



MEDIA CLIPS – Jan. 7, 2019

Sources: Rockies showing interest in Dozier
By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb
Jan. 6th, 2019

DENVER -- The Rockies are considering pursuing free-agent second baseman **Brian Dozier** on a short-term deal, but have to balance the pursuit against payroll concerns, according to multiple Major League sources.

Dozier, who turns 32 on May 15, batted .215 with 21 home runs and 72 RBIs during a 2018 season that saw him traded from the Twins to the Dodgers -- where he struggled with irregular playing time in a deep lineup, batting .182 with five home runs in 47 games following the trade. From 2014-17 with the Twins, Dozier averaged 32 home runs a season, with a career-high 42 in 2016.

Dozier could be one more power hitter for a lineup that includes third baseman **Nolan Arenado**, who led the National League with 38 home runs last season; shortstop **Trevor Story**, who was second in the NL with 37; outfielder **Charlie Blackmon**, who hit 29; and center fielder **Ian Desmond**, who hit 22.

Dozier would be a veteran replacement for **DJ LeMahieu** -- a free agent after seven distinguished seasons with the Rockies. LeMahieu and **Jed Lowrie**, who has been a switch-hitting threat while spending the last three seasons with the Athletics, would also be good fits for Colorado, but they seek longer contracts than the Rockies are willing to give.. 3rd, 2019

Even working out a shorter deal with Dozier is not certain, because of the Rockies' growing payroll.

Daniel Murphy signed for **two years and \$24 million** to play first base. Also, the Rockies have seven arbitration-eligible players, with Arenado -- a candidate for a multi-year contract -- expected to break the arbitration record of \$23 million set by **Josh Donaldson** last year, based on projections by MLB Trade Rumors, and Story also in line for a big raise.

Additionally, the Rockies are full of young, homegrown middle infielders.

Left-handed-hitting **Ryan McMahon**, who played mostly first base last year and saw his bat improve steadily as a rookie, and right-handed-hitting **Garrett Hampson**, who saw brief action late in the year but earned a postseason spot, **appear ready to contribute more**. Plus, there's middle infielder Brendan Rodgers, who is ranked by MLB Pipeline as the **No. 9 overall prospect** in baseball and tops in the **Rockies' system**. Rodgers finished at Triple-A Albuquerque last year.

Dozier's numbers with the Dodgers and Twins dipped last season -- not only the lower batting average, but a .305 on-base percentage and a .391 slugging percentage. From 2015-17, when he emerged as a standout with the Twins, Dozier produced a .258/.335/.496 slash line, with an **OPS+** of 122 (22 points above league average).

However, Dozier suffered a severe right knee bone bruise in April, and the pain remained throughout the season. To illustrate how the injury may have affected him, his **weighted on-base average** was .304 in 2018 after marks of .323 in 2015, .370 in '16 and .362 in '17. He had hard-hit rates of 31.1 percent in '15, 36.2 in '16 and 34.7 in '17, only to see the number drop to 28.7 in '18.

Oberg overcomes odds to be a force out of 'pen

After battling injuries, setup man looking to build on strong second half

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Jan. 3rd, 2019

DENVER -- Rockies right-handed relief pitcher **Scott Oberg**'s work over his past 34 regular-season games -- 1.85 ERA, 40 strikeouts and five walks in 34 innings -- may preview where his career is headed. Later innings, possibly the ninth, could come his way in the future.

But at his Sewell, N.J., home, which he shares with his wife, Diana, and a nearly 5-month-old daughter, Charlotte, Oberg keeps a cane -- one you'd expect a fellow much older than Oberg, 28, to have around -- to remind him where he has been.

It's what Oberg had to use just to get out of bed back when he was 20 and was suffering from psoriatic arthritis during his sophomore year at the University of Connecticut. During a six-month ordeal, his toes swelled to look "like little sausages," before he found the right diagnosis and medicine.

Oberg said it was difficult getting around campus due to his ailment.

"It not only affected my feet, but I needed a cane to literally get out of bed and move around my apartment until my joints started loosening to the point I could get my socks on, get my shoes on."

He recovered, only to blow out his right elbow and have Tommy John surgery. But here he is, an important part of the Rockies' bullpen.

In 2018, Oberg struggled so badly through his first 10 appearances (6.44 ERA) that he was optioned to Triple-A Albuquerque. But after his May 29 return, Oberg became trusted to protect leads. Now, with righty setup man **Adam Ottavino** exploring free agency this winter and closer **Wade Davis** signed for two more years, it's possible that Oberg could fill the ninth inning at some point should it become available.

So it's a good time to get to know Oberg, a 15th-round Draft pick in 2012 who has overcome much since his arthritis bout to become a key part of the Rockies' present and future.

The UConn Huskies produced five Major Leaguers during Oberg's time. The others are Astros outfielder **George Springer**, D-backs shortstop **Nick Ahmed**, Red Sox right-hander **Matt Barnes** and free-agent third baseman **Mike Olt**.

Oberg and Springer, the 2017 World Series Most Valuable Player, were roommates during their first two years at UConn, which included Oberg's arthritis scare, and later were in each other's weddings.

"Seeing him physically for the first time and hearing the sound off the bat, I was, 'Wow, I'd never heard anything like this before ... this guy is something special,'" Oberg said.

They faced off twice in 2015, and Oberg fanned Springer both times. They didn't face each other in the five games between the clubs in 2018. Oberg missed the final two for the birth of his daughter.

Oberg has overcome challenges -- a shoulder injury shortened his 2014 at Double-A Tulsa before he was promoted to the Majors in '15. Blood clots in his right arm in '16 led to surgery, but didn't scare him.

"I remember somebody asking me, 'Are you nervous about going to the hospital for your blood clots?'" he said. "I'm like, 'No. I've got to get there in one piece and I'll be all right.' I've been around enough doctors to know that these guys know what they're doing."

Oberg's performance changed dramatically after the time in Triple-A. According to **Statcast™**, he saw an increase in the rate of swings and misses on his fastball from **April** to his performance after his **May 29 recall**. Also the whiff rate on his slider increased from his **first struggling stint** to his **outstanding run after returning**. Most notably, in April the pitches had differing release points. After his May 29 call-up, the red and yellow are more clumped. Translated, batters couldn't tell the difference between the pitches as easily.

"I just felt a heightened awareness of my body control, of my pitches, of what it was I was doing out there," Oberg said.

Oberg's 2018 **ended with a balk**, when he dropped the baseball while on the rubber, and a wild pitch to let two runs score in the 6-0 loss to the Brewers that ended a three-game sweep in the National League Division Series. But it's not as if the oddity hangs over his head.

"The chances of that [balk] actually happening again are such a small percentage that it's not something where I'm going to beat myself up, try to correct, or hang onto this notion of, 'I'm going to be angry all offseason and take it into Spring Training,'" he said.

Oberg wants big situations and is willing to work for them.

"Coming into this year, I know I have a lot of work to do, and I want to be able to put a full seven-month campaign together," he said. "It's going out there every night with the same consistent process and attitude I had the second half."

Reports: Saunders, Rox have Minor League deal
Outfielder last appeared in Majors in 2017
By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb
Jan. 1st, 2019

DENVER -- Left-handed hitting **Michael Saunders**, an All-Star in 2016 with the Blue Jays, has signed a Minor League contract with the Rockies, according to multiple reports. The team has not announced the deal, but Saunders is expected to be in Major League camp for Spring Training.

Saunders, 32, last played in the Majors in 2017 with the Blue Jays, whom he joined after the Phillies released him three months into a one-year, \$8 million contract. Last season, Saunders played a total of 38 games at the Triple-A level for the Orioles and the White Sox, hitting .158 with two home runs and 18 RBIs.

In 2016, Saunders played in a career-high 140 games and batted .253 with a career-best 24 home runs and 57 RBIs. In nine Major League seasons, Saunders had hit .232 with a .305 on-base percentage and .397 slugging percentage.

Stats say: Welker drove ball best in Minors in '18
By Mike Rosenbaum MLB.com @GoldenSombrero
Jan. 2nd, 2019

Here at MLB Pipeline, the ringing in of the New Year means we're that much closer to rolling out our 2019 preseason rankings. Until then, however, we're continuing to look back at some of the more impressive hitters from the '18 season.

The first installment of this new stats-based series examined **10 hitters** who, based on specific batted-ball data from our Prospects Stats tool, seem poised for more success in 2019.

This week, we're breaking down a crop of last year's more successful hitters -- specifically, players who had the highest percentage of their line drives and fly balls go for hits. It's a roundabout way of highlighting which hitters drive the baseball the most effectively in absence of **Statcast™** data.

There are some obvious caveats here, of course. Namely, that the numbers used represent raw data and therefore are not adjusted for league and/or park factors. Also, the sample looks only at hitters who rank among their club's Top 30 prospects and had at least 350 batted balls during the Minor League regular season.

Meanwhile, after identifying select players in the series' first installment, this week's list is presented in ranked order. The spray charts below display all line drives and fly balls by each player in the Minor Leagues during the 2018 season.

One notable name absent from the list is Vladimir Guerrero Jr. The game's top prospect doesn't appear here because he fell just shy of the minimum for BIP (350). Of the 328 balls Guerrero put into play last season, 26.8 percent (88) were line drives or fly balls that went for hits, which would rank him just outside the Top 10 on this list.

1. Colton Welker, 3B, Rockies' No. 2 (No. 94 overall) -- 31.2 percent

Welker, 21, won the Class A Advanced California League batting title in 2018 with a .333 average. He also led the circuit in hits, tallying 151 in 114 games, and put together hitting streaks of 15 and 20 games along the way, all while showing the ability to lace line drives to all fields. His home/road splits (.572 SLG, 9 HR vs. .750 OPS, 4 HR) suggest that he did benefit from Lancaster's extremely hitter-friendly environment, and some evaluators are wary about his power potential as a result, but Welker's career .337 average in 232 Minor League games, as well as his feel for using the opposite field, provides reason for all-around optimism.

Rockies have clear objective on to-do list
By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb
Dec. 30th, 2018

DENVER -- Here are five things the Rockies have to do between now and Spring Training, as they prepare for a shot at a third straight postseason appearance:

1. Sign Nolan Arenado to a multi-year contract

It may or may not happen, depending on what the Rockies can afford versus what could be available to him on the open market after the 2019 season.

2. Consider a catching upgrade

This is here because the fans clamor for more offense than what **Chris Iannetta** and **Tony Wolters** provide. However, it's not as stark a problem if the club can find run production from outfielder **David Dahl** and infielder **Ryan McMahon**.

3. Decide what to do with the bench

The offense off the bench didn't become solidified until McMahon found pinch-hit success after two options to Triple-A Albuquerque, left-handed-hitting **Gerardo Parra** segued from a starting job to a key reserve and right-handed-hitting **Matt Holliday** joined the team late in the year. Parra and Holliday are free agents. It's not clear whether the Rockies will try to go young the way they did at the start of last season, or look at veterans.

4. Be thankful for pitching depth

In an industry that's experimenting with avant-garde, bullpen-oriented pitching structures, partly because of lack of depth, the Rockies are fortunate. Lefty **Kyle Freeland** finished fourth in National League Cy Young Award voting, righty **German Marquez** grew into a force, lefty **Tyler Anderson** logged the most innings of his career and righty **Antonio Senzatela** did enough with his opportunities to earn a postseason start. If **Jon Gray** can rebound from rough patches in 2018, and **Chad Bettis** can shake blisters that ruined his season, the Rockies could have more depth than most clubs. Righty **Jeff Hoffman** will push to be included, and **No. 3 prospect** Peter Lambert made 11 Triple-A starts at age 21 last season.

5. Settle the bullpen

Will the Rockies be able to outmaneuver some large-market clubs and re-sign **Adam Ottavino**, or will they comb for an under-the-radar stalwart? While they are expecting bounce-back years from left-handers **Chris Rusin** and **Jake McGee** and right-hander **Bryan Shaw**, the Rockies still could stand to make another addition.

Jairo Diaz, Michael Saunders sign minor-league deals with Rockies
Diaz, 27, has posted a 3.64 ERA over 29 ⅔ big-league innings
By PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
January 2, 2019 at 1:35 pm

Jairo Diaz, a hard-throwing right-handed reliever, has rejoined the Rockies organization, signing a minor-league contract. At this point, however, there are no plans to invite him to big-league camp.

Diaz, 27, has posted a 3.64 ERA over 29 ⅔ big-league innings. He was granted free agency by the Rockies in November. Last season, he posted a 5.84 ERA over 12 ⅓ innings in the minors, including a 9.82 ERA over 3 ⅓ innings at Triple-A Albuquerque.

He last pitched for the Rockies in 2017, posting a 9.00 ERA over four games (five innings). That year, he took a month-long personal leave of absence from the team in the spring, and then went on the disabled list in mid-August with elbow inflammation.

He made 21 appearances for Colorado in 2015 (0-1, 2.37 ERA), but missed 2016 following Tommy John surgery. Diaz was originally obtained from the Angels for infielder Jeff Rutledge before the 2015 season.

The Rockies have also signed outfielder Michael Saunders to a minor-league deal and he is expected to get an invitation to big-league camp next month. Saunders, a left-handed hitter, was an all-star in 2016 with the Blue Jays.

Saunders, 32, last played in the majors in 2017 with Toronto, whom he joined after the Phillies released him three months into a one-year, \$8 million contract. In 2018, Saunders played 38 games at Triple-A level for the Orioles and the White Sox, but he struggled mightily, hitting just .158 with two home runs and 18 RBIs.

In 2016, Saunders played in a career-high 140 games for Toronto, hitting .253 with a career-high 24 home runs and 57 RBIs. In nine big-league seasons, Saunders has batted .232 with 81 home runs and a .701 OPS in 775 big-league games.

Is Todd Helton a Hall of Famer? Breaking down the case for Rockies icon

First baseman is one of only two players to have at least 2,500 hits, 550 doubles, 350 home runs and a career batting average of .315 or higher

By PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: December 23, 2018 at 6:00 am | UPDATED: January 4, 2019 at 7:13 pm

A plaque commemorating Todd Helton's retired No. 17 holds a place of honor at Coors Field. It's easy to spot on the facade above right-center field.

On the main concourse, under the ballpark's giant scoreboard, the Helton Burger Shack does a brisk business, serving up shakes, fries and, of course, burgers, with a secret Helton sauce.

The man, now 45, was a career .316 hitter who mashed 369 home runs over a 17-year career. He was a five-time all-star and won three Gold Gloves at first base. He is a Colorado sports icon, but is he a legitimate candidate to be enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.?

He's eligible for the first time in 2019.

For most Rockies fans, it's a no-brainer that the first baseman belongs in the Hall of Fame, but that consensus is not universal. As Rockies' great Larry Walker has discovered, Coors Field's reputation as a hitter's paradise casts a long shadow.

Following is a breakdown of the arguments for and against Helton's induction into Cooperstown.

The basics: Candidates must receive at least 75 percent of the vote from eligible voters from the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Candidates can be on the ballot for 10 years, but they must receive at least 5 percent of the vote every year to remain on the ballot.

There are 35 candidates on the 2019 ballot, and BBWAA voters have until Dec. 31 to cast ballots. Results will be announced Jan. 22, and the 2019 Hall of Fame class will be inducted July 21.

Trending: As of Friday, 79 of an estimated 412 ballots had been made public. According to early tabulations by Hall of Fame tracker Ryan Thibodaux, Helton had received 21.5 percent of the vote (17 of 79).

Walker, who is on the ballot for the ninth time, had received 64.6 percent of the vote (51 of 79), a dramatic increase from 34.1 percent last year.

By comparison: Helton, who finished his career with 2,519 hits (including 592 doubles), is one of only two players in baseball history to have at least 2,500 hits, 550 doubles, 350 home runs and a career batting average of .315 or higher. The other? Hall of Famer Stan Musial.

Helton is one of just seven players who own a .316 career batting average, .414 on-base percentage and .539 slugging percentage over at least 1,000 career games. The others: Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Rogers Hornsby, Jimmie Foxx, Lou Gehrig and Musial, all of whom are in the Hall of Fame.

Helton is the only player in MLB history to have 35 or more doubles in at least 10 consecutive seasons (1998–2007). He was also a stalwart on defense, with three Gold Glove Awards at first base to his credit. He is tied for seventh all-time among first basemen in MLB history in fielding percentage (.9962).

Split decision: Rockies position players often see their statistics discounted because they play half their games in one of the majors' most favorable hitters' park. And there's no question that Helton's career splits are dramatic. He posted a .345/.441/.607 slash line and hit 227 of his 369 career homers in the mile-high air.

But Helton road numbers were solid: .287/.386/.469. And consider this: Helton's career .855 OPS away from Coors Field is better than the road marks of several Hall of Famers, including Dave Winfield (.841), Eddie Murray (.838), Rickey Henderson (.836), Tony Gwynn (.835), Al Kaline (.827) and George Brett (.825).

JAWS and James: Helton finished his career with a 53.9 JAWS rating, a system created by writer Jay Jaffe that evaluates a player's worthiness for enshrinement by comparing him to the Hall of Famers at his position. Helton's JAWS rating is close to the average of 54.7 for first basemen already enshrined in Cooperstown. As Jaffe recently noted Helton's JAWS score is higher than Hall of Fame first basemen such as Orlando Cepeda, Harmon Killebrew, and Tony Pérez.

Still, given that Helton played half his games at Coors, Jaffe recently concluded: "Helton is no slam dunk. I suspect most voters will see him as a borderline pick, somebody to be considered for the last spot on the ballot but not a must-vote."

Helton, by the way, retired with a 175 Hall of Fame monitor score, a metric created by sabermetrician Bill James where a score over 100 means a player is more than likely to be voted in.

WAR: In terms of WAR (wins above replacement), Helton gets a mixed report card, at least by Hall of Fame standards. According to Fangraphs, Helton's 61.2 career WAR ranks 17th all-time among first basemen, and below 12 of the 21 enshrined at the Hall including Jeff Bagwell, Jim Thome, and Frank Thomas, whose careers overlapped with Helton's. As Jaffe notes, Helton in his prime (1998-2009), put up a 59.2 WAR that ranked sixth in the majors behind only Alex Rodriguez (90.9), Albert Pujols (73.8, starting in 2001), Chipper Jones (64.5), Scott Rolen (59.7), and Derek Jeter (59.6) during his best years. But poor production in his final four seasons barely lifted his number.

Longevity vs. productivity: From 1998 through 2009, Helton was one of baseball's best first basemen and was considered an elite hitter. Although he blasted only 15 home runs in 2009, he still hit .325, had 38 double with a .416 on-base percentage and posted a .904 OPS.

But the final four years of his career numbers, when he was injured much of the time, pale by comparison. He hit .264 and had only 44 home runs. He managed just a 97 OPS+ over the final four years of his career. OPS+ takes a player's on-base plus slugging percentage and normalizes the number across the entire league. It accounts for external factors such as ballparks. It then adjusts so a score of 100 is the league average.

Then again, Helton played 2,247 games, all of them in a Rockies uniform. He's Colorado's career leader in games played, at bats (7,962), runs (1,401), hits, total bases (4,292), doubles, home runs, RBIs (1,406), walks (1,335), and intentional walks (185).

Those numbers make Helton, unquestionably, the face of the franchise.

But will he be immortalized in Cooperstown? Not in 2019, but down the road he certainly has a good chance.

**How Colorado can construct their lineup to compete for the NL West crown
By Drew Creasman - Posted on January 4, 2019 | BSN Denver**

Now that the Colorado Rockies have made what is likely to be their biggest acquisition of the offseason, bringing in Daniel Murphy to play first base and add some consistency to the offense, the question is whether or not they have a roster that can stand to compete for the NL West in 2019.

Without knowing still how the rest of the league will shake out, especially while waiting to see what the Los Angeles Dodgers are up to, we can begin to speculate on the overall potential of the Rockies lineups, especially if we allow ourselves to analyze multiple permutations of it.

There are a few key elements to consider when constructing these lineups for next season. The primary ones concern Charlie Blackmon's age and ability to play centerfield moving forward, David Dahl's health, Ian Desmond's ultimate value, and the general progression (or lack thereof) of the young contingency featuring Raimel Tapia, Garrett Hampson, and Ryan McMahon. We will hold off for now on projecting lineups with Brendan Rodgers in them.

As it is constituted this very moment, Colorado can throw out some typical or creative lineups that can be tweaked throughout the year.

While on the surface level, it may not seem like much has changed from a year ago, how these players are employed will matter a great deal to that equation.

Let's begin with a scenario most resembling what we have already seen.

If you believe that Blackmon is at his best leading off, value contact in the two-hole, and want to lean on veterans while young guys prove their value. This is a likely early-season lineup:

1. Charlie Blackmon – LF (LH)
2. Daniel Murphy – 1B (LH)
3. Nolan Arenado – 3B (RH)
4. David Dahl – RF (LH)

5. Trevor Story – SS (RH)

6. Ryan McMahon – 2B (LH)

7. Ian Desmond – CF (RH)

8. Chris Iannetta – C (RH)

9. P

The two lefties at the top make it easier to game plan against, though both Blackmon and Murphy have done well against same-handed pitching.

And, in order to avoid running into that same problem again, you have to move Story down to the fifth spot which may be a bit lower than is ideal but he moves up against lefties. If Bud Black cares less about that he can simply swap Dahl and Story and the same is true with McMahon and Desmond.

I expect we will see something close to this on Opening Day.

However, as the team coalesces and the young players emerge, the Rockies could decide to construct their lineup to take advantage of a speed element while stacking the middle of the order with power.

If you trust Dahl's ability to stay healthy and progress as an all-around player, want Blackmon in the middle of the lineup, and want to present a speed tandem at the top, this might be a lineup maybe later into the season once Dahl has proven himself:

1. David Dahl – CF (LH)

2. Trevor Story – SS (RH)

3. Charlie Blackmon – LF (LH)

4. Nolan Arenado – 3B (RH)

5. Daniel Murphy – 1B (LH)

6. Ian Desmond – RF (RH)

7. Ryan McMahon – 2B (LH)

8. Chris Iannetta – C (RH)

9. P

On days when Iannetta catches, this lineup also presents a constant switch between right and left-handed batters, causing problems for how opposing managers can align their late-inning relievers.

One downside to this lineup is that, if nobody reaches base in the first inning, a pitcher can settle into a rhythm on the mound before having to face Arenado. And Arenado has insane first-inning numbers. That plus it is always a good idea to make the opponent face your scariest guy before he gets to take a breath.

It might also be a slight misuse of Story's power to bat him second.

So far in our lineups, the bench would look like this: Raimel Tapia, Garret Hampson, Tony Wolters, Pat Valaika.

If Colorado were inclined to get creative and employ truer platoons, you could see a lineup like this against left-handed pitchers:

1. Ian Desmond – CF (RH)

2. Garret Hampson – 2B (RH)

3. Nolan Arenado – 3B (RH)

4. Trevor Story – SS (RH)

5. Charlie Blackmon – LF (LH)

6. Daniel Murphy – 1B (LH)

7. David Dahl – RF (LH)

8. Chris Iannetta – C (RH)

9. P

This is part of why it makes sense for the Rockies to still be looking for a right-handed hitter who can play in the outfield.

This lineup isn't bad by any means, and the string of lefties from 5-7 all handle same-handed pitching relatively well.

But players also need rest, and unless Valaika or Noel Cuevas has some major improvement there is a spot on the bench where it makes sense to put another player. And if you are going to platoon, you might as well get the most out of it.

If the Rockies were to acquire such a player (Josh Harrison?) Desmond could play first for Murphy at times and left-field for Blackmon at others, allowing the newcomer to fill in accordingly.

So, in theory, you could see something like this against lefties:

1. Ian Desmond – 1B (RH)

2. Josh Harrison – LF (RH)

3. Nolan Arenado – 3B (RH)

4. Trevor Story – SS (RH)

5. Charlie Blackmon – CF (LH)

6. Garrett Hampson – 2B – (RH)

7. David Dahl – RF (LH)

8. Chris Iannetta – C (RH)

Bench: Tapia, D. Murphy, Wolters, McMahon

Then, against righties, the Rockies could do this:

1. David Dahl – RF (LH)
2. Daniel Murphy – 1B (LH)
3. Charlie Blackmon – LF (LH)
4. Nolan Arenado – 3B (RH)
5. Ryan McMahon – 2B (LH)
6. Trevor Story – SS (RH)
7. Raimel Tapia – CF (LH)
8. Tony Wolters – C (LH)
9. P

Bench: Desmond, Hampson, Iannetta, Harrison (Valaika or Noel Cuevas with no acquisition)

Depending on how Dahl, Tapia, and McMahon develop, you could move them around. In fact, at first, if the club still has general concerns about his overall play, they could tap into their inner-Tony-LaRussa and bat Tapia ninth and the pitcher eighth.

This would create an interesting dynamic where, any time he does get on base, you now have one more guy with speed in Dahl. Not only that, both of the next two hitters (Dahl and Murphy) hit their fair share of line drives into the gap which Tapia can score on from first base with relative ease.

If he finally takes that next step (in whatever regards he needs to) and his bat starts to play at the majors the way it did in the minors, you could even lead Tapia off and instill this concept more naturally into the lineup with Dahl and Story to follow.

Again, I expect we will see something pretty close to this at some point early on in the season. It will only become more regular if the young guys hit.

Story can be moved up or down accordingly with how well he handles right-handed pitching.

Defensively things can get a little bit fluid as well, especially in the outfield. If the club is insistent on keeping Dahl out of CF to preserve his health, a platoon of Desmond and Tapia in center makes the most sense. If Dahl emerges as the guy who has to take that role, you move that platoon to right field with relative ease.

So can these lineups compete?

In short, yes they can.

The longer answer is that there is a lot of potential for the Rockies to significantly improve upon their offense in 2019 if they can put each player in the proper role and get one of the four key youngsters to take a big step forward.

As it stands, you can pencil in Blackmon, Story, Arenado, and Murphy to be above average hitters at least. Dahl and McMahon are the most likely to jump into that category next season with Hampson and Tapia also having the ability to make themselves plusses in the batter's box.

If none of them do, the Rockies will once again rely on their pitching and defense to get them into the dance. If one of them does, the Rockies could end up with a solid offense that can carry a bit more weight than they did a year ago.

If two of them take the next step... look out.

Colorado Rockies fans already getting a glimpse of next offseason?

by Kevin Henry - 1 day ago | RoxPile

Can what is going on right now in Major League Baseball be an ominous sign for what is to come with the Colorado Rockies and their fans following the 2019 season?

Maybe ominous isn't the right word here, but watching what is happening with Washington Nationals fans and **Bryce Harper** could mirror exactly what **Colorado Rockies** fans could endure next season when **Nolan Arenado** potentially tests the free agent market.

Every morning, we wake up to a new rumor or new thought on where Harper might land. It seems as if the Los Angeles Dodgers, New York Yankees, Philadelphia Phillies and the Nationals have all taken turns being "the favorite" to land Harper in time for next season. Which team actually lands Harper could be determined by how much that team is willing to pay and for how long. **Rumors of a 10-year deal worth more than \$300 million** have been floated out there.

What we are seeing every day with Harper now could be what we see with Arenado next season. If he doesn't re-sign with the Rockies during this season, the 27-year-old Arenado will be the key name in next year's free agent class and the teams who don't pay for **Manny Machado** or Harper this offseason will very much be in the running for Arenado's services in 2019 and beyond. He will also be the everyday subject of rumors and prognostications.

Arenado is the face of the Colorado franchise much like Harper is the face of the Nationals. Arenado is also due a big payday for his on-field performance, much like Harper.

If Arenado's camp and the Rockies can't come to an agreement this season, be prepared for plenty of "what ifs" and "what could happens" swirling around Arenado as the trade deadline nears and the season wraps up. It could very well happen, just like we've seen with Harper in recent weeks.

Keep an eye on what happens with Harper this offseason (and Machado as well, of course). Their fates could well determine Arenado's payment threshold next offseason. It could also determine exactly how many antacids Rockies fans may have to consume as they wait to see if Arenado is still in a Colorado uniform in 2019 and beyond.

When could Brendan Rodgers join the Colorado Rockies?

by Kevin Henry - 2 days ago | RoxPile

I am often asked questions by Colorado Rockies fans through social media (and even in-person by some of my local friends) about Colorado's top prospect. There is one question that I have been asked quite a bit about him lately ... so let's talk about it in this article.

When will the **Colorado Rockies** call up their number one prospect, **Brendan Rodgers**? That question has been asked many times in recent days, especially with the Rockies likely saying goodbye to **DJ LeMahieu** and having the second base starting job up for grabs heading into spring training.

Could that second baseman be Rodgers? It's highly unlikely it would be on Opening Day, especially with **Ryan McMahon** and **Garrett Hampson** already having Major League experience and both showing they're more than capable to hold down the position.

So what does the Rodgers timeline look like? Well, let's take a look at a few factors that will play into his potential Major League debut in 2019.

At the age of 22, Rodgers has plenty of time to contribute to the Rockies and manager **Bud Black insisted during last year's spring training** that he wasn't going to rush him into the big leagues and there were still plenty of things for Rodgers to work on before he stepped onto a Major League field.

What has happened in the course of a year since Black said that? Rodgers was promoted to Triple-A in late July and saw action in 19 games, totaling a nice 69 at-bats while posting a .232/.264/.290 slash line. He also saw some time on the disabled list while in Albuquerque and did not participate in the Arizona Fall League **while taking care of a shoulder** that tightened up on him near the end of the season.

As a note, Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich told Rox Pile and other media members that **Rodgers had received a clean bill of health on his shoulder**, so that's good news headin

With just a handful of at-bats at Triple-A and missing a chance to perform in the AFL, this year's spring training will be another chance for Rodgers to not only show his abilities in-person to Black but also to learn from some of Colorado's veteran players, on and off the field.

There is also the matter that Rodgers is currently not on Colorado's 40-man roster so a move will need to be made not only on the 40-man roster but also on the 25-man roster for Rodgers to see action before the start of September. That means it would likely take an injury to move Rodgers onto the active roster.

Barring that injury or a massive surprise, Rodgers will start the season at Triple-A. It's very possible that Rodgers will see action with the Rockies in 2019, but it will take him conquering Triple-A and growing at the plate and in the field. That's something that will take a bit of time so Rockies fans will have to be patient.

Knowing all of this, what's my prediction? Rodgers joins the Rockies shortly after the All-Star break. What do you think? Let us know in the comments section below.

Etkin's Notebook: Vilade Suffers Broken Finger But Should Be Full Speed by Spring
By Jack Etkin - JANUARY 3, 2019 | InsideTheseams.com

Shortstop Ryan Vilade, considered one of the Rockies' top prospects, suffered a small fracture in his right ring finger while taking batting practice but will be ready for minor league spring training at the outset of March.

Rockies player development director Zach Wilson said Vilade felt something in the finger while swinging a bat in mid-December, and got X-rays that detected the tiny fracture. No surgery was required. Vilade has a splint on the finger and is expected to resume hitting in about two weeks.

"He'll be full-go by the middle of February," Wilson said, "so this really hasn't affected him that much at all."

Players report to minor league spring training on March 1. Vilade, who turns 20 on Feb. 18, was the Rockies' top pick in 2017 when they took him in the second round out of Stillwater (Okla.) High School. The Rockies forfeited their first-round pick that year after signing free agent Ian Desmond.

In his first full professional season last year at Low Class A Asheville, Vilade hit .274/.353/.368 with five homers and 44 RBI in 124 games. He improved dramatically in the second half of the season. Vilade struck out once every 3.77 plate appearances in the first half with a .230 average and .640 OPS. He cut that strikeout rate to one every 9.47 plate appearances in the second half when he hit .310 with a .789 OPS.

SIGNED UP

The Rockies signed outfielder Michael Saunders, infielder Peter Mooney, catcher Brett Nicholas and right-hander Chi Gonzalez to minor league contracts with invitations to big league spring training.

Saunders, 32, a left-handed hitter who lives in Castle Rock, has played a combined 775 games and hit .232 with a .705 OPS for the Mariners, Blue Jays and Phillies, but has been hampered by shoulder and knee injuries. He didn't play in the big leagues last year when he spent time in the Royals', Pirates', Orioles' and White Sox's organizations.

He was healthy but played a total of 38 games at Triple-A for the Orioles and White Sox. His best year was with the Blue Jays in 2016 when Saunders hit .253 with a .815 OPS, 24 home runs and 57 RBI in 140 games.

Mooney, 28, hit .297 with a .796 OPS last year for Miami's Triple-A New Orleans affiliate. He is a very good defender, along the lines of Daniel Castro, who spent last season in the Colorado organization and played 18 games for the Rockies, and like Castro will provide infield depth. Castro, 26, signed a minor league deal with the Dodgers in November.

Nicholas, 30, played a total of 36 games with the Rangers in 2016 and 2017. In 117 games last year at Triple-A El Paso, a Padres affiliate, Nicholas hit .291 with a .839 OPS, 16 homers and 83 RBI. The Rockies do not have a catching prospect close to the majors, unless Tom Murphy, who turns 28 in April, blossoms. Nicholas is a good defender with occasional power and will provide depth at the position.

Gonzalez, who turns 27 on Jan. 15, pitched in a total of 17 games, including 13 starts, for the Rangers in 2015 and 2016, going 4-8 with a 4.54 ERA. A first-round pick of the Rangers and the 23rd player drafted overall in 2013, Gonzalez pitched a total of 10 shutout innings in three games, two starts, last year for two of Texas' short-season teams. He spent a month in the Dominican Republic pitching for Licey and went 2-3 with a 1.91 ERA in 28 1/3 innings over six starts, the last on Nov. 20.

Coaching Adjustments

Steve Merriman has joined the Rockies' organization as the Double-A Hartford pitching coach. He was the Cubs' assistant pitching coordinator last season and has coached in the Royals' organization in 2013-2014, the Diamondbacks' (2007-2009) and the Mets' (2004-2006).

Merriman, 51, also worked for the Major League Scouting Bureau from 2009-2011 as an area scout in the Midwest. He had accepted the job as Double-A pitching coach in the Rockies organization for 2015 and was included in a January press release by New Britain, then the Rockies' Double-A affiliate, announcing the staff for that 2015 season. But for personal reasons, Merriman was unable to take the job.

Bob Apodaca will work part-time as a special assistant to player development in the upcoming season and spend most of his time at the lower levels. Apodaca, who turns 69 on Jan. 31, has been in the Rockies' organization 16 seasons. He joined it as the Rockies' pitching coach in 2003 when Clint Hurdle was beginning his first full season as the Colorado manager. Apodaca was Hurdle's pitching coach in 1988 at High Class A St. Lucie in Hurdle's first season as a professional manager, and they spent several seasons together in the minors.

Apodaca remained the Rockies' pitching coach until June 26, 2012, when he asked to be reassigned and was named a special assistant to general manager Dan O'Dowd. Apodaca was the Rockies assistant pitching coordinator for four seasons from 2013-2016 and spent the past two seasons as the Short Season Class A Boise pitching coach.


Going Deep: Kyle Freeland Could Be the Next Great Ace
By Michael Augustine - JANUARY 3, 2019 | Pitcherlist.com

Colorado Rockies starter **Kyle Freeland** is ready to become an ace. Drafted 8th overall in the 2014 Amateur Draft, his Fangraphs Prospect Report rates his command and slider at 60 and his fastball a 55. His curveball (40) is seen as his weakest pitch with his changeup rated average (50). We here at Pitcher List currently have him ranked 34th.

In 2018, Freeland greatly improved. He more than doubled his WAR, increased his K/BB rate (2.47), and saw both his chase and whiff rate rise. The only repertoire change that Freeland made was his increased four-seam fastball usage at the expense of his sinker. The sinker turned out to be a liability in 2017 and his slider was pretty mundane. His four-seam, though used much less his rookie year, was his most effective pitch. Using his four-seam more in 2018 often complimented (improved?) his slider effectiveness; his sinker also bore the fruits of improvement.

So why Freeland? What makes me think that he could rise even higher in 2019? Well, for several reasons that the chart below provides. First and foremost, the **most effective spot** to attack a hitter with your fastball **is up and in**. Throughout the last two seasons (minimum 2000 pitches) no one did it more than Freeland. Right behind him is reigning 2018 Cy Young Award winner **Jacob deGrom**, along with the elite arms of **Chris Sale** and **Josh Hader**. I also feel compelled to point out that there are also some very 'meh' pitchers and a few 'blah' (I'll speak to that later on).

Moving on, I'll need to give a bit of context to this chart. When I looked into elevated pitches, I took the two-year totals of both right-handed and left-handed pitchers who threw up and in to the respective-handed batter. The pitch '#' is that total and the 'Pitches' section is total fastballs thrown for each season as well as the pitch's total value (pitch info data) alone and scaled to 100 pitches (wFB/C). The Avg EV, BAA, and % is in relation to JUST elevated fastballs, NOT all fastballs.

 ELEVATED FOUR-SEAM FASTBALLS 2017-18								
Name	#	Pitches	wFB	wFB/C	vFB	Avg EV*	BAA*	%*
Kyle Freeland	193	1963	14.3	1.13	92.4	82.1 MPH	.234	9.83%
Jacob deGrom	201	2068	23.6	1.73	96.7	82.5 MPH	.151	9.72%
Gio Gonzalez	203	2099	12.8	1.51	90.7	87.0 MPH	.239	9.67%
Carlos Rodon	137	1474	-0.3	-0.03	93.1	82.7 MPH	.163	9.29%
Kyle Gibson	193	2171	-8.9	-1.15	93.5	85.7 MPH	.367	8.89%
Drew Pomeranz	188	2189	-1.9	-0.33	89.8	84.3 MPH	.177	8.59%
Chris Sale	192	2247	13.6	1.38	95.7	86.1 MPH	.118	8.54%
Matthew Boyd	131	1561	-0.5	-0.05	91.1	88.0 MPH	.229	8.39%
Dylan Bundy	183	2241	-13.7	-1.01	92.0	88.8 MPH	.222	8.17%
Patrick Corbin	110	1439	1.6	0.26	91.3	84.0 MPH	.297	7.64%
Danny Duffy	123	1621	3.3	0.28	93.7	84.6 MPH	.162	7.59%
Josh Hader	122	1638	19.7	1.89	95.1	79.0 MPH	.091	7.45%
Daniel Norris	101	1376	-5.9	-1.42	90.7	89.4 MPH	.289	7.34%
Wei-Yin Chen	104	1438	3.5	0.3	91.6	82.1 MPH	.250	7.23%
Ariel Miranda	114	1590	1.6	2.93	90.8	89.0 MPH	.282	7.17%
Jose Quintana	186	2622	12	0.82	92.0	86.1 MPH	.163	7.09%
Brent Suter	137	1947	1.1	0.1	87.3	80.7 MPH	.184	7.04%
Jake Odorizzi	179	2562	3.6	0.34	91.3	88.9 MPH	.215	6.99%
Tyler Mahle	168	2440	-1.2	-0.09	93.1	76.1 MPH	.237	6.89%
League AVG	-	-	0.5	0.3	93.9	85.7 MPH	.220	6.45%

(italics are better than average)

During his first two seasons, Freeland faced an unbalanced amount of right-handed hitting- 78% to be exact. For the purposes of this article, we'll keep our focus on RHH data. While we can't completely discredit his performance against left-handed hitters but we would be dealing with a much smaller sample.

I mentioned before, (potential) control is one of Freeland's assets. In 2017, his BB/9 was at almost 4 but that figure was lowered to below league-average in 2018 (3.11). What's more, Freeland pitched something like 50 more innings in 2018 which resulted in 67 more strikeouts with just *seven* additional walks. Freeland is improving in terms of control and that lends itself to being more accurate when it comes to locating pitches, the importance of which **I've preached about before.**

Speaking of location, let's get a general idea of where Freeland throws and what the results are. Below are charts which reflect his data against RHH in 2018.

Kyle Freeland

Pitch %

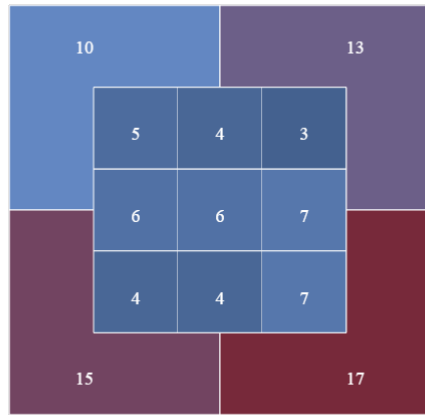


CHART 1

Kyle Freeland

Batting Average

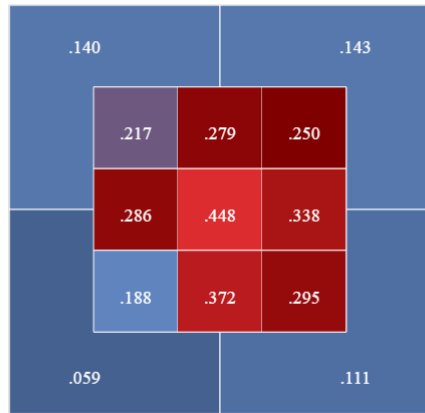


CHART 2

Kyle Freeland

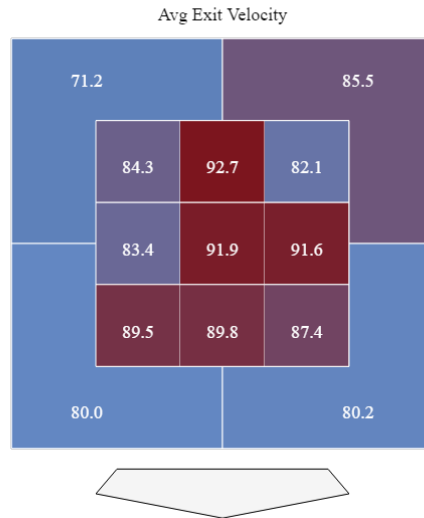
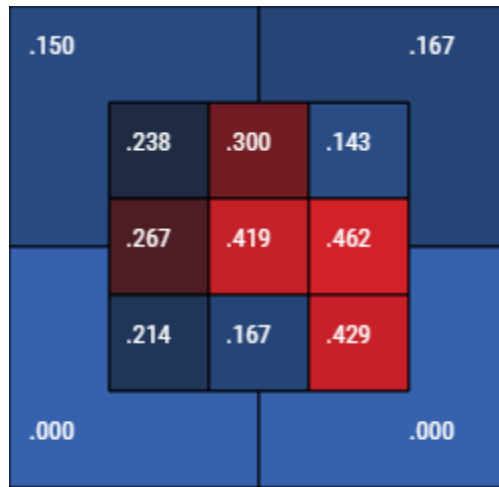


CHART 3

So, to oversimplify, Freeland is best when throwing up and in as well as down and away. The idea is knowing what pitch should go where.

Let's start with Freeland's best pitch, the four-seam, which was rated 10th overall (wFB) in 2018, minimum 100 IP. Interestingly, hitters produced a .254 batting average on Freeland's fastball, context neutral. Since batting average only accounts for when hitters actually make contact with the pitch, we could presume that his pitch is rated as high as it is because he's aware of how/when to use it, but tends to make a few too many mistakes.

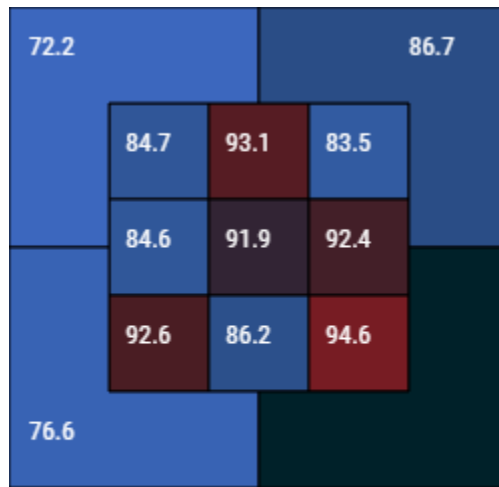
Here is Freeland's fastball BAA by zone. Those 'mistakes' occur mid or down and away in the strike zone. When Freeland keeps the pitch inside, the results are much better.



Kyle Freeland
Batting Avg
[Catcher Perspective]

CHART 4

So what about exit velocity (85 MPH overall average)?



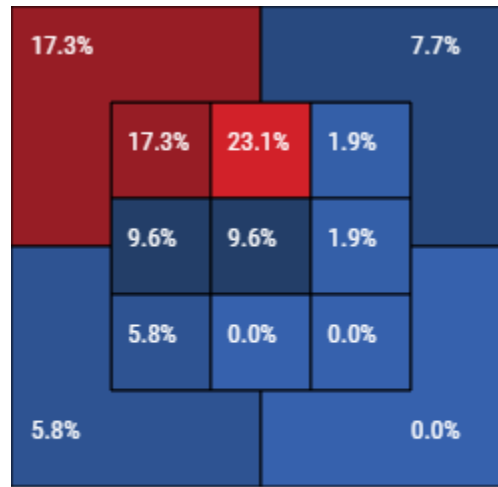
Kyle Freeland
Exit Velocity
[Catcher Perspective]

CHART 5

Again, the same results apply. Given the proper launch angle, home runs start surfacing around 90 MPH exit velocity. The hardest hit fastballs are right in the areas where the hitter can get his arms extended the most.

I don't like putting a lot of emphasis on contact data because it's so difficult to say under what circumstances they occur. Did Freeland throw three fastballs in a row to the same area (away), only to have the hitter catch up and crush it? In the lower metric zones (up and in), did Freeland get that result because he mixed his pitches well or is it simply because the hitter couldn't time the pitch correctly given the **Effective Velocity** time units in play, for example?

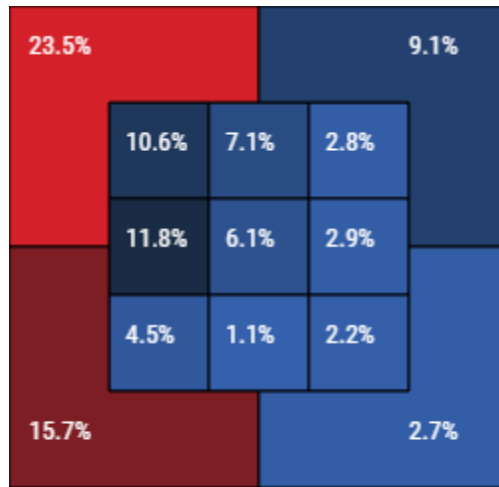
So what about fastball whiff rate against righties in 2018?



Kyle Freeland
Pitch %
[Catcher Perspective]

CHART 6

It's pretty definitive that Freeland's fastball works best up and/or in to righties, which feature the lowest zone BAA, exit velocity, and whiff rate. Just to be certain we aren't skewing that argument with small samples, here are Freeland's overall location tendencies for his fastball (RHH).



Kyle Freeland
Pitch %
[Catcher Perspective]

CHART 6

It's clear that Freeland is aware of what he needs to do with his fastball against righties. But that's just part of the story. What about his other pitches? Is he creating an effective pitch ecosystem? Does he mix his pitches well? What about properly spreading (effective) velocity, as Ev creator **Perry Husband** preaches in his pitching philosophies?

As for his pitch mixes, Freeland has demonstrated the ability to be liquid with his pitch selection. Just 40% of his pitches are fastballs, followed by 29% sliders, 14% changeups, and 13% sinkers. Freeland drops a curve in just under 5% of the time but we'll ignore that pitch. Chart 7 shows how well he keeps hitters off-balance.

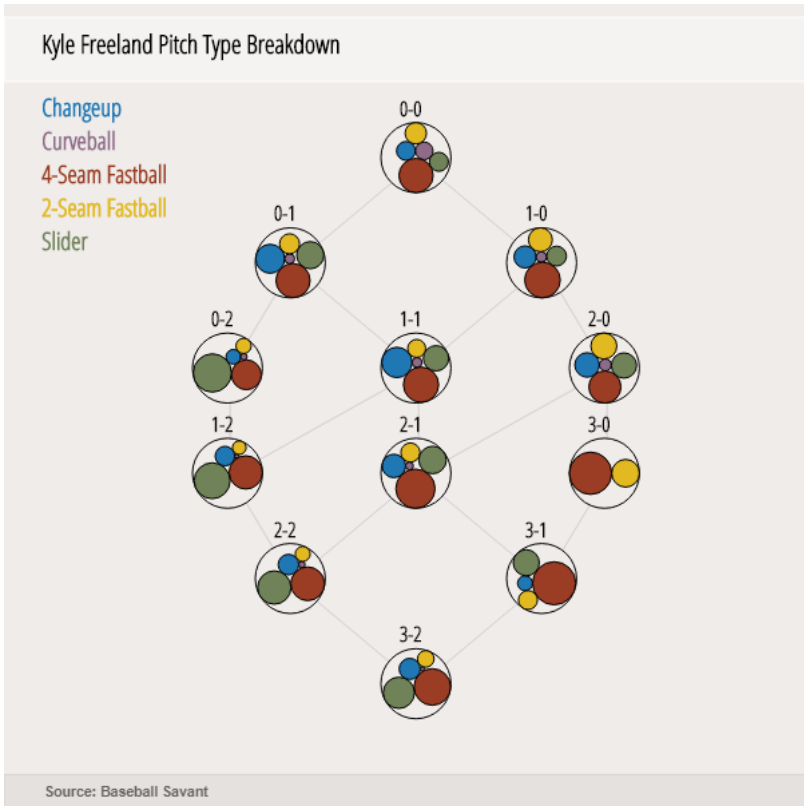


CHART 7

The only time disparity occurs is when Freeland is deep in the hole against a hitter. However, Chart 8 shows how rarely that occurs and you can see that he's typically ahead of hitters.

Kyle Freeland

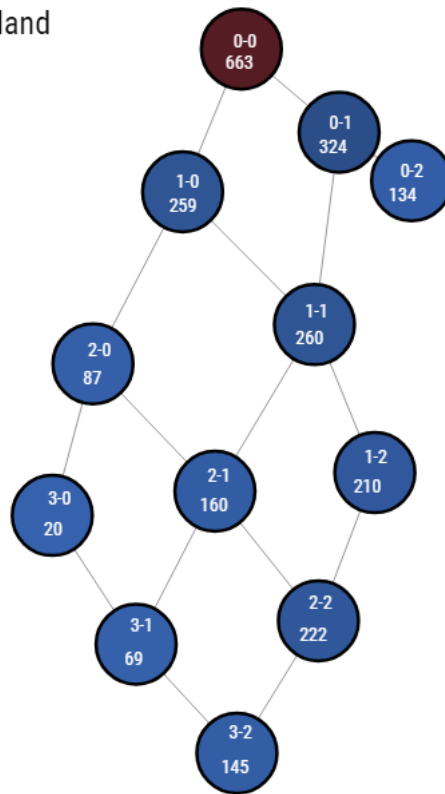


CHART 8

For his slider, Freeland tends to place the pitch middle zone. It doesn't work- hitters average over .400 with a 90MPH+ exit velocity.

Freeland gets the vast majority of whiffs when he throws it down and in (58%) most of which occur out of the zone (51% overall). While the exit velocity is lower, it's still a bit high for a low breaking pitch.

One issue that Freeland has with the slider is its below average movement (H= 85 and V= 97) according to Brooks Baseball's Pitch IQ (keep in mind 'below average' doesn't mean bad, it just indicates that it doesn't move as much as other sliders). He has to be more mindful to locate it properly and use it in the right manner. When he does, he effectively spreads velocity with the prior pitch, and when he doesn't, it's a bane to his liquidity. He doesn't seem to get 'lucky' with it; if he did, there would be more of an even spread on his zone metrics.

His changeup is kept away from righties. It still was still valued below average in 2017 but it improved in 2018. When the pitch ends up within the strike zone, hitters are very successful- almost all zones are .300+ BAA. The ideal location for his changeup is down and away (ideally near the edge) because exit velocity and batting average drop significantly while the whiff rate is by far the highest of any other zone.

I won't give his sinker/two-seam much analysis because its usage would appear to be slowly phasing out or at least greatly reduced. Nevertheless, for argument's sake, he needs to keep the pitch low in or out of the zone. That's where he gets his best results.

The below at-bat demonstrates the ideal ecosystem in terms of sequencing and location for Freeman. After starting with a changeup outside for a ball, Freeland goes back to that location and nibbles at the zone with a pressure pitch changeup for a strike. Yes, the umpire was a little liberal but credit his catcher for framing. Then Freeland draws a foul-tip on the slider low and away, after which he finishes the hitter off with a high four-seam fastball.

Here are the three pitches overlaid with trails. The placement of these pitches, along with the decent tunnel and the sequence, follow Ev 101 and kept at least 6 EvMPH between each pitch. The figures using Ev Time Units are as follows: Changeup, 85 EvMPH > Slider, 79 EvMPH > Fastball, 96 EvMPH

Freeland won't blow hitters away with a low-90s fastball and he doesn't have to because he's (at least) mildly aware how to use it to best suit his gameplan. What's more, using Effective Velocity principals, he can add as much as 5 MPH to the pitch to make hitters have to time it as a 98 MPH fastball if they want to regularly make good contact (barrels, liners, burners, etc).

Going back to the elevated fastball list at the top, I want to point out that simply elevating your fastball isn't enough. As you can see, there are plenty of pitchers on that list with negative fastball value. Most of them don't sequence properly or vary their pitches enough. If you pound fastballs in a particular zone maybe three times in a row, a hitter is going to catch up especially if you don't demonstrate liquidity with your pitch selection. This isn't a hard and fast assessment, simply an assumption based upon the fact that the pitchers on that list who do well with their fastball tend to keep hitters guessing more.

Something I have yet to mention but is nonetheless key for Freeland to transform himself into a bonafide ace is to tighten up his release points. His fastball and slider are too far apart and don't seem to tunnel well under his current mechanics. Freeland's horizontal release points for those pitches approaches a half inch difference on average with his vertical points nearly three-tenths of an inch. Of course, that seems fairly minuscule on the surface but you have to take into account that there are sometimes large deviations that not only could tip a hitter off but make it nearly impossible for him to tunnel when the time is right to use them in tandem. The changeup and fastball are a bit closer, but still not ideal. Given the

prowess with which he can dismantle hitters up in the zone, having the ability to hide his secondary pitches behind the fastball (or vice versa) will give hitters all kinds of fits. Take into account how successful he was in 2018 without these proposed adjustments and consider how much filthier Freeland could be in 2019.

DJ LeMahieu returning to the Rockies could still make sense

It will depend on how this year's free agent market shapes up.

By Hayden Kane@hwkane - Jan 7, 2019, 8:00am MST | Purple Row

DJ LeMahieu is unlikely to return to the Rockies. As soon as he hit free agency it seemed clear that the Rockies planned to move on. And that seemed like the right plan. They have a number of highly regarded prospects who can play second base, and LeMahieu seems due for a decent payday in free agency.

But what if LeMahieu falls victim to recent trends in free agency and sees his market crash? Free agency isn't what it once was, and veteran players have increasingly found themselves waiting. For example, It was just last year that Mike Moustaskas ended up back with the Kansas City Royals on a one-year, \$6.5 million deal. If there's no market for DJ and he ends up waiting until sometime into February or even into Spring Training to sign, the Rockies should swoop.

That's a cold-hard business take on a scenario that would stink for DJ LeMahieu. I don't want him to get left hanging by the market. As much as I would love to see him back with the Rockies, I want him to get the payday he deserves for his solid production the last six seasons. If he gets to maximize his value with something like a three-year deal, that won't be with the Rockies. But if that doesn't work out and he has to settle for a lesser deal, the Rockies should take advantage of that opportunity, and hopefully it would be a deal that isn't rock-bottom for LeMahieu.

Let's say the Rockies can sign LeMahieu to a two-year, \$14 million deal. That's just under the **MLB Trade Rumors prediction** of a two-year, \$18 million deal or but far less than anything in the \$30 or \$40 million range that is not out of the realm of possibilities.

A deal like that would be really good value for a player of his caliber, and it's at least maybe a less painful discount for LeMahieu if he does get left hanging by a cold market. That positions the Rockies to win now in a season when they certainly want to win now and, among other things, convince **Nolan Arenado** to stay long term.

The top objection to bringing LeMahieu back will be that he will block playing time for top prospects like **Ryan McMahon, Garrett Hampson** and Brendan Rodgers. That's a fair objection, especially for the Rockies with their unfortunate habit of preferring veterans to young players. But it's a different case with LeMahieu than it is with **Ian Desmond** or **Gerardo Parra**.

We know LeMahieu is good. Going back to 2015, he posted 2.4 WAR as he started to establish himself. He peaked with that stellar 5.3 WAR season in 2016 but then has held steady with 2.9 WAR and 3.0 WAR the past two seasons. A little bit of injury trouble this past season put a damper on things, but I feel comfortable saying that DJ is predictably good. On the other hand, we don't know if **McMahon** or **Hampson** or even Rodgers is good, even if we have a lot of reason to assume they will be.

Approached correctly, the Rockies could earn themselves some flexibility by bringing LeMahieu back. They would have depth and versatility to cover for injuries or simply be more creative with lineups. They would also have options to make trades, either trading prospects to make a deal or trading LeMahieu in a mid-season deal. They wouldn't have to be sellers to do so, though that type of trade would be quite a departure from the moves the Rockies are typically willing to make.

The risk would be that the Rockies bring LeMahieu back and simply block the young guys without doing anything creative. That would mean players like **McMahon** and Hampson going the way of **Raimel Tapia** or, you know, what happened to **McMahon** last year — too good for Triple-A but wasted as a bench player on the big league roster. I think the Rockies could get great value out of McMahon and Hampson as reserves, but Bud Black would have to show a willingness to use his bench players differently. The sting would be even more acute if it felt like Brendan Rodgers was ready and the Rockies simply kept his path to playing time blocked.

DJ LeMahieu has been one of the core players for the Rockies as they have developed into a consistent playoff contender. This is probably the end of that run. But if free agency does not reward LeMahieu for his good work and his market goes cold, and if the Rockies are willing to bring him back for a role other than obvious everyday starter, then the Rockies should consider bringing him back for another run with the team that he helped build.