instead signed veteran Chris Iannetta to a two-year, \$8.5 million deal.

The Rockies are putting a lot of responsibility on Iannetta's wide shoulders, beginning with his ability to mentor a young rotation. Iannetta, who turns 35 on April 8, believes he's up to the task.

"I'm better at handling scouting reports and pitchers. Plus, I've learned from all of my experiences. You can't replicate that," said Iannetta, who made his big-league debut with the Rockies at age 23. He played six seasons for Colorado, then moved on to the Angels (2012-15), Mariners (2016) and Diamondbacks (2017).

Iannetta also thinks he's fit enough to handle a heavy work load, if asked. "If that means I catch 100 or more games, that's fine," he said. "If that means I catch 70-something games, that's fine. All I want to do is contribute and pour champagne at the end of the season."

No matter how many games Iannetta catches, Colorado needs a capable backup.

"One guy will catch 100, give or take five, 10, 15 games, and the other catchers will complement," general manager Jeff Bridich said.

That will make for a competitive camp, with Tony Wolters and Tom Murphy sparring for the No. 2 job.

Player Profiles

— **Iannetta:** He's coming off one of the most productive offensive seasons of his career. He hit .254 with 17 homers, 43 RBIs and a .354 on-base percentage for the D-backs. Those 17 homers came in just 272 at-bats and were one shy of his career high.

While Iannetta saw action in 89 games last season, he started only 70 times at catcher, so despite his desire to be a workhorse, there is a legitimate question about whether he's up to the task.

As for his defense, there are also question marks. According to FanGraphs, Iannetta has a Defensive Runs Saved (DRS) rating of -2, which puts him slightly below average in terms of his total defensive value.

— **Wolters:** Opened the season as the starting catcher, but by midseason, it was clear he was beginning to wear down, physically and mentally. That was part of the reason the Rockies traded for Lucroy at the deadline and sent Wolters to Triple-A for a tuneup.

Wolters appeared in 83 games across two stints with Colorado, starting a team-high 66 games, posting a catcher's ERA of 5.07. Wolters came out of the gate strong, hitting .360 in April with a .407 on-base percentage. By season's end, however, he was hitting .240 with a .341 OBP, and he failed to hit a home run all season.

Wolters has the will and athleticism to succeed, but does he have the skills to be Colorado's No. 2?

— **Murphy:** It's been difficult to get a true read on Murphy, because his career has been marred by injuries. Last year, he suffered a broken right forearm and wrist in spring training, and played in just 12 big-league games. Murphy didn't impress — and appeared to press — during his short time with the Rockies, batting 1-for-24.

In 38 games with Triple-A Albuquerque, Murphy batted .255 with 10 doubles, one triple, four home runs and nine RBIs. He turns 27 in April, so this spring training is extremely important for him.

— **Others to watch:** Anthony Bemboom, who received an invite to big-league camp, and Chris Rabago, who's on the 40-man roster, will see playing time in the Cactus League, but neither figures to compete for a spot on the big-league roster. Bemboom is an emergency option, but the Rockies could seek out a journeyman catcher if need be. That's what they did last spring when they signed Ryan Hanigan in May.

Looming questions: Will Iannetta, teamed with either Murphy or Wolters, be able to provide the presence the Rockies need to steer their young rotation? Will the catchers provide needed firepower to the lineup? Will the Rockies regret not re-signing Lucroy?

Up next: The infield

Rockies' long-term success depends on prospects striking gold

Riley Pint, Ryan McMahon and Brendan Rodgers head Colorado's minor-league class

By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | Feb. 4th, 2018

Major League Baseball is a game of windows.

Unless you are the Los Angeles Dodgers, a storied franchise playing in a mega-market with an annual mega-payroll, the window to postseason success usually doesn't remain open for long.

The Kansas City Royals know all about that. They waited 29 years to qualify for the postseason before making the World Series in 2014. They won it all in 2015, beating the overmatched Mets in five games. But now the Royals are a .500 baseball team again.

The Rockies' window appears wide open, with general manager Jeff Bridich going so far as to say the 2018 squad is capable of winning a World Series. But is there enough homegrown talent in the Rockies' farm system to give them a period of sustained success? Can the Rockies withstand the possible all-star departures of center fielder Charlie Blackmon and second baseman DJ LeMahieu, both of whom are scheduled to become free agents after this season? And what happens if third baseman Nolan Arenado, the five-time Gold Glover and RBI machine, departs after the 2019 season?

Zach Wilson, director of player development, is not fretting.

"I know we definitely have confidence in our young pitching depth, and it's starting to coming to fruition at the major-league level," Wilson said. "Regardless of what happens to the other guys (in the majors), we our building for future.

"Our job is to not worry about Charlie, Nolan or DJ. Our goal is churning out impactful, major-league players from year to year. We think we have a chance to do that for a really long time."

It's no secret that the Rockies, under Bridich, hold on to their prospects like precious gemstones, particularly their farm-raised pitchers. Wheeling and dealing is not the Rockies' MO. Since the end of the 2015 season, Jerry DiPoto, Seattle's GM, has made 62 trades. The Rockies, by contrast, have made only 12 trades during the same time period. Rivals ask about prime infielders Ryan McMahon and Brendan Rodgers, but the Rockies turned a cold shoulder to offers.

Although the Rockies are bullish on their farm system, and therefore their future, outside reviews are mixed. Baseball America recently ranked all 30 farm systems, with the Rockies coming in at No. 20, down from their No. 10 ranking in 2017. However, MLB Pipeline.com (part of MLB.com), ranked Colorado eighth.

“The Rockies remain strong on the farm despite graduating David Dahl, Jon Gray, Trevor Story and several other rookies to the big leagues ...,” said the MLB Pipeline story. “They have one of the most balanced systems around, with depth in both position players and pitchers.”

The consensus around baseball, however, is that the depth in the outfield is relatively thin, now that Dahl and Raimel Tapia have graduated to the majors. The Rockies need them to pan out.

Also, for the Rockies to keep their competitive window open past this season, McMahon, 23, and Rodgers, 21, need to mature quickly.

McMahon made his major-league debut last August, batting .157 (3-for-19) in just 17 games. He’s penciled in as a first baseman for 2018, but his natural position is third place, a position he played in high school. He began seeing playing time at second base last year at Double-A and Triple-A, where he hit a combined .355.

“I feel really good and really comfortable at first, and I’ve been working out there all offseason,” said the 6-foot-2 McMahon, who has increased his weight from 202 pounds to a sculpted 215. “But the thing is, I’ve been working everywhere — second and third. I’m just trying to stay fresh, for wherever they need me.”

The possibility looms that McMahon could eventually succeed LeMahieu at second, but if that’s the case, a lot of work remains.

“I feel more comfortable at first and third, especially third, because that’s where I’ve played my whole life,” he said. “But I’m getting more comfortable at second. But there are still some throws I have to get used to, and I have to remind myself how to make them from (second).”

Wilson sees McMahon’s versatility as a strength, providing the Rockies with lineup flexibility.

“Ryan McMahon is going to be an important player, but I’m not sure I would pigeon hole him right now,” Wilson said.

“What I do know about him is that he’s a hitter, with some real power.”

Rodgers, a natural shortstop, is currently blocked at that position by Story, but Rodgers also projects as a possible, power-hitting second baseman. Slotting him in at third, should Arenado depart the organization, doesn't seem likely, at least not right now.

Rodgers, the third overall pick of the 2015 draft, who received a record \$5.5 million bonus to sign with the Rockies, is not shy about his objectives.

"My first goal is to stay healthy, the next goal is to get to (the majors) this year," he said. "I definitely think it's achievable and that's what I'm going to keep my eye on."

Wilson won't project when Rodgers will make his debut, let alone when he'll become an everyday big-league player. But he is confident the Rockies' homegrown strategy will pay dividends beyond 2018-19.

"We have depth everywhere and we still have another wave of position players and pitchers to come," he said.

Hot Prospects

A snapshot of the Rockies' top 10 prospects heading into 2018:

1. Brendan Rodgers, SS/2B: Smooth, powerful swing and strong arm, but is he nimble enough for shortstop? (Big league ETA, 2019)
2. Ryan McMahon, 1B/2B/3B: Infield versatility and soft hands are plus, and he should hit for power at Coors Field. (2018)
3. Riley Pint, RHP: Third-overall pick in 2016 draft can throw a 100 mph fastball, but lack of command and bouts of wildness must be cured. (2021)
4. Peter Lambert, RHP: He's not a flamethrower, but he's shown a versatile arsenal, poise and strike-throwing ability in three minor-league seasons. (2020)
5. Colton Welker, 3B: If the Rockies are unable to hold on to Nolan Arenado, Welker, who wields a promising bat, could be the third baseman of the future. (2020)

6. Ryan Castellani, RHP: He throws a mid-90s fastball, a hard slider and a decent changeup. He's been durable so far, and will get a big test at Triple-A this season. (2019)

7. Yency Almonte, RHP: Capable of throwing a 96-98 mph fastball with hard sink, and he's got a solid slider. Some project him as a possible reliever in the big leagues. Will likely start 2018 back at Triple-A. (2018)

8. Garrett Hampson, 2B/SS: He played college ball at Long Beach State (like Troy Tulowitzki) and has good instincts at both short and second. Not a power hitter, but he has excellent speed.

9. Ryan Vilade, SS: Drafted last summer out of high school in the second round. He's already earning a reputation as a power hitter. (2021)

10. Sam Howard, LHP: Left-hander was added to the 40-man roster in November. He's not overpowering, but he's a thinking-man's lefty. Could provide rotation depth this season. (2018)

Why the Rockies should sign J.D. Martinez

The free agent slugger would be a perfect fit for both Coors Field and the current construction of the Rockies roster.

By Jordan Freemyer / Purple Row | Feb. 7th, 2018

Just Dingers. That's not just the nickname of free agent outfielder **J.D. Martinez**, it's kind of what he does at the plate.

Over the past four seasons, Martinez has clubbed 128 home runs for the **Tigers** and **Diamondbacks**, hitting .300/.362/.574 with a 148 wRC+ in the process, and yet a week into February he is still without a team for the 2018 season.

That is where the **Colorado Rockies** come in. As Spring Training approaches, the Rockies face a lot of question marks in their corner outfield spots. Do they trust veterans **Ian Desmond** and **Gerardo Parra** to return to their best and provide a platoon option, or do they put their faith in the health of **David Dahl** and/or a breakout for **Raimel Tapia**?

Aside from the questions about health and performance, there is the fact that four of the five outfielders currently projected to make the Opening Day roster, Parra, Dahl, **Tapia** and center fielder **Charlie Blackmon**, hit left handed. The Rockies sure look like a team that could use a 30-year-old right fielder who bats right handed and just hit 29 home runs in 62 games with Arizona to end the 2017 season.

in addition to strengthening the Rockies corner outfield situation, Martinez would also provide a boost to an offense that ranked 27th in baseball with a wRC+ of 87 in 2017 and has yet to really be upgraded this offseason. The Rockies had just four hitters with a wRC+ better than 100 last season, two of whom, **Jonathan Lucroy** and **Mark Reynolds**, are no longer with the team. By contrast, Martinez had a wRC+ of 166 last season and has been better than 135 in each of the last four seasons.

Martinez is not just a great hitter. He's also a great hitter with a profile primed to succeed playing at altitude. Martinez hit the ball in the air 43.2 percent of the time in 2017 and led the league with a whopping 49% hard-hit rate, almost three percentage points more than any other hitter.

Looking at their respective careers, Martinez is actually a quite similar hitter to Nolan Arenado. Here's a look at some of their batted ball numbers:

Career Stats

Player	BB%	K%	LD%	GB%	FB%	HR/FB	Hard-Hit%
Arenado	7.00	14.90	20.90	36.50	42.60	14.90	35.00
Martinez	8.00	25.20	21.20	41.00	37.90	19.40	39.00

Stats via FanGraphs

Martinez hits a fewer fly balls than Arenado, but they tend to fly over the fence more often. Martinez also strikes out more than Arenado, but that says as much about Arenado as it does Martinez.

There is still an elephant in the room, however, which would be the cost of adding Martinez financially. Martinez will certainly fetch a hefty contract, though as we saw with Todd Frazier's two-year, \$17 million deal with the **Mets**, he will likely have to settle for less than he anticipated getting at the beginning of the offseason.

From the Rockies side of things, **according to Cot's Contracts** their 2018 Opening Day payroll currently sits just north of \$131 million after ending the 2017 season with a payroll right around \$156 million. That's a difference of \$25 million, or as it so happens, the rough cost of one J.D. Martinez.

Another concern would be the length of a potential deal, but it seems the Rockies, and about 29 other teams, have made it pretty clear that very long-term deals are just something that isn't going to happen this offseason. If something like a four-year, \$100 million deal would be enough to get Martinez in purple pinstripes, it would seem like a no-brainer.

With so many teams trying to limit payroll and tank for better draft picks and several heavy hitters trying desperately to get under the luxury tax threshold, this is the perfect opportunity for a mid-market team like the Rockies to make a splash that would likely help persuade a certain franchise third baseman to commit to staying in Colorado for the long haul. What better way to do it than to sign the premier position player on the market?

Let's spend Dick Monfort's money and chase World Series glory

By Casey Light / Mile High Sports | Feb. 6th, 2018

Only one person in Denver has the authority to spend Dick Monfort's money — at least his money tied to the Colorado Rockies roster — and spend it he has. Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich opened up the checkbook to the tune of \$114.5 million spent on free agents so far this offseason, the most in baseball according to the salary tracking website Spotrac.

The Rockies, fresh off a Wild Card berth, dropped big money on the bullpen (Jake McGee, Bryan Shaw and Wade Davis), not to mention spending willingly on four key players to avoid arbitration (Charlie Blackmon, DJ LeMahieu, Chad Bettis and Chris Rusin) and bringing back a former player (Chris Iannetta) to stabilize the catcher position. Yet, with pitchers and catchers due to report in just one week, there are still positions in limbo for manager Bud Black. First base is a major question mark, and how that spot plays out could impact the outfield. The Rockies are chock full of talented young starting pitchers, but a proven arm could bolster a rotation that is long on upside but short on experience.

It's unlikely Bridich will be doling out any more big contracts this offseason, but the hot stove market for free agents has been unusually cold this year (outside of Rockies relievers) and there are still dozens of players presently without a home for the 2018 season.

Big-name free agents like outfielders Jose Bautista and J.D. Martinez, corner infielders Eric Hosmer and Mike Moustakas, and starting pitchers Yu Darvish and Jake Arrieta are all yet to sign. With Spring Training just two weeks away, someone is going to flinch and the markets will open back up.

Thomas Harding of MLB.com wrote recently that the Rockies are sticking to a plan: "...develop a starting rotation and lineup core, then target key veterans for important bullpen roles and augment the lineup ... they have eschewed calls to add an experienced starter or a multiyear contract for a corner bat."

However, if it proves out that teams are dictating (see, winning) these new contract negotiations, the Rockies could find themselves in a unique position to "augment the lineup" and/or add that starter or corner bat at a team-friendly price. Knowing they have the chance to be a legitimate championship contender, it has to be tempting for the brass at 20th and Blake to go out and snag one or two more players that could put them over the top.

Only Jeff Bridich can spend Dick Monfort's money, but here are some ways he could do so that would improve the Rockies' championship odds in 2018 and 2019.

Scenario 1: Bye Bye Blackmon, Play Him Off DJ

The Rockies know they have, for certain, one year remaining with batting champions Charlie Blackmon (2017) and DJ LeMahieu (2016) on the roster. After that, they'll have to make a choice. Both become unrestricted free agents in 2019. The Rockies can't keep both Blackmon and LeMahieu and have any hope of also keeping Nolan Arenado beyond 2019. (Arenado is a UFA in 2020).

In this scenario, we'll presume that the moves they make on the eve of (or during) Spring Training 2018 are with the notion that Blackmon and LeMahieu will both be gone in 2019 and the Rockies will be stockpiling money to pay Nolan Arenado come 2020.

Move 1: Add a No. 2/3 Starter

The Rockies will have their big three bats in 2018, and they can't afford to let a young (see, unproven) starting rotation spell doom in what would be the last hurrah for Blackmon, LeMahieu and Arenado.

They won't spend \$20-plus million on the likes of Jake Arrieta or Yu Darvish, but second-tier starters like Jason Vargas and Chris Tillman could be had for a couple of years at around \$10 million per year. Both Vargas and Tillman have baggage from the 2017 season (Vargas fell off the map after an All-Star appearance and Tillman battled injury), but both have intriguing upside (Vargas won 18 games last year and Tillman started three consecutive Opening Days for Baltimore). Playing in a division stacked with quality starters, Colorado would be wise to add a proven arm that has pitched in high-leverage situations (both have postseason experience).

Coughing up another \$10 million on a starter (especially one with question marks) might be painful, but it would be more painful to see the last year of Colorado's "big three" go to waste if the young starters don't take a leap forward in 2018. The financial burden will be high in 2018 but they'll save money in 2019 with Blackmon and LeMahieu gone, going with younger in-house to replace them. It's an all-in play on 2018, with the hopes that young talent like David Dahl and Pat Valaika can fill the void in 2019.

Move 2: Find Mark Reynolds 2.0

If Charlie Blackmon is going to be gone in 2019, the Rockies will need Dahl to fill his shoes both as the captain of the outfield and as a big bat in the lineup. That also means that Ian Desmond will need to lock down one of the corner outfield spots — likely left field. The Rockies signed Desmond last year with the hope that he could play first base. Desmond's hand injury in Spring Training forced them to bring back Mark Reynolds, who went on to have a near All-Star caliber season. Ryan McMahon may not be ready to make the full-time leap to the big leagues in 2018, so in this scenario it makes sense to find a stopgap at first base and firmly plant Desmond in the outfield.

Reynolds remains a free agent and has probably earned himself a multi-year deal, but with each passing day (and better first basemen still available) that likelihood diminishes. He would be the logical choice to bring back, given his familiarity with the club and his relative success in Denver. However, similar options like Adam Lind, Mike Napoli and Tyler Moore are also out there. Any one of those three has the potential to mirror Reynolds' success without tying down the club long-term at the position.

In this scenario the Rockies' best chance to win it all is 2018; they'll have significant work to do in 2019 to fill holes on the roster left by Blackmon and LeMahieu, but at least they'd have Arenado long-term.

Scenario 2: Chuck and DJ Stay, but No More Nolan

Hard as it may be for some Rockies fans to imagine, there's a possible future that does not have Nolan Arenado playing third base at Coors Field. Arenado is under team control through 2019 (his final year of arbitration eligibility). After that he is looking at a long-term deal that could be worth as much as \$400 million. If the Rockies decide that price tag is simply too rich for their blood (and really, who could blame them?), they could use some of that money to lock up Charlie Blackmon and DJ LeMahieu on longer deals. That would allow them to ride out the Blackmon-LeMahieu-Arenado trio through the 2019 season, making two legitimate runs at the World Series.

In this scenario, Colorado doesn't have to be so desperate for an impact starter in 2018 and they can even experiment with Ian Desmond at first base like they planned to do in 2017. Still, they'll have to make some moves to bolster the weak spots on the roster.

Move 1: Bring Back CarGo

Carlos Gonzalez was the only Rockies player on the 2017 Wild Card team who also played in the 2009 playoffs for Colorado. No one player represents the Rockies over the past decade more than “CarGo.” But it’s possible he’ll be “Gonzalez” in 2018. CarGo remains a free agent, with teams treading lightly after he struggled mightily (by his standards, at least) in 2017. But his value to Colorado isn’t different. Gonzalez held down the right field corner at Coors Field as well as anyone ever has, and his corner locker was the hub of the Rockies clubhouse.

In the event the Rockies decide they won’t pursue Arenado beyond 2019, they’ll have some money to pay Gonzalez in the short term. Spotrac has him valued at \$15 million for this year. The Rockies won’t pay that, and it’s unlikely anyone will. CarGo has long wanted to contribute to playoff success in Colorado, and Jeff Bridich (with help from Bud Black) may just be the man to convince him to take a hometown discount to make that happen. With Desmond at first base and Blackmon in center, Gonzalez can maintain his familiar spot in right field and hope that last season’s poor batting performance was an anomaly and not a trend. Worst-case scenario: If Gonzalez can’t sustain starters’ at-bats at a high level, the Rockies will have spent a little extra on bringing back their longtime clubhouse leader who would also be a dangerous bat off the bench and a reliable fourth outfielder.

Move 2: Add a Depth Starter

Bridich and Black have confidence in their young starting pitchers, and they’ve given themselves some room for error with seven starters under 30 (and another three or four knocking at the door in the minors) all capable of claiming a spot in the rotation. Still, only Jon Gray has started a postseason game, which ended very poorly for the big right-hander. Adding a depth starter with a little more experience (think Tyler Chatwood but with better home/road splits) could be the stabilizing element needed to carry the young rotation through 2018 and give them confidence heading into what would be a make-or-break 2019 season in this scenario.

Rockies fans might shudder to hear a name like Brett Anderson, but it’s a pretty steep drop off in the lower ranks of available starters after Jason Vargas and Chris Tillman. There are some potential diamonds in the rough, including Mat Latos and Wade Miley, and Colorado could even flirt with an Ubaldo Jimenez (more shudders, perhaps?) reunion.

Bridich doesn’t *have to* make a move on a starter, but he would be wise to have a backup option or two in the event his young pitchers stumble out of the gate.

This scenario bids farewell to Arenado after 2019, but it gives him two legitimate shots at a World Series between now and then alongside Blackmon and LeMahieu.

Scenario 3: Go All-In for 2018, Then Pray

The common belief is that Colorado long-term will have to choose between Nolan Arenado, Charlie Blackmon and/or DJ LeMahieu. Keeping all three isn't realistic, given the depth in the farm system and the high price tag each will command. But there's even a scenario in which all three are playing elsewhere by 2020.

If the Rockies aren't sure they can commit to any of those three beyond their current contracts, they could make a very bold move and add two more big-name players at the last minute for 2018, then start to blow things up in 2019.

It would mean paying a huge payroll this year, saying goodbye to Blackmon and LeMahieu after 2018 and could mean trading Arenado midseason in 2019. But would it be worth it to make the World Series this year? Here's how it could happen.

Move 1: Pay for an Ace

Does Dick Monfort want to pay Yu Darvish or Jake Arrieta more than \$20 million a year on a multi-year deal? No. Does Dick Monfort want to make it to another World Series? Yes.

Adding Darvish or Arrieta would give the Rockies a bona fide No. 1 starter. Either one would immediately be a pitcher that Bud Black could match up against the top starter that Arizona, Washington and the Dodgers would march out in the opening game of a playoff series. Neither Darvish nor Arrieta are at the level (especially year after year) as Zack Greinke, Max Scherzer or Clayton Kershaw, but either one can certainly match up against that group better than anyone currently on the Rockies' roster.

The Rockies were on Darvish's 10-team no-trade list last year, but so were the Red Sox and Cubs — both division winners. Perhaps he'd be more open to pitching at Coors Field now that Bryan Shaw and Wade Davis would be following him in relief. Arrieta, meanwhile, would come with the added bonus that he would get to bat at Coors Field in half his starts. (He hit .262 with the Cubs in 2016.)

Neither one would guarantee a World Series appearance — even Kershaw couldn't do that — but both would offer a major boost in 2018 and give the Rockies an arm that could single-handedly win games for them in 2019 (and beyond when the big three completely dissolves in this scenario).

Move 1a: Sign Eric Hosmer

Yes, Eric Hosmer would cost the Rockies another \$20-plus million dollars on top of the money they're already spending on Davis and what they'd have to spend on an ace in this scenario. But he would immediately elevate the Rockies' lineup from "one of the best" to "hands down the best" in the National League for 2018.

Hosmer hit a career-high .318 in 2017 and slugged 25 home runs for the second consecutive season. Protected by the other big bats in the Rockies lineup and playing at Coors Field, Hosmer would be a legitimate threat to win a batting title. Hosmer and Arenado would be, for 2018 and '19, the best corner duo in baseball (offensively and defensively). The Rockies, although they'd have one of the biggest payrolls in baseball in 2018, would have to be a favorite to win the NL pennant.

Even without Blackmon and LeMahieu in 2019, the Rockies might have enough (especially with a stud starter like Arrieta or Darvish) to make another run at a pennant on the backs of Arenado, Hosmer and Desmond. And if things don't pan out, the Rockies could trade Arenado at the deadline in 2019 for a haul of prospects.

In this scenario, 2020 and beyond would be played without Arenado, Blackmon and LeMahieu. But it would include Hosmer, Desmond and an ace — not to mention players like David Dahl, Trevor Story and other up-and-coming Rockies.

It's certainly not the most prudent play, and it might burn some bridges with fans who want to see Arenado, Blackmon or LeMahieu locked up as a "Rockie for life," but it would pry wide open the 2018 championship window.

Where's the Money?

The Rockies upped their payroll significantly for 2018, knowing that this may be the last hurrah with Blackmon, LeMahieu and Arenado all on the same roster. They've assembled what, on paper, should be a lights-out bullpen. But they're also leaning heavily on a young, mostly unproven starting rotation and entered February without a first baseman, officially.

Pitchers and catchers report in a week. The first full Spring Training workout is less than a fortnight away. The free agency levee is going to break sooner than later.

There are moves Jeff Bridich can make to improve his team's chances in 2018 (and 2019), but in the end it's Dick Monfort's money. How badly Monfort wants to improve those odds will dictate which of these scenarios (if any) plays out.

2018 Rockies Preview: Trevor Story's next chapter

By Aniello Piro / Mile High Sports | Feb. 6th, 2018

The Colorado Rockies turned heads last season with their impressive 87-75 record, returning to the postseason for the first time in eight years while establishing themselves as a perennial playoff threat for the foreseeable future.

After years filled with shortcomings and underachievement, general manager Jeff Bridich figured out a way to tap into the minds and wallets of the Monfort family, the Rockies ownership group, which until recently have often been branded as cheap and disinterested in winning. The Rockies currently claim the 14th-highest payroll with \$123.64 million dedicated to the 25-man roster which is a significant increase from 2017 (\$105.03 million) and 2016 (\$88,354,041).

The Rockies are relying on Trevor Story improving in 2018

The Rockies' infield is loaded with All-Star talent. Nolan Arenado mans the hot corner and DJ LeMahieu patrols second base. The two make Colorado's infield dynamic; however, the Rockies infield can be one of the best in baseball if shortstop Trevor Story plays up to his potential in 2018.

After bursting onto the baseball scene during his rookie season in 2016, Story built high expectations for his sophomore season. 2017 did not go as smooth for Story as his rookie season as he saw his home run total and average batting dip while his strikeouts total ramped up.

The sophomore slump hit Story hard. His batting average dropped from .272 to .239. His home run total fell from 27 to 24 despite having nearly two months of additional playing time. (He was fully healthy in 2017 after his injury-shortened 2016 tour.) Story also struck out a whopping 191 times — the most in the National League — and had a strikeout percentage of 34.4 last year.

The Rockies need Story to mature at the plate by cutting down his strikeouts while becoming a more efficient hitter. Former Rockies manager Walt Weiss and present-day skipper Bud Black have both said they believe Story has up-the-middle power and the potential to be a run-producing bat in the middle of Colorado's lineup with serious impact. Story demonstrated this ability in spurts, but his plate discipline and, at times, all-or-nothing swing have limited his ability to develop into a dynamic all-around hitter.

After struggling out of the gate in 2017, Story managed to ramp up his performance as the season progressed. He hit .254 with 13 home runs and 47 RBI in the second half of the season. It was a huge jump from his .224 average, 11 home runs, and 35 RBI in the first half.

Story also had a power surge late in the season as his slugging percentage rose to .520, up from .396 in the first half of the year.

With all the money Colorado has spent on free agents over the past two offseasons and the looming free agencies of cornerstones Nolan Arenado, Charlie Blackmon, and DJ LeMahieu, the Rockies are relying internally on improving their offensive production. They need players like Story expected to boost their outputs.

Story is not far off from figuring things out at the plate. His pitch selection continues to be an issue, but with two years in the big leagues under his belt he should take a big leap forward in 2018.

While he still needs some work on the offensive side of things, Story has been sharp on defense since getting called up to the show. Story has made quite a few highlight-reel plays over the course of the past two seasons and is sharp enough to play shortstop on a day-to-day basis. He logged a fielding percentage of 98.2 last season — second-best among NL shortstops.

Spring Training and the 2018 season are important for Story. Infielder Brendan Rodgers, the No. 3 overall pick in 2015, is quickly climbing the ranks in the minor leagues. A future with Story at shortstop and Rodgers at second base would be ideal, but Rodgers was drafted as a shortstop and could threaten Story at the position. If Story can up the production at the plate and cut down on his strikeouts, he will ink his name in Colorado's lineup at shortstop for the foreseeable future.

Colorado Rockies: It's time to sign a first baseman

By Olivia Greene / Rox Pile | Feb. 8th, 2018

On Feb. 5 the New York Mets signed Todd Frazier to a two-year deal. The Colorado Rockies were rumored to be looking into the former Yankees third basemen, even though they still have Nolan Arenado for a couple more years. With that all being said the Rockies do have a primary position they should be looking at: first base. In this article, I'll analyze a few of the free agent first basemen that the Rockies could potentially sign. I'll also be going over what they're contracts should look like.

1. *Mark Reynolds*

Let's just go ahead and get the obvious choice out the way. Mark Reynolds is the most likely candidate for the Rockies.

He made a big splash with the Rox with only signing to a minor league contract and a Spring Training invite. He put in real work putting up a .267 batting along with 30 homers and 97 RBIs. Arguably, that's his best season since 2009 when he had 44 home runs and 102 RBI with the Diamondbacks.

That's pretty good for a guy who the Rox had low expectations for. Defensive wise he did nothing, but add to the already amazing defense. Just last season he made 131 double plays while only making 6 errors. That's pretty good if you ask me. Speaking on his contract, if you look at his contract from last year, it was a 1 year/\$1.5 million. That seems to be a good deal for Reynolds.

I'd actually go over what I believe would be a sound deal for him in my past article. Right now with the free agent market how it is I'd say the max they should give him is \$2 million and stick with the one year deal as Mark Reynolds is 34.

. *Logan Morrison*

Honestly, we've covered **Logan Morrison** in so many different articles here that it's crazy. However, we've mainly discussed him in **these four separate articles**. If the Rockies aren't able to sign Reynolds, Logan Morrison would be the next the best thing. He may actually be an upgrade from Reynolds. Morrison hit a whopping 38 home runs with 85 RBIs that led him to a .246 batting average.

These are Rockie caliber numbers. When you put his stats next to the other Rockies in the lineup, you've got someone that fits right in. Defensively, Morrison is good as well only committing 8 errors and turning 91 double plays. In advanced defensive stats, he is also rated well compared to other first basemen in the American League last season, according to **Fangraphs**. His salary was higher than Reynolds' as Morrison's contract came out to be \$2.5 million for the 2017 season.

Since he's only 30, I'd offer him a two or three year contract amounting to around \$5.5 million (for two years). Even if you go a bit higher, Morrison would be worth it. He probably won't be getting the money that some originally predicted, like MLB Trade Rumors **predicting** that he'd get 3 years and \$39 million all the way back in November. But if the Rockies could work that down a lot, he'd be worth it.

3. Lucas Duda

This one may be a little bit off the beaten path but with baseball, out of the box thinking comes in handy. **Lucas Duda** is a clutch guy and there's no way to tout that. Looking at his stats from last year his batting average was low (.217), but he hit 30 home runs.

To me, it sounds like you have a guy that can swing for power but could work on his contact. The 64 RBI isn't too shabby either, but it's understandable to want more out of him. Duda's time was split due to trade between the Mets and Rays, but with both teams he only had 2 errors which lead to a total of 4 in all.

I'd be reaching out to him ASAP. I wouldn't say the Rockies should drop a lot of money on him, but he's worth more than some perceive. Since he's 32 he probably has 2 good years left, but maybe have a club option in case not everything goes well. Let's shoot for about \$9.5 million for 2 years with a club option.

After all, if he can put up something similar (or better since he'd be playing half of his games at Coors Field) to what he **averaged** in 2014 and 2015 with the Mets (144 games, 70 runs, 30 doubles, 28 home runs, 82 RBI, a .249/.350/.483 slashline, and an OPS+ of 133, he would be well worth \$9.5 million. With the OPS+, the only players on the Rockies last season who were close to that were Nolan Arenado (132 OPS+) and Charlie Blackmon (142).

. Eric Hosmer

A girl can dream right? I truly think that if the Rockies did entertain the idea of signing Hosmer, all of Colorado would be in a frenzy. This would be a dream come true for some Rockies fans as I know that Hosmer would most likely have his best numbers at Coors. Hosmer isn't really a huge power threat but good for contact. Even though he had only 25 homers, he came through with 192 hits and 94 RBIs, which lead him to a .318 batting average. Did I mention he won the Silver Slugger this year as well?

Defensively, Hosmer just took home his fourth career Gold Glove award. If he were to join the Rockies, it'd make him the third Gold Glove player in just the infield.

~~Truly, I can't think of one bad thing when it comes to Hosmer.~~ Actually, yes, I can think of a bad thing: his agent Scott Boras. Now, when talking contract projections, **Scott Boras completely wrecks some teams** from wanting to even talking to Hosmer. When it comes to Hosmer, he's good... really good.

That doesn't mean I would hand out a \$200 million contract. You're out of your mind if you think Hosmer is worth that. He's only 28 so with him it'd be okay going for more years. Since the Royals just **offered** him a deal, it's nice to analyze. It was a 7-year deal for \$147 million. I'd probably go for a 5-year deal for \$100 million, but if the Rox did something like that they'd probably have to completely devote the next few seasons to upgrading the farm system. All it comes down to with **Eric Hosmer** is if he's truly worth the extra cost.

These guys are all free agents, meaning I'm only looking at the current market and solving the first base situation via signing someone. There could be some options on the trade market as well.

The best bet for the Rox is to resign Mark Reynolds or sign Logan Morrison. In my opinion, Morrison would be the better choice looking at his age and his stats. Now, I'm not forgetting that **Ian Desmond** is a possible choice if they choose to stay internal, but he'll most likely be in the outfield. **Ryan McMahon** is the big name on campus for the job if they don't sign a free agent. To me, it's a questionable choice, but hopefully when Spring Training rolls around, they help develop him more and start him in the Cactus League games.

They could even let Rockies infielder **Pat Valaika** see some time at first base. It is something that I said that could potentially happen about a month ago in **this** article and something that Rockies manager Bud Black mentioned as a possibility as we mentioned in **this** article from two weeks ago. In addition, Black also mentioned that prospect **Jordan Patterson** could also see some time at first base.

There's quite a lot of avenues the Rockies could go down, but as of now their best bet would be signing a first baseman.

Colorado Rockies: German Marquez a dark horse Cy Young candidate?

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | Feb. 8th, 2018

When Richard Justice of MLB.com came up with his list of 10 dark horse Cy Young candidates for 2018, he tabbed a member of the Colorado Rockies rotation as a possibility. While that may come as a surprise, it may be more of a surprise which pitcher was mentioned.

When you think of the Colorado rotation, **Jon Gray**'s name is often the first mentioned. However, it was another starter that caught Justice's attention. **German Marquez** was the 10th name on Justice's list, citing the evolution of Marquez on the mound and saying, "...his arm is so good that it's easy to forecast special things."

The soon-to-be 23-year-old right-hander led the Rockies in starts (29), innings pitched (162) and strikeouts (147). He also tied for the team lead in wins with 11. Quite a jump for someone who saw action in just six games in 2016.

There is no question that Marquez took a huge leap forward last season and was one of the cornerstones of a Rockies rotation that was paced by rookies when Jon Gray and **Chad Bettis** both missed significant time with injuries. There is also no question that the Rockies are hoping that Marquez continues his evolution in 2018. Could that include Cy Young discussion? It would be a good sign for the Rockies to have one of their young hurlers mentioned in the same breath as **Clayton Kershaw**, **Max Scherzer** and other National League perennial favorites for the coveted award. It would not only mean that Marquez had a solid season but also that Colorado pitchers were finally getting some of the national recognition they deserve.

In this interesting article on Purple Row, new metrics were used to measure the effectiveness of Colorado's rotation members from 2017. Marquez topped one of the three metrics measured, ranking in the highest stamina among last year's Rockies starters.

There is plenty of room for improvement for Marquez, who flashed a 4-1 mark and 2.64 ERA in five May starts, including spreading just three hits over eight innings in a May 10 win over the Chicago Cubs at Coors Field. Justice mentions his fastball that averaged over 95 miles per hour last season. If Marquez can harness his curveball and use it on a consistent basis, it will bode well for Colorado.

Colorado Rockies: Scott Boras is killing the offseason

By Olivia Greene / Rox Pile | Feb. 8th, 2018

This past offseason has been, so far, lackluster due to the fact there haven't been many big signings. This has brought up many rumors of a players' strike, which seem to be highly doubtful.

One of the included big name relievers that has signed is former **Colorado Rockies** closer **Greg Holland**. Ironically, Holland reportedly received a more than plentiful contract, yet he rejected it. Everyone at Rox Pile was confused as to why he rejected a three-year/\$52 million deal as Noah Yingling discussed **in this article**. Holland's agent is Scott Boras. Actually, the majority of the top free agents are clients of Boras, which leads me to believe this could be a problem. Major League Baseball seemed to agree today **in a statement**.

Scott Boras could be considered a superstar agent. He's seemingly formed a monopoly of big-name players, including **Eric Hosmer**, **Jake Arrieta**, **J.D. Martinez**, and Holland. Did I also mention that these men are all still free agents? Yes, that's correct ... Scott Boras has the futures of their careers in his hands.

You may wonder why Holland rejected Colorado's hefty contract offer ... the same one that **Wade Davis** reportedly accepted. Scott Boras may have played a part in that. As of right now, the super agent's clients seem to believe that he will get them more money than any team is willing to put out. Holland looks to be a firm believer in that as well. One can only think that with the promises of more money that you either hold out for more, like Martinez, or just completely reject probably the best offer you'll get, like Holland.

As I read the article about Holland rejecting such a large sum of money, I knew Boras had to be apart of the problem. Let's face the fact Holland most likely won't get a better contract than he was offered. Now I will say this Holland was great for the Rockies and he may have just shot himself in the foot. Now with Davis as closer, there doesn't really seem to be a point as to why the Rox need Holland unless they wanted to add even more depth to the bullpen. As I've said before and I'll say again the Rockies have solidified their bullpen and the money has been spent. Holland truly isn't needed in Denver this season.

Final Thoughts

If the Rockies wanted to sign a bigger name before Spring Training, good luck. Due to Boras holding out with teams to get more money, it's heavily and negatively affected the free agent market. We are less than 10 days left before pitchers and

catchers report ... and there are still way too many unsigned big names. This, however, seemingly won't affect the Rockies as they spent early on their bullpen and seem to be happy with their lineup heading into spring training.

Colorado Rockies Top 20 prospects for 2018

By John Sickels / SB Nation | Feb. 8th, 2018

Despite a rash of graduations in 2017, the Rockies still have plenty of interest down on the farm

Colorado Rockies Top 20 Prospects for 2018

The list and grades are a blending of present performance and long-term potential. Comments are welcome, but in the end all analysis and responsibility is mine. All of these grades are subject to change as the winter progresses.

The final grades will be finished sometime in late February when all 30 teams are complete.

QUICK PRIMER ON GRADE MEANINGS

Grade A prospects are the elite. *In theory*, they have a good chance of becoming stars or superstars. Theoretically, most Grade A prospects develop into stars or at least major league regulars, if injuries or other problems don't intervene. Note that is a major "if" in some cases.

Grade B prospects have a good chance to enjoy successful careers. Some will develop into stars, some will not. Most end up spending several years in the majors, at the very least in a marginal role.

Grade C prospects are the most common type. These are guys who have something positive going for them, but who may have a question mark or three, or who are just too far away from the majors to get an accurate feel for. **A few Grade C guys, especially at the lower levels, do develop into stars.** Many end up as role players or bench guys. Some don't make it at all.

Finally, keep in mind that **all grades are shorthand.** A Grade C prospect in rookie ball could end up being very impressive, while a Grade C prospect in Triple-A is likely just a future role player.

1) Brendan Rodgers, SS, Grade A-: Age 21, first round pick in 2015 from high school in Florida, hit .387/.407/.671 in the California League over 222 at-bats, then .260/.323/.413 in 150 at-bats in the Eastern League; destroyed High-A (albeit in a friendly league and park), was more human in Double-A but still very credible for his age (he was 20 most of the season); scouts praise his bat speed and overall offensive potential, projecting him to hit for both power and average,

overriding some concerns about an aggressive approach though he'll need to make a few adjustments; range is fringy at shortstop but he should be able to handle a shift to second base without trouble should it be necessary; ETA late 2018.

2) Ryan McMahon, INF, Grade B+/A-: Age 23, second round pick in 2013 from high school in California; hit .355/.403/.583 with 20 homers, 11 steals, 41 walks, 92 strikeouts in 470 at-bats in Double-A and Triple-A, went 4-for-19 in the majors; cut way back on strikeouts in 2017 after whiffing 161 times in '16; better selectivity and more consistent swing mechanics boosted production and he has nothing left to prove in the minors; adequate at third and second base but played first base late in the year and was solid there; has enough bat to play anywhere and ready now; ETA 2018.

3) Peter Lambert, RHP, Grade B: Age 20, second round pick in 2015 from high school in California, posted 4.17 ERA with 131/30 K/BB in 142 innings, 147 hits in High-A; we need to discount what most hitters do at Lancaster but conversely if a pitcher performs well in that environment he deserves some extra credit; fastball 90-95 but not afraid to be aggressive with it, locates well, plays up due to contrast with above-average curveball, change-up; plus makeup and quite young; ETA 2020.

4) Colton Welker, 3B, Grade B: Age 20, fourth round pick in 2016 from high school in Florida; hit .350/.401/.500 with six homers, 18 walks, 42 strikeouts in 254 at-bats in Low-A despite missing eight weeks with strained abdominal muscles; projected to hit for both power and average by scouts; hit .400/.449/.584 in Asheville but .302/.355/.414 on the road, still very solid for the South Atlantic League; decent glove at third base, good enough to stay there if he hits as expected; will probably continue to make noise in High-A with Double-A being the genuine test; ETA 2020.

5) Ryan Vilade, SS, Grade B: Age 18, second round pick in 2017 from high school in Oklahoma, hit .308/.438/.496 in 117 at-bats in Pioneer League with 27 walks, 31 strikeouts; very impressive pro debut against slightly older players; hitting instincts quite polished for his age and shows very good eye for the strike zone, combine that with plus bat speed and you have a player; not a butcher at shortstop but range would fit better at second base; his arm is strong enough for third, which is also an option if he hits as expected; ETA 2021.

6) Garrett Hampson, INF, Grade B-: Age 23, third round pick in 2016 out of Long Beach State University; hit .326/.387/.462 with 24 doubles, 12 triples, eight homers, 56 walks, 77 strikeouts, and 51 stolen bases in High-A; most of his power came at Lancaster (.350/.406/.532) but he was still pretty good on the road (.300/.366/.383), maintaining his strike zone judgment very well; 70-runner combined with walks looks good at the top of the order; excellent at second

base, can also handle shortstop without hurting you though tools are a bit marginal there; quite reliable at both positions; ETA late 2019.

7) Ryan Castellani, RHP, Grade B-: Age 21, second round pick in 2014 from high school in Arizona, posted 4.81 ERA with 132/47 K/BB in 157 innings in Double-A, 163 hits; most days works at 90-94 but can hit 96-97 at his best, while mixing in a slider and change-up; although he throws strikes both secondary pitches are erratic and he seldom had both of them working in the same game; he did finish well, throwing 14 shutout innings in his last two starts of the year with 15 strikeouts in 14 innings; potential number three starter if he finds more consistency; ETA late 2019.

8) Riley Pint, RHP, Grade B-: Age 20, first round pick in 2016 from high school in Kansas; very disappointing season for the fourth-overall pick in the '16 draft, posting 5.42 ERA with 79/59 K/BB in 93 innings, 96 hits in Low-A; home park bandbox at Asheville didn't help but he was equally bad on the road; fastball reported as high as a rumored/reported 102, a definitely confirmed 99, and consistently 94-96, but very inconsistent off-speed pitches and poor command due to mechanical issues make him quite hittable at this point, even for Low-A hitters; widely regarded as best pitching prospect in the Rockies system; in my opinion he has the best *arm* for certain, but that's not the same thing as being the best pitching prospect, thus his ranking here; he certainly has lots of time but another bad year as a starter will increase relief rumors; ETA 2021.

9) Tyler Nevin, 3B-1B, Grade B-: Age 20, first round pick in 2015 from high school in California, son of former major leaguer Phil Nevin; missed almost all of 2016 with hamstring tear and half of 2017 with a wrist problem but has hit well when healthy, batting .299/.353/.454 with eight homers, 27 walks, 65 strikeouts in 328 at-bats between Low-A and short-season rehab work; finished very hot, hitting .336/.381/.523 in last 50 games; bat speed and power are real and he didn't show much rust as a hitter despite the long injury layoff; on the other hand his defense at both third base and first base was poor, leading to positional questions, although the lack of repetitions with the glove as well as his youth could be mitigating factors; ETA 2021.

10) Yency Almonte, RHP, Grade C+/B-: Age 23, drafted by Los Angeles Angels in 17th round in 2012 from high school in Florida, traded to Chicago White Sox in 2015 then the Rockies in '16; posted 2.00 ERA with 71/31 K/BB in 76 innings in Double-A with 58 hits, then 4.89 ERA with 22/21 K/BB in 35 innings in Triple-A, 41 hits; live arm with 94-96 MPH fastball, also has a solid-average slider; change-up is very erratic, decent some days and not existing on others, was able to

dominate Double-A but moving up to Albuquerque and the PCL exposed his command issues; I think he's probably a reliever long-term; ETA late 2018.

11) Forrest Wall, OF, Grade C+/B-: Age 22, compensation round pick in 2014 from high school in Florida, hit .299/.361/.471 in 87 at-bats in California League, missing most of the season with a dislocated (non-throwing) shoulder; former second baseman moved to outfield last year after proving too error-prone and looked decent enough with the glove; although a larger sample is needed, he's at least playable in center; line drive bat with solid eye and slightly above-average runningspeed haven't changed but he lacks the huge impact potential of a top outfield prospect; ETA 2020.

12) Sam Howard, LHP, Grade C+/B-: Age 24, third round pick in 2014 from Georgia Southern University; posted 3.32 ERA with 104/43 K/BB in 127 innings in Double-A/Triple-A, including a good bit of pitching in the PCL without overt collapse of his stats; survived Albuquerque intact in other words, which is fine training for Coors Field; looks like a finesse lefty on paper but fastball can get up to 95, also has a good changeup; slider is generally average and can get flat; potential fourth starter who might be more dominant on per-inning basis if used in bullpen; ETA late 2018.

ANALYST NOTE: Spots 13 through 20 are more-or-less interchangeable.

13) Tom Murphy, C, Grade C+: Age 26, third round pick from University of Buffalo in 2012, hit .255/.312/.426 with four homers, nine walks, 56 strikeouts in 141 at-bats in Triple-A, missing most of the season with a broken arm; played well in Triple-A in 2016 (.327/.361/.647) and doesn't have much left to prove with the bat if healthy; very good power, though batting average and OBP will likely be erratic; injuries have slowed his defensive development but he's a viable backstop if he hits as much as he should/could; we'll have to see if the injury impairs his throwing; ETA 2018.

14) Brian Mundell, 1B, Grade C+: Age 23, seventh round pick in 2015 from Cal Poly, hit .300/.385/.472 between High-A and Double-A with 60 walks, 70 strikeouts, 15 homers in 436 at-bats; plus raw power in 6-3, 230 pound body but game power plays lower due to line drive swing; very good eye for the strike zone helps and more homers may come in time; lacks the athleticism and mobility to play anywhere but first base and even there he's below-average overall; I like his bat and he could put up big numbers especially in thin air, but where do you play him? ETA 2019.

15) Yonathan Daza, OF, Grade C+: Age 23, from Venezuela, hit .341/.376/.466 with 34 doubles, 11 triples, three homers, 31 steals, 30 walks, 88 strikeouts in 519 at-bats in High-A; hit almost as well on the road (.331/.377/.434) as at home (.350/.375/.495) so this isn't just a mere Lancaster illusion, we do need to see him in Double-A of course but he caught

the eye of Cal League observers with speed, gap power, and throwing arm; he caught the attention of other teams, too, so the Rockies protected him on the 40-man roster as otherwise someone would probably have taken him in the Rule 5 draft; ETA 2020.

16) Sam Hilliard, OF, Grade C+: Age 23, 15th round pick in 2015 from Wichita State University, hit .300/.360/.487 with 21 homers, 37 steals, 50 walks, 154 strikeouts in 536 at-bats in High-A; originally a pitcher, became full-time outfielder last year in college; legit power/speed combination and a strong throwing arm, too, all physical tools at least average or a notch above; sometimes patient but strikes out a lot; has to prove he can hit outside of Lancaster, batted .336/.399/.572 at home but just .261/.315/.391 on the road; the splits mean we must be grade-cautious, but there are real tools here; watch him closely in Double-A; ETA 2020.

17) Daniel Montano, OF, Grade C+: Age 18, signed out of Venezuela in 2015 for \$2,000,000; hit .270/.355/.423 in Dominican Summer League with three homers, nine steals, 24 walks, 39 strikeouts in 189 at-bats; DSL performance was quite solid although numbers at that level must be dealt with judiciously; that said, scouting reports show above-average speed with a chance for average power; already has good plate discipline; long way off of course but some observers expect a serious breakout once he gets to the United States; ETA 2023.

18) Breiling Eusebio, LHP, Grade C+: Age 21, from the Dominican Republic, posted 3.61 ERA with 53/20 K/BB in 57 innings between Northwest and South Atlantic Leagues; throws heavy fastball in low-90s along with a curve that flashes plus and an erratic but improvable change-up; further polish on secondaries could result in a breakout soon; watch for any spike in K/IP ratio as early indicator; ETA 2021.

19) James Farris, RHP, Grade C+: Age 25, ninth round pick by the Chicago Cubs in 2014 from University of Arizona, traded to Rockies last winter; posted 3.59 ERA with 69/17 K/BB in 58 innings between Double-A and Triple-A, 51 hits; typical middle relief type with 90-95 MPH fastball and an average but consistent slider; should be ready for bullpen trial soon; ETA 2018.

20) Wes Rogers, OF, Grade C+: Age 23, fourth round pick in 2014 from Spartanburg Methodist; hit .319/.377/.488 with 37 doubles, nine homers, 45 walks, 85 strikeouts, 70 steals in 461 at-bats in High-A; impressive season but he was repeating the Cal League and has sharp splits, hitting a crazy .356/.418/.589 at Lancaster with a more reasonable

.285/.338/.397 on the road; given his speed even the latter line makes him someone to track when he reaches Double-A; ETA late 2019.

OTHER GRADE C+: Willie Abreu, OF; Ben Bowden, LHP; Shane Broyles, RHP; Ramon Marcelino, OF; Mike Nikorak, RHP; Dom Nunez, C; Jordan Patterson, 1B-OF; Chad Spangberger, 1B;

OTHERS OF NOTE: Bryan Baker, RHP; Anthony Bemboom, C; Bret Boswell, 2B; Sam Bouchard, 1B; Noel Cuevas, OF; Jairo Diaz, RHP; Tommy Doyle, RHP; Vince Fernandez, OF; Josh Fuentes, 3B; Will Gaddis, RHP; Casey Golden, OF; Rayan Gonzalez, RHP; David Hill, RHP; Austin House, RHP; Reid Humphries, RHP; Zach Jemiola, RHP; Nick Kennedy, LHP; Justin Lawrence, RHP; Matt McLaughlin, SS; Pearson McMahan, RHP; Javier Medina, RHP; Shael Mendoza, 2B; Harrison Musgrave, LHP; Yolki Pena, OF; Chris Rabago, C; Roberto Ramos, 1B; Mike Tauchman, OF; Jesus Tinoco, RHP; Robert Tyler, RHP; Jerry Vasto, LHP; Jan Vazquez, C; Hunter Williams, LHP

Despite all of the graduations last year, there's still a nice batch of talent there. I will answer questions in the comments section.