



MEDIA CLIPS – January 30, 2017

Rockies' top prospect among 17 spring invites

Rodgers expected to see time at short, second and third in camp

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Jan. 29th, 2018

DENVER -- The Rockies' No. 1 prospect, Brendan Rodgers, is prepared to watch, learn and maybe laugh.

Rodgers, 21, a shortstop who also has experience at second base, was one of 17 players to receive **non-roster invites** to Major League Spring Training on Monday. Rodgers not only is the team's **top prospect** according to MLB Pipeline, but the **No. 15 prospect overall** entering 2018. He also is MLB Pipeline's **fourth-ranked shortstop**.

The first invite to Major League camp usually is a get-your-feet-wet proposition for a player as new to pro ball as Rodgers, the team's top pick and third overall in the 2015 Draft. Generally that player is expected to learn quietly, and even take some good-natured kidding. But it's also Rodgers' first shot at competing with and against Major Leaguers -- players he hopes to play alongside soon.

"It's a big honor," said Rodgers, who last year was invited from Minor League camp for two Cactus League games and went 1-for-2 with a double. This year, he gets to be with the Major Leaguers during their preparation.

"I'm really excited. That was my goal last year, to hopefully get that big league invite. The hard work paid off, and I ended up achieving my goal. ... I'm sure there will be some nicknames, but that's all part of it. I'm just going to have to play along, play hard, fit in with those guys. They can help me."

Rodgers earned the early invite with a standout season at Class A Advanced Lancaster and Double-A Hartford -- .336, 18 home runs, 64 RBIs, 26 doubles and three triples in 89 games.

Rodgers also made progress defensively at shortstop. He is expected to work out at short, second base and third in camp in an attempt to accelerate his big league readiness.

How close Rodgers is to the Majors is unknown. The production suggests a fast path, but Rodgers believes the ability to stay healthy could make his goal a reality. He had nagging injuries while playing 37 games at Rookie-level Grand Junction in 2015 and 110 games at Class A Asheville in 2016. Last season, he had a minor hand injury at the start of the year and missed significant time at Hartford with a right quadriceps injury.

To combat that, Rodgers said he realizes that muscling up to the 215-217 pound range was not the best, so he is down to his preferred playing weight of 205.

"That's a good weight for me," said Rodgers, who chuckled about looking online and seeing him listed at 180 -- his weight at Lake Mary (Fla.) High School before the Draft. "I feel like I'm better at 200-205. Maybe sometimes bigger and stronger isn't going to last you through 140-160 games. Sometimes being more light on your feet helps you last those extra 20-30 games."

Other key prospects receiving invitations were Garrett Hampson, MLB Pipeline's **No. 7 second baseman** in the Minors and the No. 8 player in the Rockies' system; right-handed starting pitchers Peter Lambert (Rockies' No. 5) and Ryan Castellani (Rockies' No. 6, second big league camp appearance); righty reliever Shane Broyles, who had a 1.84 ERA and 21 saves at Double-A Hartford; first baseman Brian Mundell (Rockies' No. 14), who batted .300 with 15 homers at Lancaster and Hartford; catcher Dom Nunez (Rockies' No. 15), who played at Hartford and in the Arizona Fall League; and center fielder Sam Hilliard (Rockies' No. 19), who hit .300 with 21 homers, 23 doubles, seven triples and 37 steals at Lancaster.

Also back in camp is lefty starter Harrison Musgrave, who nearly made the Major League club last spring but saw his season at Triple-A Albuquerque shortened by a finger injury.

The Rockies have not signed a longtime Major League veteran to a Minor League deal. However, two middle infielders with Major League experience -- **Daniel Castro** (Braves 2015-16) and **Shawn O'Malley** (Angels 2014, Mariners 2015-16) -- were invited to improve depth. Additionally, righty-hander **Brooks Pounders**, who has 24 total relief appearances with the Royals in 2016 and the Angels last season, will be in camp.

Completing the list are righty relievers **James Farris** and **Austin House**, and lefty reliever Jerry Vasto, all of whom pitched at Albuquerque last season; and catchers Anthony Bemboom (Albuquerque) and Jan Vazquez (Hartford).

Rockies looking into Reynolds, CarGo or Frazier

Desmond offers flexibility at OF or 1B in club's pursuit of corner bat

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Jan. 29th, 2018

DENVER -- The Rockies' roster appears to be calling for one more corner bat, and indications are the club is looking to resign either first baseman **Mark Reynolds** or outfielder **Carlos Gonzalez**, or sign right-handed-hitting free agent **Todd Frazier**.

The Rockies' wont is to not comment publicly, and various industry sources say they are being quiet. But through various conversations, the idea of revisiting Reynolds (.277/.354/.471 the past two years) or Gonzalez (who dipped to .262 with 14 homers last season but hit .335 with eight homers and 31 RBIs in August and September), or bringing in Frazier (.222 last year with the White Sox and Yankees, but a .552 slugging percentage and 12 of his 15 homers off left-handers).

Another option is to go with what they have, which would mean young players, such as first baseman **Ryan McMahon** and outfielders **David Dahl**, **Raimel Tapia** and **Mike Tauchman**, would receive opportunities to grab as much playing time as merit allows. All bat left-handed, and the trio of outfielders have speed and can play defensively in multiple spots.

. 11th, 2018

The Rockies feel covered in any scenario because right-handed-hitting **Ian Desmond**, in the second year of a five-year, \$70 million deal, can be used at first base or in left field. A fractured left hand in Spring Training and two calf strains during the regular season limited him to 95 games (.274, 7 HRs, 40 RBIs), but with a return to health he will be a key lineup cog. He'll be the team's highest-paid player at \$22 million this season.

Additionally, the Rockies have corner outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, who hit .309 with 10 homers and 71 RBIs last year, entering the final season of his three-year deal. Parra, due \$10 million in 2018 plus a \$1.5 million buyout or \$12 million option for '19, can play either outfield corner and could conceivably be used as a cleanup hitter behind **Nolan Arenado** against right-handed pitching.

The past two years, the Rockies brought in Reynolds to compete for opportunities, and each time he ended up the starter at first base. The plan last year was to use Desmond at first, but injury opened the door for Reynolds, who hit .267 with 30

homers and 97 RBIs, and was a Final Vote finalist for the All-Star Game. When Desmond returned, he played 66 games in left field and 27 at first base.^{27th, 201}

If the Rockies sign Reynolds or Frazier, Desmond figures to make most of his starts in left field. If they sign Gonzalez, then the original plan of Desmond making most of his starts at first base goes back into effect.

Whether it's Reynolds, Desmond or Frazier -- who hit 29 homers in 2014, 35 in '15 and 40 in '16 -- the Rockies expect to have right-handed power and experience, which would allow them to make sure McMahon is ready before feeding him regular playing time. The Rockies do have time with the left-handed-hitting McMahon, the **No. 41 prospect** in baseball according to MLB Pipeline; he has all of his Minor League options.

Having a productive righty bat, however the lineup is shaped, is a priority. Last year, the Rockies faced lefty starters 48 times and went 20-28. In the National League West, they faced lefties 33 times and went 13-20 -- including 6-9 in the 15 games against the division-champion Dodgers, 2-6 against the Giants, 3-3 against the second-place D-backs, and 2-2 against the Padres.

Rodgers leads Rox trio on Top 100 Prospects

McMahon (No. 41), Pint (No. 100) join 15th-ranked player on MLB Pipeline list

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Jan. 27th, 2018

DENVER -- Rockies middle-infield prospect Brendan Rodgers returns to MLB Pipeline's **Top 100 Prospects list** in the No. 15 spot -- the same one he held last year. But make no mistake, Rodgers has moved forward.

Rodgers, who is joined on the 2018 list by Rockies first-base prospect **Ryan McMahon** (No. 41) and right-handed pitcher Riley Pint (No. 100), held his spot after putting together standout offensive numbers -- a .336 batting average, a .373 on-base percentage and a .567 slugging percentage -- at the Class A and Double-A levels. After being drafted third overall in 2016 out of Lake Mary (Fla.) High School, it was the first year in full-season leagues for Rodgers, 21.

The annual ranking of MLB's Top 100 prospects is assembled by **MLB Pipeline** Draft and prospect experts Jonathan Mayo, Jim Callis and Mike Rosenbaum, who compile input from industry sources, including scouts and scouting directors. It is based on analysis of players' skill sets, upsides, proximity to the Majors and potential immediate impact to their teams. Only players with rookie status entering the 2018 season are eligible for the list. Players who were at least 25 years old when they signed and played in leagues deemed to be professional (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Cuba) are not eligible.

Rodgers was hitting .400 through 48 games with Lancaster in the Class A Advanced California League when the Rockies promoted him. He spent the next 38 games with Hartford in the Double-A Eastern League and hit .260 with six home runs and 17 RBIs in 38 games before suffering a right quadriceps injury. Once healthy, Rodgers finished the regular season and spent the playoffs at Lancaster.

Rodgers is being prepared at both middle-infield positions and likely will also see time at third base before he is ready for the Majors. The Rockies have been impressed with his development at shortstop, especially on plays to the middle of the diamond.

McMahon, 23, hit .355 with 20 homers and 88 RBIs last season at Hartford and Triple-A Albuquerque -- including .374 with 14 homers and 56 RBIs in 70 games at Albuquerque. He debuted in the Majors by going 3-for-19 over 17 games at the end of last season, but could have a shot to earn playing time at first base this year.

McMahon was not on the Top 100 list last year, after some struggles at the Double-A level as a 21-year-old. However, not only did he find his swing, but he made forward strides defensively. Drafted in the second round in 2013 out of Mater Dei High School in Santa Ana, Calif., as a third baseman, McMahon saw significant time at first base and second base last season.

Pint, 20, selected fourth overall in 2016 out of St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Overland Park, Kan., debuted on the '17 list at No. 51 after throwing just 37 innings at Rookie-level Grand Junction. He dropped to the bottom of the list after taking his lumps in his first full professional season -- 2-11, 5.52 ERA in 22 starts at Class A Asheville. But once he learns to control his fastball -- which sits in the upper 90s and has been clocked at better than 100 mph -- most believe Pint could take off quickly.

Last season, Pint struck out 79 against 53 walks in 93 innings. Scouts who watched him reported that he has a couple of power breaking pitches to go with his fastball, but a changeup that fades to his arm side could separate him from other pitchers -- once he finds a way to get ahead in counts.

Blackmon open to moving out of leadoff spot

Rockies center fielder could hit 3rd, breaking up right-handed bats

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Jan. 22nd, 2018

DENVER -- **Charlie Blackmon** set Major League records from the leadoff position last season and provides power and run production like no other hitter in that spot. But when asked by reporters Thursday, Blackmon said he would be willing to move if it would make the Rockies' lineup better.

"We have not discussed it yet, but I am sure it's a possibility," said Blackmon, who avoided salary arbitration with a one-year, \$14 million contract for 2018 and is eligible for free agency at season's end. "It seems like it could be a good idea.

"I am comfortable leading off. And it has been working. But it may not be the best lineup construction."

Blackmon amassed 103 (of his 104) RBIs from the leadoff position to eclipse the previous mark, 100 by the Angels' Darin Erstad in 2000. Blackmon's 383 total bases also set a Major League record, and his 86 extra-base hits were a National League record.

However, with **Carlos Gonzalez** exploring free agency, the Rockies potentially could enter 2018 without a proven hitter at the No. 3 spot -- between No. 2 hitter **DJ LeMahieu** and cleanup man **Nolan Arenado**. It's conceivable that the spot is appropriate for Blackmon, who is coming off leading the NL in batting at .331 and tied Arenado for the team lead in home runs with 37. He would be a lefty bat between two productive righties.

But with about two months before the start of the season, the Rockies could address the middle of the order via free agency or even a trade.

Also, **David Dahl**, who didn't appear in the Majors last season because of a rib injury, and **Raimel Tapia** are outfielders who have been groomed to hit at key spots in the lineup throughout their Minor League careers -- at the top or in the middle. Each has flashed potential in the Majors.

Dahl hit .315 with seven home runs, 24 RBIs, 12 doubles and four triples in a 63-game trial in 2016. Tapia bounced between Triple-A and the Majors last year, but had a solid .288 average, two home runs, 16 RBIs, 12 doubles and two

triples during his 171 plate appearances with Colorado. Both are baserunning threats, with **Statcast™** having clocked Tapia with some of the highest top speeds in the Majors last season.

Blackmon hit .291 with a .321 on-base percentage while breaking in from 2011-13 -- a period interrupted by foot and knee injuries. Blackmon became the regular center fielder and leadoff man in 2014, and he responded with an All-Star Game appearance and a .288 average and .335 on-base percentage. His OBP and slugging percentages have improved each year since, leading to a career season and an All-Star start in 2017.

Since 2014, according to STATS, Blackmon tops all leadoff hitters with 2,318 at-bats, with **Dee Gordon**(now with the Mariners) second at 2,136, and Blackmon's .309 batting average and .517 slugging percentage are tops. His .367 on-base percentage over that period ranks sixth, but no one ahead of him has more than 1,639 at-bats (the Cardinals' **Matt Carpenter** leads at .389).

But to turn away from Blackmon at the top of the order could mean turning away from record-setting run production and power from a spot not known for either. His 102 homers, 418 runs scored, 312 RBIs and 127 doubles lead Major League leadoff batters since 2014, and his 31 triples are second only to Gordon's 35.

Walker not elected, receives boost in HOF voting

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Jan. 24th, 2018

DENVER -- Former Rockies star Larry Walker earned his highest total in Hall of Fame voting, receiving 34.1 percent of the votes, as announced Wednesday night on MLB Network.

Four players were elected by earning at least 75 percent of votes from the Baseball Writers' Association of America -- former Braves switch-hitting star Chipper Jones, longtime outfielder Vladimir Guerrero, power-hitting Jim Thome and closer extraordinaire Trevor Hoffman. They will join former Tigers teammates Jack Morris and Alan Trammell, who were elected by the Modern Era Committee in December, to form this year's class, which will be inducted this summer.

While not in the Hall, Walker -- who spent 10 of his 17 seasons with the Rockies -- enjoyed a boost in support in his eighth year on the ballot, as voters continue to put his statistics in perspective, take into account his defense and baserunning and apparently give him a favorable look because he was not tied to the performance-enhancing drugs that were pervasive in the sport during his career. However, Walker has been penalized in the voting because of the hitter-friendly environment at Coors Field and injuries -- he exceeded 150 games played just one season.

Walker had never received more than 22.9 percent of votes before this year. But stat-conscious voters have looked at him with new eyes.

For example:

- Walker joins five Hall of Famers -- Stan Musial, Babe Ruth, Jimmie Foxx, Ted Williams and Lou Gehrig -- as the only players in MLB history who batted at least .300, had a .400 or better on-base percentage, a .400-plus slugging percentage and at least 450 doubles, 60 triples, 350 homers and 1,250 RBIs.
- On famed stat analyst Bill James' Hall of Fame monitor, which assesses how likely a player's career stats are to be judged Hall of Fame-worthy, Walker scores 148. A solid score is 100 and a 130 makes a player a virtual cinch.
- Walker's .278 career road batting average is higher than 33 position players in the Hall.

- Walker's .306 batting average against left-handed pitching is bettered by only two lefty-hitting Hall of Famers -- Tony Gwynn (.324) and Rod Carew (.317).

- Walker won seven Gold Glove Awards. Of right fielders not in the Hall, only Dwight Evans (eight) has more.

Next year, former Rockies star Todd Helton, who spent his entire 17-year career in Colorado, will be eligible for Hall of Fame voting.

No player who ever played for the Rockies is in the Hall of Fame. The only Hall of Famer affiliated with Colorado is Rich "Goose" Gossage, who worked as a special front-office pitching advisor in 2003. Longtime Rockies beat reporter/columnist and current MLB.com columnist Tracy Ringolsby was the winner of the 2005 J.G. Taylor Spink Award, which is presented during Hall of Fame Weekend by the BBWAA for meritorious contributions to baseball writing.

Rodgers ranked as No. 4 SS prospect

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb | Jan. 23rd, 2018

DENVER -- The Rockies think enough of 2015 first-round MLB Draft pick Brendan Rodgers -- ranked the **No. 4 shortstop prospect going into 2018**, according to MLB Pipeline -- to give him a diverse education.

After the 2016 season, the Rockies sent him and Forrest Wall, another high pick in 2016, to instructional ball in the Dominican Republic in an effort to round out their off-the-field education.

Top 10 Prospects by Position

[RHP - Breakdown | List](#)

[LHP - Breakdown | List](#)

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[SS - Breakdown | List](#)

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[Top 100 - Saturday, Jan. 27](#)

In 2017, Rodgers put up such dominant offensive numbers at Class A Lancaster (.387, .407 on-base percentage, .671 slugging percentage) that he earned a promotion to Double-A Hartford. But at the end of the year, he found himself back in Lancaster -- not because of a demotion, but because Lancaster made the California League playoffs and the Rockies wanted Rodgers to have that experience.

Rodgers, 21, figures to be a big part of what the Rockies believe is a bright future. So the club wants to give him every experience possible before he sees the Majors. In a 3-0 sweep of Rancho Cucamonga and a 3-0 loss to Modesto in the Cal League Championship Series, Rodgers went 6-for-28 (.214) with a home run, six runs scored and four RBIs -- and gained invaluable experience.

"You do the best you can with what you have," Rockies senior player development director Zach Wilson said. "That's one of the reasons we sent Brendan Rodgers back to Lancaster to experience the playoffs, and experience when people are counting on you -- and it's win or lose, and it's do-or-die -- how are you going to handle that? And how are you going to handle the mental and physical grind of that."

The playoff experience capped an eye-popping year for Rodgers, who was young for the Class A Advanced Cal League and even younger for Double-A, where he batted .260 with six home runs and 17 RBIs in 38 games before suffering a quadriceps injury in August. Rodgers finished the regular season and playoffs healthy at Lancaster.

"It was a tremendous development year for him," Wilson said. "I don't think anybody expects a player to hit close to .400, but he was able to do that in Lancaster and it wasn't due to the hitting environment. It was due to his talent. He continues to grow on the offensive side of the ball, but defensively he took some very big strides forward this year."

For the second straight season, Rodgers saw time at second base. But after playing there 24 games in 2016, he had just 10 at second and 80 at short in 2017. Rodgers is built thicker than most at shortstop, but Wilson and the Rockies have expressed confidence he can play the position in the Majors if the opportunity is there.

The development plan is similar to that of current Rockies shortstop **Trevor Story**, who was introduced to other positions in the Minors, but grasped the opportunity at shortstop after the Rockies traded **Troy Tulowitzki** to the Blue Jays and released **Jose Reyes**.

"So you never know how these opportunities are going to lie and how it's going to all unfold," Wilson said. "We're going to continue to try to prepare Brendan to take on any role defensively that he's going to need to when the bat's ready to come up."

Larry Walker on Hall of Fame voting: “It’s almost like Coors Field is my PED”

Walker has two years of eligibility left before his fate moves on to the Hall’s Today’s Game committee

By Joe Nguyen / Denver Post | Jan. 30, 2018

The Baseball Hall of Fame class was announced last Wednesday, and for the eighth consecutive year, former Colorado Rockies star outfielder Larry Walker failed to reach the 75 percent voting threshold that would stamp his ticket to Cooperstown.

After hovering between 10 and 23 percent in the Hall of Fame voting in his first seven years of eligibility, Walker received a personal-best 34.1 percent in 2018. He shared his thoughts with Mitch Melnick on Montreal 690 last Friday about struggling to find support with the voters.

“I can’t fault myself. I played for a major-league team that happened to be in Denver,” Walker said to Melnick. “If that’s a problem and if that’s going to be an issue for them, then get rid of the team and move it elsewhere if it’s going to be that big of an issue.

“No needles went in my (butt). I played the game clean, but I played in the ballpark and it’s almost like Coors Field is my PED.”

Walker played 17 seasons in the majors — 10 with the Rockies — finishing with 383 home runs, 1,311 runs batted in, a .313 batting average and a .400 on-base percentage. He also won three Silver Slugger awards, seven Gold Gloves and was the National League MVP in 1997 — a year in which he batted .366 with 49 home runs, 130 RBIs and 33 stolen bases.

Walker was asked about his thoughts on players, such as Barry Bonds, who received more votes than him despite being cast under a shroud of performance-enhancing drugs.

“No, I don’t think it was the right thing,” Walker said about the use of PEDs. “(But) I don’t think PEDs are as bad as playing in Coors Field, apparently.”

Walker has two years of eligibility left before his fate moves on to the Hall’s Today’s Game committee.

“It’s frustrating,” Walker said, “but at the same time, I get it.”

Contract status for Nolan Arenado, Charlie Blackmon, DJ LeMahieu puts Rockies at crucial crossroads

Arenado: "Opportunity to play in October every year is what I want"

By Patrick Saunders / Denver Post | Jan. 26, 2018

The Rockies' immediate future looks bright.

They are coming off their first playoff appearance in eight years, have raised what's potentially the best homegrown starting pitching corps in franchise history, fortified their bullpen by spending \$106 million this winter, and there is exciting young talent flowing in their minor-league pipeline.

But the Rockies are nearing a critical crossroads.

How the front office deals with the future contracts of center fielder Charlie Blackmon, second baseman DJ LeMahieu and, most of all, five-time Gold Glove third baseman Nolan Arenado, will shape the franchise for years to come. Blackmon and LeMahieu are scheduled to become first-time free agents after the 2018 season, with Arenado following after the 2019 season. Keeping all of them is going to cost the Rockies a lot of money, but there's more than dollars at stake. The trio has been the heart and soul of the Rockies' resurgence and become fan favorites for a franchise that drew an average of 36,464 fans per home game last season, ninth best in the majors and the Rockies' best gate since 2001.

Arenado, considered by many to be one of the top-five position players in baseball, is in line to command a long-term deal that would make him the highest-paid athlete in Colorado history, should he choose to stay with the Rockies. Next year's stellar free-agent class will set a high bar. According to The Washington Post, executives around baseball think that Nationals star Bryce Harper will command a deal worth more than \$400 million. Arenado, who'll make \$17.75 million in 2018, won't rake in Harper-like money, but he'll command a huge deal, nonetheless.

But money will not be the deciding factor when it comes time for Arenado to make a decision.

"The opportunity to play in October every year is what I want," he said in a phone interview. "I want a team that tries as hard as it can to make the playoffs every year."

Asked if he saw the Rockies evolving into that kind of franchise, Arenado said, "I think so. I mean, obviously we are in a tough division when it comes to the Dodgers and the Giants. And the Diamondbacks are good, too. But I think the future is much brighter in Colorado than it's been in the past. That excites me and makes me very aware of what's going on here."

That said, Arenado stressed that he does not want his career to play out as Todd Helton's did. Helton played in Colorado for 17 seasons, became the beloved face of the franchise, had his number retired and might end up in the Hall of Fame. But Helton's Rockies qualified for the playoff just twice, in 2007 and 2009. Arenado wants more.

"There is something to be said for being with an organization for your whole career, I definitely believe in that," Arenado said. "I admired Todd and I admired (Yankees icon) Derek Jeter; guys who stick with one team their whole career. So I have a lot of respect for what Todd did. But at the end of the day, I don't want to be in Todd's shoes where I only go to the playoffs twice in my career."

GM mum on long-term plan

Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich stresses that each player will be dealt with on an individual basis. And while both Arenado and Blackmon say they expect discussions about potential long-term deals to begin during spring training, Bridich prefers not to share much of what he's thinking.

"To engage in some sort of public discourse, or some sort of public negotiations with a player, is not good form, in my opinion," Bridich said. "It's not something that benefits the team and it can cause distractions. It doesn't benefit the player and I don't think it benefits the player's teammates."

Blackmon, who recently signed a one-year, \$14 million deal to avoid arbitration, has made it clear that he would like to stay with the Rockies, the only organization he's ever known. But Blackmon, who turns 32 on July 1, is nearing the chance to sign the one, big, long-term contract of his career.

But he doesn't want his contract status to become an issue this season.

"It's a two-way street," Blackmon said. "I really like playing here. It's been a great place to be. I like the people. I like the teammates. And I've also been on a one-year situation for the past three-to-four years, so it doesn't really change anything for me. I'm used to that go-out-and-produce mind-set. Hopefully, something happens. That would be great.

"But I don't plan to let that get in the way of me playing baseball. I don't plan to be thinking about that during the season. That's my time to work. I don't want to be distracted."

Good and bad of longer deals

Former Rockies GM Dan O'Dowd (2000-2014), Bridich's mentor, had a lot of experience — good and bad — constructing long-term contracts. In December 2004, he signed 30-year-old left-handed pitcher Denny Neagle, who had two All-Star Game appearances to his name, to a five-year, \$51 million contract. Eight days later, he signed 27-year-old lefty Mike Hampton to an eight-year, \$121 million deal. Both deals blew up in the Rockies' face.

In the winter of 2010, O'Dowd and his front office negotiated a pair of expensive, high-impact contract extensions, signing shortstop Troy Tulowitzki to a franchise-record 10-year \$157.75 million deal, followed by a seven-year, \$80 million pact with outfielder Carlos Gonzalez.

"One thing I learned is that you should never sign a contract that you ultimately can't afford," said O'Dowd, now an analyst for the MLB Network. "What that means to each individual franchise, of course, is totally different.

"But at the end of the day, you simply can't sign someone to a contract you can't afford. If you do, you are going to spend the rest of your time trying to work around that contract. In the long run, that doesn't work."

What's more, O'Dowd senses that major-league clubs are beginning to rethink signing players to long-term deals. That's part of the reason signings have been slow this offseason, he said.

"I think it's shown that term (length of contract) is very important to our game now," he said. "That's not a blanket statement for every player and every position, because every player is going to age differently ... but I do think term is becoming a big decision for organizations."

Arenado, should he stay in Colorado for the bulk of his career, could join Helton as part of Coors Field's Mount Rushmore, as the face of the franchise. Bridich, who must find long-term balance for the organization, looks at the argument somewhat differently.

"I think that moniker, or that concept, of a 'franchise player' is determined largely by the fans," he said. "I don't think that that's necessarily some label or tag that is created by some sort of contract.

"I think there are certain connotations that come with 'the face of the franchise.' I think our fans determine that. So, ultimately, I'm not sure how relevant that concept is to the issue of contractual agreements."

As for Arenado's future, it rests on his one overriding desire.

“I don’t mean to be arrogant here, but money is not an issue anymore. I’m already wealthy,” he said. “It’s about winning and it’s about the ability to play baseball in October.”

Todd Helton definitely belongs in Hall of Fame, says former Rockies GM Dan O'Dowd

First baseman finished 17-year career with a .316 average, 2,519 hits and 369 homers

By Patrick Saunders / Denver Post | Jan. 26, 2018

Todd Helton, the face of the Rockies and the only player to have his number retired by the franchise, finished his 17-year career with a .316 average, 2,519 hits and 369 homers.

He becomes eligible for the Hall of Fame in 2019. His legions of fans believe his induction is an easy call. But many Hall of Fame voters aren't so sure, and they point to Coors Field as the primary reason they won't vote for Helton. In other words, playing his home games at baseball's notoriously hitter-friendly ballpark might cost him a spot in Cooperstown. Dan O'Dowd wants to make sure that doesn't happen.

The former Rockies general manager, now an analyst for the MLB Network, on Thursday made a passionate case for Helton's induction into the Hall.

"I've got to get in here on Todd Helton," O'Dowd told the panel debating the class of 2019. "We're going to debate his rate stats ... for me he was a 5.00 WAR player for 12 straight years. His stretch between 2000 and 2005, his peak years, were as good as anyone currently in the Hall of Fame.

"His year 2000, you could say historically might have been one of the best years in the game."

For the record, Helton batted .372, mashed 42 home runs, drove in 147 runs, posted a 1.162 OPS and an 8.8 WAR. And he came in *fifth* in the National League MVP voting.

"There's two things I want to address," O'Dowd said. "First of all, I want to dig into the Coors Field myth. I am so tired of hearing this split argument. If you're a player and you've got to play all your home games at 5,280 (feet), the adjustments you have to make in hitting — which is a muscle-memory sport — to play your games in Colorado, to go on the road and play your games, is the most difficult adjustment in the history of the game. He had to do that for 17 straight years.

"No. 2: the physicality of mentally and physically playing your games at 5,280, is the most difficult place to play. So you got to put in context the home/road split, as relations to the challenge of that particular venue.

"No. 3: it's called the Hall of Fame. It's called the Hall of Fame because there has to be some historical understanding of what a player means to a franchise. This is a relatively new franchise within the game of baseball, from a historical

perspective. This is by far the greatest player to wear a Rockies uniform and spend 17 years playing for that organization. There has to be some recognition (and) understanding, because he did it with class, he did it with integrity and he did it with this level of consistency.”

O’Dowd went on to say that Helton was one of baseball’s toughest warriors: “I’ll go on record as saying, I bet you Todd didn’t play more than 50 percent of his games at 100 percent physically and mentally, to be able to go compete, because of the challenges of the venue he played in.”

The bottom line, according to O’Dowd?

“One team his entire career, greatest player in the Rockies history. It has some value.”

Rockies Mailbag: Charlie Blackmon thinks moving from leadoff to heart of the order “could be a good idea”
Denver Post sports writer Patrick Saunders posts his Rockies Mailbag once per month during the offseason

By Patrick Saunders / Denver Post | Jan. 26, 2018

Denver Post sports writer Patrick Saunders posts his Rockies Mailbag every other week on Tuesdays during the season and once per month during the offseason.

Pose a Rockies – or MLB – related question for the Rockies Mailbag.

If the Rockies do not sign a corner bat, should Bud Black consider moving Charlie Blackmon out of leadoff spot in an effort to strengthen the middle of the order?

Aaron Hurt, Omaha, Nebraska

Aaron, that’s a persistent question from a lot of fans. Truthfully, I’ve always thought Blackmon in the leadoff spot was a no-brainer. Why mess with one of the best, most unique leadoff hitters in the game?

But I was intrigued by your question, so I reached out to Blackmon.

Here’s what he told me:

“We have not discussed it yet, but I’m sure it’s a possibility. It seems like it could be a good idea.

“I’m comfortable leading off, and it has been working. But it may not be the best lineup construction.”

So, I guess we’ll find out in spring training if it’s part of the plan.

From everything Black has said so far, he greatly prefers Blackmon in the leadoff spot. You know the reasons: An NL batting title, .399 on-base percentage, 102 RBIs from the top spot and 37 homers.

But if the Rockies don’t acquire an impact corner bat (and it’s starting to look doubtful that they will), I could see Black experimenting with the batting order. Perhaps Raimel Tapia fills the leadoff role on occasion, if he improves some aspects of his game.

David Dahl has good speed (when healthy), but he also has pop in his bat, so I’m not sure the Rockies want him leading off.

Bottom line: I still think Blackmon will lead off, but the door is open for change. Personally, I love having Blackmon leading off because I think it sparks the offense. But every season brings new challenges.

Hey Patrick, two things here. First, would the Rockies be interested in signing free agent (right-hander) Tim Lincecum? I think he can be a good veteran presence with plenty of postseason experience to help the young rotation.

Second, what are your thoughts of the Rockies signing CarGo to play first? I know Mark Reynolds did great last year, but can he do it again?

Victor, Alameda, California

Victor, I do not see the Rockies signing Lincecum, especially not as a starter. I know he's worked out hard this offseason and is attempting a comeback, but I think he's destined for the bullpen.

I don't know Lincecum, but I don't think he would be that interested in mentoring a bunch of young starters.

Could the Rockies take a flyer on him and ink him to a minor-league deal? I suppose so, but I think a West Coast team is a more likely destination.

Regarding Carlos Gonzalez, I think his days in Colorado are over. However, if this long, slow offseason wraps up and he still doesn't have a deal he wants, I could see him returning on a one- or two-year deal. But I just don't see him as a first baseman.

I keep thinking CarGo will ultimately land in Arizona. We'll see.

Patrick, shouldn't Coors Field have a Captain Earthman statue? What better way to celebrate the dedication of the iconic vendor of his era? The Captain was a quirk that made the Rockies experience a Denver experience. He will be missed this season.

Andrew, Denver

Andrew, I don't know about erecting a statue, so maybe a plaque would be appropriate. I think statues are usually reserved for high-profile players and owners, etc.

I'm not downplaying Captain Earthman's unique place in team history, but there are a lot of other people who have had a bigger impact on the franchise, and they have not been honored. Former team president Keli McGregor, for instance, has a large plaque in center field, but not a statue. McGregor died suddenly in 2010.

For those who are not familiar with Captain Earthman's story, here is a link to the story about the life and death of a colorful man whose real name was Brent Doeden.

Any idea if the Rockies might entertain bringing back Matt Holliday in a platoon/reserve role to play a little first base and OF?

Jeffrey, Harrisburg, IL

Jeffrey, I have not heard any noise about that. I know that Holliday loved his years in Colorado, but I think it would make much more sense for him to play in the American League where he would primarily be a designated hitter.

The Minnesota Twins reportedly have some interest in Holliday, who is now 38.

Last season, while playing DH for the Yankees, Holliday hit 19 homers in 90 games (373 at-bats), with a .231 average and a .748 OPS.

Patrick, let's talk about the Hall of Fame with former Rockies players.

Who do you think will be the first to get inducted? My vote will be Nolan Arenado, as long as he signs a long-term deal with Colorado. Larry Walker was an outstanding player but was hurt often and missed a number of games.

Todd Helton I consider a really great player, but this isn't the hall of great. Your thoughts?

Tom, Littleton

Tom, I don't think Walker will get voted in by the writers, so he will have to rely on the Modern Era Committee.

It's going to be a tough road for Helton, too, but I think he will get in within his 10 years of eligibility. So, in my mind, Helton will get in before Arenado – toward the end of Arenado's playing career.

Patrick, the Rockies signed Ian Desmond to be the first basemen last offseason and now it doesn't sound like they have any intention of playing him there this year. With Dahl coming back, and the fact that we still don't have an established first basemen, do you see Bud Black taking Desmond from the OF and putting him at first?

Steven L. Denver

Steven, during the recent Rockies Caravan, Black said he could see Desmond getting time at first, but in my mind, Desmond will be the starting left fielder.

Bottom line: I don't think Desmond will be the starting first baseman. I think the Rockies will head into spring training undecided on that position, unless they acquire a free agent in the next three weeks.

Patrick, it has been a slower offseason and there are still a number of guys out there that could help the Rockies in 2018. What are your thoughts on Jake Arrieta coming to Denver on a three-year deal?

Jeff, Aurora

Jeff, I would be shocked if the Rockies signed Arrieta, or any other top-tier starter. Those pitchers simply don't want to come to Colorado, and general manager Jeff Bridich has made it clear that his philosophy is to pack the rotation with homegrown talent and then spend on the bullpen.

I think it's a sound philosophy.

Besides Arenado's and Blackmon's sensational season last year (and Mark Reynolds being a saving grace at first) the Rockies' most important position player was Gerardo Para. Once he returned from injury, he was terrific. Clutch hitting, moving runners over, great defense. Just an energetic, always-positive sparkplug. With that said, what are we going to do in the outfield? Ian Desmond is due to bounce back (similar to Para last year) and if Dahl is healthy, that makes for a crowded outfield because Raimel Tapia played really well last year too.

Ian, Northglenn

Ian, that's a great question. But it's funny, too, because I remember many of us thinking the Rockies had too many outfielders last winter. Then Dahl got hurt, and then Desmond got hurt. Suddenly, the depth was all gone.

This is how I see it setting up to begin the season: Desmond in left; Blackmon in center; Parra in right; and either Dahl or Tapia on the bench.

That could certainly change during spring training or early in the season, depending on Dahl's health and other factors.

Patrick, it's almost time for pitchers and catchers to report to spring training. What are you most looking forward to about spring training?

Ted, Denver

Ted, I love the first two weeks of spring training when the players are happy and not stressed out. The wall that naturally goes up between reporters and the players goes down for a while, so it's a nice, relaxed time.

I also like living in the condo and being on my own with no attachments for a few weeks. I love being married, but for a short time, it's almost like being back in college. It's fun. I love hanging out with my good friend, Thomas Harding, from MLB.com.

Once the Cactus League games start and we begin traveling all over Phoenix, the days get really long and a bit tedious.

As for the baseball side of things, I look forward to getting to know the new players (Wade Davis and Bryan Shaw). It's also fun to watch the young pitchers, especially early in camp, to see what kind of stuff they have.

And, oh yeah, I can't wait to go have chili rellenos and a margarita at Frank and Lupe's in Old Town Scottsdale!

Carlos Gonzalez, Todd Frazier among Rockies remaining free agent targets

Just weeks from Spring Training, the Rockies are still looking to add a free agent bat.

By Jordan Freemyer / Purple Row | Jan. 29, 2018

With less than three weeks until pitchers and catchers report to Spring Training, the **Colorado Rockies** still have several irons in the fire as they look to upgrade their offense via free agency, **according to Thomas Harding of MLB.com.**

In addition to the possibility of bringing back first baseman **Mark Reynolds** and outfielder **Carlos Gonzalez**, both of whom were with the team in 2017, the Rockies are also talking with infielder **Todd Frazier** about a deal.

Frazier, an All-Star in 2014 and 2015, has hit at least 27 home runs in each of the past four seasons. He hit .213/.344/.428 with the **White Sox** and **Yankees** last year. The 31-year-old (who will be 32 next month) also walked 14.4 percent of the time in 2017, more than any Rockies hitter and has hit fly balls more than 47 percent of the time in each of the last three seasons, making him suited to the thin air of Coors Field.

The Rockies have also talked with Reynolds and **Gonzalez** about re-signing with the team. Gonzalez is fourth on the Rockies all-time list with 211 home runs and hit .292/.351/.521 in nine years with the club, though those numbers dipped to .262/.339/.423 in 2017. Reynolds spent the past two seasons with the Rockies, hitting .267/.352/.487 last season with 30 home runs.

In an incredibly slow offseason league wide, the Rockies may be looking to sign these players at a cut rate. That said, any of them would bolster the team's greatest positions of need, corner outfield and first base, as the season approaches.

Brendan Rodgers leads Colorado Rockies' 2018 spring training non-roster invitees

Rockies announce 17 non-roster invitees for spring training

By Jordan Freemyer / Purple Row | Jan. 29, 2018

The **Colorado Rockies** released their list of non-roster invitees to 2018 Major League Spring Training today, and Rockies top prospect Brendan Rodgers is included. A total of 17 players that are not on the Rockies 40-man roster will be joining the big-league squad in camp this spring.

Of the 17 players, only two of them were signed to minor league deals with invites attached this offseason. All of the other players are prospects from the Rockies own farm system. Besides Rodgers, starting pitching prospects Ryan Castellani and Peter Lambert are the other two biggest prospects to be joining the big-league team though neither has a real path to making the team out of spring training.

Brian Mundell, Garrett Hampson, and Sam Hilliard represent some of the Rockies top position players. Like their starting pitcher counterparts, they are most likely just in camp to gain valuable experience in case the Rockies need to call on their services later in the season.

The two new names to the Rockies organization that are among the invites are utility player **Shawn O'Malley** and reliever Brooks Pounder. While Pounder's name alone should give him a roster chance, the chances of either breaking camp with the team are very slim. That continuing theme highlights the current strength of the Rockies 40-man roster as there isn't an obvious candidate among any of the non-roster invites to make the team on opening day.

The Rockies could still sign additional players to minor-league deals with invites, and with the current market being so slow that could be a notable player in the mold of the Rockies' **Mark Reynolds** signing last spring. That type of potential signing probably represents the best chance of a player currently not on the Rockies 40-man roster making the Rockies opening-day active roster.

The complete list of non-roster invites is:

LHP

Harrison Musgrave
Jerry Vasto

RHP

Shane Broyles
Ryan Castellani
James Farris
[Austin House](#)
Peter Lambert
[Brooks Pounders](#)

C

Anthony Bemboom
Dom Nuñez
Jan Vázquez

IF

[Daniel Castro](#)
Garrett Hampson
Brian Mundell
Shawn O'Malley
Brendan Rodgers

OF

Sam Hilliard

Baseball's free agent problem and Charlie Blackmon's future with the Rockies

The current free agent problem is made for a player like Blackmon

By Eric Garcia McKinley / Purple Row | Jan. 29, 2018

Baseball has a problem. The lack of free agent signings this offseason is merely a symptom of something systemic. It's not the disease. Tanking is viewed by fans and front offices alike as an acceptable long-term competitive strategy. Doing so hurts current competitive balance while also dis-incentivizing spending money in free agency. The MLBPA has slowly but surely weakened since the 1994 strike, which has led the union to concede pay for young players in favor of other amenities, under the assumption of a later payday in free agency. At the same time, owners are using the luxury tax threshold as an excuse to withhold those paydays. It's even become common for fans to view the game from the perspective of the front office and giving praise to the savvy acquisition of young cost-controlled players and maximizing dollar value (even this article is sort of an example of that).

Jeff Passan lays all of this out **in an excellent article for Yahoo! Sports**. The most critical point Passan makes is that this offseason isn't a blip that emerged out of nowhere in November, 2017 that will go away before the big free agent class of 2018 hits. It's a problem long in the making, and there's going to be a reckoning sooner or later.

The **Rockies** player most immediately affected by the state of things is Charlie Blackmon. Not long ago it looked like Blackmon was headed for a huge payday in free agency once he hits the market after the 2018 offseason. The 31-year-old had an MVP-caliber season in 2017, and his year-to-year improvements stand as a testament to his work ethic as much as his talent. There didn't seem to be much standing in the way between Blackmon and a Jayson Werth-like contract. Werth also entered free agency after his age 31-season, and the **Nationals** signed him to a seven-year contract worth \$126 million. Maybe Blackmon would get fewer years, and maybe the dollars wouldn't match, but he was on his way to getting paid.

That's far from a sure thing now. The problem is going to be especially hard on a player like Blackmon, who didn't play his first full season until he was 27. Now, he'll hit free agency past his prime, and he and his agent will try to entertain teams who are either not trying to win and unwilling to pay up for an outfielder on the wrong side of 30 or teams who'd much rather rely on younger and cheaper options. One anonymous league official told Passan: "Of course it doesn't make sense. We pay you the minimum for three years and arbitration for three or four years, and then you get paid more in free agency for your decline?"

There's no scenario in which Blackmon doesn't get the short end of the stick. He's not unique in that regard. Similarly, the Rockies aren't unique in their increasingly advantageous position regarding Blackmon. And one way they can take advantage of that position is offering Blackmon a below market extension.

Before this offseason began to unfold, it didn't seem like an extension made much sense. On the one hand, Blackmon wrapped up an excellent season in which he established himself as a premier outfielder. If I were him, I wouldn't have accepted anything less than six years and \$120 million as an extension, and I wouldn't have done that because free agency was the beacon to get at least that and maybe more. On the other hand, if I were the Rockies I would have been extremely hesitant to make an offer like that.

Now, in late January, things look different. That type of extension offer was never going to come Blackmon, and it doesn't look like it'll be coming his way in free agency either. The Rockies could now have a brief window before free agency begins to take advantage of the system and extend Blackmon for something that benefits the team, though not necessarily Blackmon.

The Lorenzo Cain contract could be a decent proxy. He just signed with the **Brewers** for five years and \$80 million. After JD Martinez, Cain was the best outfielder on the market this year. He's similar to Blackmon in that he excels in one part of the game and is average to slightly above in another part. While Blackmon is an excellent hitter and a good outfielder, Cain is an excellent outfielder and a good hitter. Cain's the same age now as Blackmon will be when he's a free agent next year.

An extension for three or four years in the range of \$20-25 million a year could be hugely beneficial to the Rockies and potentially enticing to Blackmon (as long as his expectations weren't as Werth-ian as mine were). He'd be ready to hit free agency again at around age 35, which is most definitely worse for him. Although that'd also be around the time the current CBA expires so he might just be on strike anyhow.

If there's a benefit to Blackmon in any of this, it's that he wouldn't be stuck in free agent purgatory next offseason. Otherwise, it's a bad outcome of a bad situation and another symptom of baseball's systemic problem. Without an extension, Blackmon will be a 32-year-old outfielder with a qualifying offer attached. He may spend January 2019 wondering if he'll be at Spring Training with a team or one **organized for him and other frozen-out free agents**.

Colorado Rockies announce their non-roster invites to Spring Training

By Noah Yingling / Rox Pile | Jan. 29, 2018

Yesterday, the Colorado Rockies announced that their non-roster invitees to Spring Training and most of them are prospects.

The Colorado Rockies announced that they will have 17 non-roster invitees to major league camp when Spring Training starts here in a few weeks.

The highlight of them is Rockies top prospect, infielder **Brendan Rodgers**. Here's the breakdown of the players by position.

Catchers (3): Anthony Bemboom, Dom Nuñez, and Jan Vázquez

Infielders (5): Daniel Castro, Garrett Hampson, Brian Mundell, Shawn O'Malley, and Brendan Rodgers

Outfielders (1): Sam Hilliard

Pitchers (8): Harrison Musgrave, Jerry Vasto, Shane Broyles, Ryan Castellani, James Farris, Austin House, Peter Lambert, Brooks Ponders

Of the 17 non-roster invitees, only O'Malley and Ponders spent 2017 outside of the Rockies organization.

O'Malley, 30, has been in affiliated baseball since 2006 but he has only played 124 games at the major league level.

None of the 124, though, were in 2017. He's not much of a threat with the bat (.231 hitter in the majors and .262 in the minor leagues) but he is very versatile as he has played every position but pitcher, catcher, and first base in the majors.

He also has played those positions in at least ten games a piece. If this description sounds familiar to you, you could basically copy and paste this description on 2017 Rockie **Alexi Amarista** (gasp!).

Ponders, 27, has appeared in 24 MLB games in the past two seasons with the Royals in 2016 and the Angels in 2017.

He has not done particularly well in the majors as in those 24 games, he has an ERA of 9.78 and he averaged 14.1 hits allowed per nine innings. He was much better in Triple-A in 2017 as he had an ERA of 2.63 in 38 outings.

Final Thoughts

While the Rockies could make some additions to their non-roster invitee list, in my opinion, the only player who has a remote shot at making the Rockies 25-man roster at the end of Spring Training is Brendan Rodgers.

Don't get your hopes up though as he will not be on the MLB roster breaking out of spring training. He only played 38 games at Double-A before being stricken by the injury bug. He's still got some more seasoning to do. Perhaps, we could see him as a September call-up but I would think that we'll see him in 2019.

Colorado Rockies: Larry Walker on his Hall of Fame snubbings

By Noah Yingling / Rox Pile | Jan. 29, 2018

Larry Walker, who played with the Colorado Rockies from 1995 through 2004, is usually rather relaxed on Twitter on his Hall of Fame snubbings but he showed a bit of a different side in an interview recently.

An MVP award, a five-time All-Star, a seven-time Gold Glove Winner, a three-time Gold Glove winner, three-time batting champion, and a three-time Silver Slugger Winner. All describe former Colorado Rockies outfielder Larry Walker. However, in eight trips to the Hall of Fame ballot, Walker has never received more than 34.1 percent on it, and that happened this year.

Other players like **Barry Bonds**, **Roger Clemens**, and (in 2017) **Manny Ramirez** have all done much better on the Hall of Fame ballot as, in the case of Bonds and Clemens, are creeping close to 60 percent of the vote.

Most of Walker's tweets about it are lighthearted, like this:

However, in an interview with former Montreal Expos broadcaster Mitch Melnick, of Montreal's 690 CKGM, Walker had a bit of a different demeanor (h/t **The Score** via **Purple Row**):

"I can't fault myself. I played for a major-league team that happened to be in Denver," he said. "If that's a problem, and there's going to be an issue, then get rid of the team and move it elsewhere if it's going to be that big of an issue. No needles went in my ass, I played the game clean, but I played in a ballpark. And it's almost like Coors Field is my PED."

He also offered his thoughts on potential steroid users who are doing better than him in the Hall of Fame balloting:

"They cheated and they're getting twice as many votes as I am, so take that how you will," he said.

The only suspected players that took steroids that are nearly double of Walker's vote total are Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens.

Final Thoughts

For me personally, if I had a vote for the Hall of Fame, I would not vote for players like Bonds and Clemens because this reason. Just this in 2018 ballot, players like Walker, **Fred McGriff**, **Jeff Kent**, **Johan Santana**, **Curt Schilling**, **Edgar Martinez**, **Mike Mussina**, **Omar Vizquel**, and **Billy Wagner** were all hurt by the balloting and during their careers by these players who cheated.

For McGriff, he had 493 career home runs. Before the “steroid era,” 500 home runs was considered an automatic ticket to the Hall of Fame. If the 1994-95 MLB strike doesn’t happen, McGriff gets 500 home runs. But even with 493, they look sparse compared to the career numbers of Bonds, **Gary Sheffield**, **Mark McGwire**, **Sammy Sosa**, and others. If you look at the career home run leaders, without steroid users, McGriff would be tied for 20th all-time in home runs (instead of 28th). From 1988 through 1994, he was in the top four in home runs in the leagues that he played in, including leading the league twice in 1989 and 1992 with 36 and 35 home runs. But, just six seasons later, McGwire and Sosa both completely shattered the single season mark of 61, set by **Roger Maris** in 1961.

For Walker, there is no question that he is being blackballed out of the Hall of Fame and this is almost exclusively from playing a majority of his career in Denver and Montreal (where they weren’t exactly being televised in the United States on ESPN, NBC, or CBS on a nightly basis). As Walker said himself, Denver is a city and Coors Field is a park in Major League Baseball. There should obviously be adjustments to the offensive numbers but, for Walker, it is obvious that he has still crossed that threshold of being a Hall of Famer.

It’s like the argument that designated hitters and relief pitchers don’t belong in the Hall of Fame. It’s a position in baseball, correct? Are you one of the best, if not the best, who played that position in the era that you played?

If each of those answers are yes, the answer to whether Larry Walker is a Hall of Famer is abundantly clear.

Colorado Rockies: Youth could push DJ LeMahieu out after this season

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | Jan. 29, 2018

There has been a lot of discussion about some of the contract decisions the Colorado Rockies will face during this upcoming season. As the season goes along, those discussions will only become more pronounced, especially as the trade deadline approaches.

Colorado has three big decisions coming up in the not-too-distant future. **Charlie Blackmon** and **DJ LeMahieu** will become unrestricted free agents after the 2018 season. **Nolan Arenado** will be free to listen to what should be massive contract offers from many teams after the 2019 campaign. All three are All-Stars. All three have been key pieces to Colorado's recent success.

However, it's very likely that all three won't remain with the Rockies. It's not economically feasible to think, based on franchise history, the Rockies will spend big dollars on all three players. That sets up what could be decisions that will determine the future of the Rockies.

So who stays and who goes? It's logical to think that Colorado will save as many resources as possible to keep Arenado as the face of its franchise (**we have estimated it may take \$280 million to keep Arenado**). That's also the decision that is the furthest away on the timeline.

So if it comes down to LeMahieu or Blackmon staying with the Rockies, it could well be the bearded leadoff man who sees a new contract (**that could be around \$20 million per season**) rather than LeMahieu. Why? Part of that thinking has to do with Blackmon's historic pace as Colorado's top of the order hitter and his ability to kickstart the Rockies offense on any given night. Another part has to do with who is coming up behind LeMahieu in Colorado's farm system.

At the age of 21, **Brendan Rodgers** was just named **as the 15th-best prospect in all of Major League Baseball**. After hitting .387 in 51 Class-A games last season before being called up to Double-A Hartford, it's easy to think that Rodgers could well make the next step to Triple-A this season if he performs as he has in the past. A stint on the disabled list while in Hartford limited Rodgers to just 38 games with the Yard Goats last season. He will likely start the year back in Hartford with every opportunity to advance to Albuquerque. That would put him on track to potentially make his Major League debut in the 2019 campaign.

While Rodgers has had more game experience at shortstop than second base (33 games at shortstop versus six at second base last season at Hartford), he said **in an interview with Purple Row last season** that he has been taking plenty of pregame reps at second base. The timing, perhaps, couldn't be better for the Rockies and their payroll with the 29-year-old LeMahieu, who is scheduled to make \$8.5 million this season, soon to be asking for a larger, long-term contract.

Additionally, **Ryan McMahon** told me **in a recent interview** that he is still working on his fielding techniques as first base, second base and third base. While he may "penciled in" at first base this season, it's quite possible the Rockies could shuffle him to second if Rodgers might not be ready to take over the reins next season. A possible scenario is that **Ian Desmond** could play first while McMahon (the 41st-best prospect in all of baseball) plays second until Rodgers is ready.

And hey, don't forget that **Garrett Hampson** is lurking as well **as the seventh-best prospect at second base in MLB today**.

There is no question that DJ LeMahieu is an integral part of Colorado's success. However, with the Rockies coming to a critical time with their payroll decisions with three of their biggest stars, youth could well be served at the expense of Colorado's current Gold Glove-winning former league batting champion. At the end of the day, baseball is a business and letting LeMahieu go could be tough but, at the end of the day, what's best for the Rockies business.

Rolling the dice on Ryan McMahon is a worthwhile gamble for the Rockies

By Aniello Piro / Mile High Sports | Jan. 26, 2018

The Colorado Rockies dilemma at first base has bled into the new year and remains an issue that can be traced back to the start of the last offseason.

Colorado originally planned to convert Ian Desmond, who signed a five-year, \$70-million contract before the season, to the position but a broken hand in Spring Training derailed those plans. Journeyman Mark Reynolds, who was with the team in 2016, re-signed on a one-year minor league deal and went on to start 132 games at the position in 2017 as Desmond rehabbed.

Spring Training is right around the corner, and the Rockies still have not addressed the position for 2018, which presents problems entering a season with high expectations.

The Rockies and general manager Jeff Bridich have a few intriguing options to fill the void at first base, but they would be wise to stay in-house and transfer the reins to youngster Ryan McMahon.

McMahon, 23, hit .355 in split time between Double-A Hartford and Triple-A Albuquerque last season before making the jump to the big leagues towards the tail end of the season. He batted .158 in 24 plate appearances (19 at-bats) with the Rockies. While in the bigs, McMahon spent most his time observing the functions of the team and learning how to be a major leaguer.

McMahon, a 2013 second-round draft pick, is in a position to assert himself as the everyday first baseman for the playoff-caliber Rockies. Between his performance in the minor leagues and defensive flexibility, McMahon makes the most sense for the Rockies at first base at this point.

First things first, he's inexpensive. The Rockies have already spent \$100-plus million-dollars this offseason and cannot afford to spend big with the impending free agency of Nolan Arenado (2020), Charlie Blackmon (2019), and DJ LeMahieu (2019).

Should the Rockies lose any one of those three, there will be another leadership void to fill. It's likely Colorado will already be without longtime right fielder and clubhouse leader Carlos Gonzalez, who is expected to move on in free agency. Losing Arenado, Blackmon and/or LeMahieu would continue to erode the leadership corps that has been in place in

recent years. McMahon could be a central figure in the next group of players to fill that looming void. McMahon, along with Brendan Rodgers, Riley Pint, and Raimel Tapia, could offer the sustainability Bridich and Co. will need in the years to come. Injecting McMahon now would be in Colorado's best interest in the big picture.

McMahon, a natural third baseman, is capable of playing multiple infield positions. His versatility, paired with his offensive production, should warrant consideration for a possible utility role. Alexi Amarista — a personal favorite of manager Bud Black who signed a free-agent minor-league contract with Detroit — was not so productive in his first season in Colorado. McMahon's skill set and affordability make perfect sense for the team to slide him into that role.

With his impressive batting average in the minor leagues last season, McMahon demonstrated his potential to evolve into an impact bat for the Rockies in the near future. On top of a robust .355 average, he also managed to drive in 88 RBI and blast 20 home runs. With as much offense as the Rockies already have, they would be foolish not to install McMahon into the team, especially with what other offerings are available.

Reynolds had a superb 2017 campaign in which he hit .267 with 97 RBI and 30 home runs. He was arguably the biggest bargain in the sport last season at \$1.5 million. The odds that he can mimic his production of last year seem unlikely, and he will certainly come at a higher cost. Reynolds hit .284 with 61 RBI and 19 home runs ahead of the All-Star Game last season. Following the midsummer classic his numbers dipped significantly, as he only hit .243 with 36 RBI and 11 home runs in the second half. He was signed to a minor league contract last season and will surely command more than last year. After the offseason spending spree, the Rockies may not be able to afford Reynolds' new asking price.

The Desmond first base experiment never really got off the ground last season, so it would make sense for Desmond and McMahon to split time at first base to open the season. That would allow Colorado to attempt to revive their so-far failed experiment and start to cement McMahon for the future. Utility infielder Pat Valiaka is another option, but he proved most valuable as a clutch pinch-hitter with power and a valuable asset coming off the bench capable of playing any infield position.

All in all, McMahon makes the most sense for the Rockies at first base for 2018. At 23 years old, he fits the blueprint that Bridich has for winning now and in the future. He's cost-effective and has the potential to generate just as much offense as some of the other options. Spring Training is likely where the Rockies will identify their first baseman for the 2018 season and McMahon has an opportunity to rise to the occasion and help drive Colorado into the future.

Dahl... Desmond... Tapia... CarGo?! Colorado's outfield situation is complicated

By Casey Light / Mile High Sports | Jan. 24, 2018

Colorado Rockies manager Bud Black doesn't have much use for social media in his job, but if we were to categorize his outfield situation it would be easy to say, "It's complicated." But that's not necessarily a bad thing.

With less than a month remaining before players report to Spring Training, the makeup of the Rockies' outfield for 2018 remains in a state of mild flux. Black has three proven major league talents, along with several young prospects ready to take the next step. But he also has a hole at first base that he may need to fill with one of those proven talents. What Black does at first base will likely play a big role in how the outfield takes shape for a very important 2018 season.

The Veterans

It's a certainty that, barring injury, reigning N.L. batting champ and two-time All-Star Charlie Blackmon will patrol center field. After that, things are more complicated.

Gerardo Parra produced one of the better statistical seasons of his career in 2017. Parra batted over .300 (.309) for the second time in his career, while driving in a career-high 71 runs. Defensively Parra was deployed primarily in left field, but he did play some right field and even a little first base. Parra has a Gold Glove in both left field (2011) and right field (2013), so Black should feel more than confident playing Parra at either corner outfield position.

Gone (and still available in free agency) is longtime Rockies right fielder Carlos Gonzalez. His contract expired at the end of 2017 and the Rockies have allowed the three-time All-Star and Gold Glove winner and 2010 batting champ to test free agency. So far there have been no takers. Gonzalez spent the majority of his career in Denver and became a fan favorite and clubhouse leader. A return to Colorado isn't out of the question, but several factors will play into whether or not he's needed.

Chief among those factors is how Black intends to use last year's big free-agent signing, Ian Desmond.

Colorado signed Desmond last offseason on a five-year, \$70-million deal with the idea of converting him to first base. Desmond logged meaningful big-league innings at shortstop and all three outfield positions, earning two All-Star nods, before his arrival in Denver. A broken hand in Spring Training derailed the effort to move him to first base and general manager Jeff Bridich had to fall back on Mark Reynolds. When Reynolds burst out of the gate with a blazing start to 2017,

Black had no choice but to consider other options for Desmond once he returned to the lineup. Desmond played 27 games (22 starts) in left field in 2017, and he could return there in 2018. But it sounds like Black still hasn't given up on the idea of Desmond playing first base.

In fact, Desmond's name was the first off Black's tongue last week when the skipper was asked about the situation at first base.

"You look at last year," Black said on Saturday ahead of the final stop in the annual Rockies Caravan, "we had Ian Desmond projected to possibly play first base. He went to spring training as our first baseman, right? Then, you know, we signed Mark and then things happened like they do. Mark emerged because Ian broke his hand, but, you know, at first base Ian is there."

Desmond is there because Reynolds, like Gonzalez, is a free agent without a home. Colorado signed the veteran on a minor league deal in 2017, and Reynolds more than delivered on that contract with a .267 batting average, 30 home runs and 97 RBI, not to mention sterling play at first base. The 34-year-old Reynolds played well enough to earn a multi-year deal somewhere, although he remains unsigned as of publication.

So, with Reynolds possibly out of the picture and Desmond still being top-of-mind at first base, that leaves one starting outfield spot potentially up for grabs.

Fans would no doubt like to see Gonzalez back, but the Rockies are also anxious to see if David Dahl is fully healthy and ready to step into a full-time role at the major league level.

The Prospects

Dahl sparked Denver's curiosity with a fiery debut in 2016. In 63 games, the then-22-year-old hit .315 and slugged 23 extra-base hits in 222 at-bats with the big-league club. He opened his career with a 17-game hitting streak, tying Chuck Aleno (Cincinnati, 1941) for a MLB record. Dahl's numbers in the minors were just as impressive, hitting .307 and compiling 802 total bases for seven different teams. The 10th overall pick in 2012, Colorado would love to find a permanent place in the majors for the left-handed hitting Dahl.

Complicating Dahl's place on the big-league club is a complicated injury history that has caused him to miss significant time in three of his six professional seasons.

Dahl missed all of 2017, starting with a rib injury suffered in Spring Training. That compounded into a back injury in July and the Rockies shut down Dahl for the remainder of the year. In 2015, Dahl missed most of his season with the New Britain Rock Cats (Class AA) after colliding with a teammate and suffering a lacerated spleen. He played in just 10 games in 2013 with the Asheville Tourists (Class A) before a torn hamstring ended his season.

If you were following the pattern, 2018 should be a healthy year for Dahl. (We'll hold our collective breath in 2019.) He's progressing nicely in his rehab, and Black expects him to be ready to go come Spring Training.

"[Dahl] is in Arizona," Black said. "He is progressing real good as far as his health. He's at the complex, as are a number of players, but he's taken some swings at a pretty high intensity. It's not full batting practice I mean that's common (how many stages) we are still a month away from position players but he's in the cage he's swinging he's running he's throwing he's lifting weights there is a process to the amount of weight he's lifting but he's building right now there are no concerns."

That's big news for the organization, who would love to see their top-10 pick contribute significantly here in his seventh pro season.

Dahl recently posted a video to Twitter that proves he's getting back into form. Now it's a matter of getting back up to major-league game speed after a year off.

"He didn't play much last year," Black continued, "So, I think he's got to reestablish himself. It's hard to basically not play then just jump in there and produce. But he's capable, I mean he's got a lot of tools."

Those tools Black referenced are probably most similar to Charlie Blackmon. Although Dahl is a right-handed thrower, he hits with power from the left side and could be a longterm replacement for Blackmon's bat in the lineup. Blackmon becomes a free agent next year, and the Rockies will have a tough choice in retaining his services along with D.J. LeMahieu or trying to keep Nolan Arenado, who hits free agency in 2019 and will command hundreds of millions of dollars. Dahl, if healthy, could not only play a significant role in 2018 — in either left or right field opposite Parra — but also in 2019 and beyond should the Rockies let Blackmon move on in free agency.

Speedster Raimel Tapia is also in the mix.

“I think he matured,” Black said of Tapia’s 2017. “He bounced up and down last year a lot. Overall, [he] showed some big league skills. He’s got a skill set that plays in the big leagues with his speed and his bat-to-ball skill. He can run a ball down, steal a base. He’s an exciting player.”

The left-handed Tapia, who turns 24 on Feb. 4, saw action in 70 games for the Rockies last year and offers an intriguing speed element that has been lacking for Colorado in recent years. Tapia recorded only five stolen bases in seven attempts at the big-league level, but he has 132 in 637 minor-league games. He also has 38 triples on his résumé, and the expansive outfield at Coors Field could see those numbers climb.

Also knocking at the door is Mike Tauchman, another player who profiles much like Blackmon (as a left/left centerfielder). Tauchman has just 27 MLB at-bats to his credit, but the Rockies think so highly of him that he’s no longer listed among their top 30 prospects — effectively moving him into the same category as Dahl and Tapia, as major-league ready.

It’s Complicated – And That’s Okay

With only 25 Opening Day roster spots available, Black won’t be able to carry Blackmon, Parra, Desmond, Dahl, Tapia and Tauchman all as outfielders. Even if Desmond is at first base, Black will likely carry only four outfielders as he did to start 2017. That will leave one of those budding major leaguers, Dahl, Tapia and Tauchman, out of the picture. Another one will be pushed out should Reynolds return (or another option emerge at first base) and push Desmond back to a primarily outfield role.

All of that makes it harder for Gonzalez to return, even on a small-money deal, but the loss of his clubhouse leadership and his 10 years of MLB knowledge has to make the front-office brass at 20th and Blake think long and hard. Gonzalez struggled through much of 2017, but came on when it mattered most to help seal a playoff berth. He’s still only 32 years old.

Is his experience and leadership worth more than the upside Dahl, Tapia and Tauchman present and the major league experience they would gain? It’s a debate that will gain intensity every day that Gonzalez remains unsigned elsewhere.

Is Dahl going to return healthy and major-league ready? Will Desmond officially make the move to first base? The questions are piling up as the days are counting down to the start of Spring Training.

Colorado has big expectations in 2018, with players and coaches alike not shying away from saying a World Series berth is their goal. With so many talented outfielders at their disposal, Bud Black and the front office can be patient and selective before deciding which four outfielders open the season on the big-league roster. It's complicated, and that's actually a good thing.

2018 Rockies Preview: Once a weakness, the bullpen is now a source of strength

By Aniello Piro / Mile High Sports | Jan. 29, 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).

After spending big to get the Rockies back to the postseason last year, Bridich and the Monforts opened the checkbook once again this offseason in an attempt to push the Rockies over the top to fortify the roster for a run at the World Series.

In their 11-8 loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks in the National League Wild Card game last year, the Rockies learned how vital a strong pitching staff is when playing in baseball's big dance. Although starting pitcher Jon Gray put the Rockies in a poor position from the get-go by surrendering four earned runs in 1.1 innings pitched, the seven combined earned runs allowed from the bullpen ultimately killed Colorado in the long run.

With the expanded budget, the Rockies made an effort to add supreme talent to the bullpen by re-signing Jake McGee and adding right-handed pitcher Bryan Shaw — both to three-year, \$27-million-dollar contracts. But they did not stop there as they signed All-Star Wade Davis to a whopping three-year, \$52-million-dollar contract — the highest annual salary paid to a relief pitcher in the history of the sport. The deal has a fourth-year vesting option attached to it which could amount the contract total to \$66 million if exercised.

Shaw was a member of the Cleveland Indians before signing with Colorado and served as an integral part of their bullpen in a recent stretch of dominance that includes a run to the World Series in 2016. Shaw has been one of the most durable relief pitchers in baseball over the past few seasons, having appeared in 475 games since he entered the league in 2011, the third-most appearances in baseball during that span. Shaw is also the only pitcher in the sport to have appeared in at least 70 games for five consecutive seasons. Shaw was 4-6 with an ERA of 3.52 last season.

Davis, a three-time All-Star, will replace Greg Holland as the Rockies closer for the coming season, much like he did in Kansas City just a few years ago. Davis logged 32 saves last season while posting an ERA of 2.30. He also registered the fewest blown saves in the National League last year, which will give the Rockies security at the end of games — something that was a problem in the final couple months of last year and was highlighted in the Wild Card loss.

McGee rejoins the Rockies following a pair of solid seasons in Colorado after spending time as a member of the Tampa Bay Rays. McGee was sharp for the Rockies last year as he recorded a 3.61 ERA and WHIP of 1.10 and helped propel Colorado to the Wild Card.

Between re-signing McGee, adding Shaw and Davis, and the other dollars already guaranteed to Chris Rusin, Adam Ottavino, and Mike Dunn, the Rockies have more than \$100 million in guaranteed money tied up to relief pitchers which adds up to be the most expensive bullpen in baseball history. The Rockies are all-in on following the mold of the mega-bullpen idea established of the 2015 Kansas City Royals, 2016 Chicago Cubs, and 2017 New York Yankees among other teams.

The Rockies' bullpen combined for an ERA of 4.40 last season which stands as the seventh-lowest mark in franchise history. Between the new additions and already established arms, Colorado and manager Bud Blackwill have a nice mix of weapons to choose from on a nightly basis.

Shaw, McGee, and Davis are penciled in to fill the seventh, eighth, and ninth inning roles which give the Rockies one of the strongest back-end bullpens in the sport. Adam Ottavino also can be an impact arm for the Rockies if he can manage to establish some level of consistency on the mound. Between his plus fastball and wipe-out slider, Ottavino has flashed his ability to be a power pitcher for the Rockies, but his 5.06 ERA in 2017 begs to differ.

Ottavino is one arm the Rockies have in the bullpen with the potential to be superb.

Carlos Estevez is another pitcher who has shown in spurts he has the potential to be a plus option in the bullpen for Colorado. Despite spending a majority of the season in the minor leagues last year, Estevez was good enough in his time at the major league level and demonstrated enough poise on the mound to warrant an appearance in the Wild Card game. If he can continue to mature and improve his control, he should be able to find a home within the Rockies bullpen.

Dunn and Scott Oberg had up-and-down seasons in 2017 but were relied upon consistently throughout the year. They have the potential to grow and serve as reliable relief options for Colorado as does youngster Zac Rosscup.

The Rockies best and most consistent bullpen pitcher last season was Chris Rusin. Rusin was excellent and served as a swiss-army knife for the Rockies having pitched in both short and long relief situations at a highly productive level. Rusin logged the most innings pitched on the team and posted an astounding 2.65 ERA with a record of 5-1.

The Rockies bullpen will probably look like this come Opening Day:

Wade Davis (CL) – RHP

Jake McGee – LHP

Bryan Shaw – RHP

Adam Ottavino – RHP

Chris Rusin – LHP

Mike Dunn – LHP

Scott Oberg – RHP

Carlos Estevez – RHP

Zac Rosscup – LHP

There is the potential for a couple of young starters to join the relief force. Jeff Hoffman and Tyler Anderson are two candidates to spend some time in the bullpen; however, that will likely be decided throughout Spring Training.

With what the Rockies have managed to build in the bullpen over the past few seasons paired with their recent offseason additions, the 'pen has transformed from a weakness to a source of strength and focal point in which the Rockies will rely on to win for the coming season.

It will indeed be intriguing to see if Colorado's investment will pay off both this season and in the long run. The recent moves have certainly caught the eye of many around the sport as the Rockies' popularity has started to increase. Former Rockies pitcher and current Seattle Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto called the Rockies' offseason moves "brilliant" on a podcast for The Denver Post. The additions are expected to help Colorado compete for the top spot in the ultra-competitive National League West.

The 2018 season will not be easy for the surging Rockies. The Giants have made major investments up and down their roster, and the Dodgers and Diamondbacks are coming off 104 and 93 win seasons respectively. But with the Rockies offense being as lethal as ever and a young starting rotation ready to break out, loading up on bullpen talent was a smart play to ensure the late-game heartbreak the Rockies have become accustomed to over the years is a thing of the past.

2018 Rockies Preview: Will Tony Wolters and Chris Iannetta suffice behind the plate?

By Aniello Piro / Mile High Sports | Jan. 29, 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 catcher position was a carousel of sorts for Colorado last season. The Rockies entered the year planning to use a tandem of rookie catchers in Tom Murphy and Tony Wolters. After Murphy suffered a fractured right forearm during Spring Training, the Rockies pivoted to Wolters and Dustin Garneau to start the season. Garneau struggled in the early going and management eventually had to make the move to veteran catcher Ryan Hanigan, who signed with the team on a minor-league deal just ahead of Opening Day.

Wolters impressed early, and Hanigan was steady throughout the season. Both are adept receivers, but lacked the punch manager Bud Black needed at the bottom of his lineup. The Rockies got that plus a veteran to work with their young starting pitching staff when Jeff Bridich traded for Jonathan Lucroy at last season's deadline. Lucroy impressed in his limited time with Colorado by posting a .310 batting average with 13 RBIs in 46 games. After the brief but enjoyable stint with the club, Lucroy welcomed the idea of a reunion this offseason. It is still not entirely out of the question, but differences in opinion over the length of a potential deal and dollar amounts seemed to derail contract talks early in the winter.

With that, the Rockies decided to go with a familiar face to take over a bulk of the duties at catcher this coming season by signing veteran Chris Iannetta to a two-year, \$8.5-million-dollar contract. Iannetta was a member of the Rockies from 2006-11, during which time he hit .235 while driving in 236 runs. After departing Colorado, Iannetta spent time with the Los Angeles Angels, Seattle Mariners and Arizona Diamondbacks before seeing his career come full circle at age 34. Iannetta is a lifetime .231 hitter.

Iannetta, like Lucroy and a slew of other aging players have done over the years, will be looking to give his career a spark in his return to Colorado. Coors Field is one of the most hitter-friendly parks in the sport and profiles perfectly to Iannetta's biggest strength — power.

Although he does not hit for a particularly high average or drive in a large number of runs, Iannetta can be a difference maker with one swing of the bat. He can serve as a slugger of sorts for Colorado moving forward as he did in his lone season in Arizona. In 89 games last season, Iannetta blasted 17 home runs while slugging .511. [Charlie Blackmon](#), [Nolan Arenado](#), [Mark Reynolds](#), and [Trevor Story](#) were the only Rockies who managed to eclipse the 15 home run threshold last season. Outside of Blackmon and Arenado, pinch-hitting superstar [Pat Valaika](#) was the only Rockie who slugged higher than Iannetta in 2017.

With the hitter-friendly accommodations of Coors Field and his particular skillset, Iannetta has the potential to be a vigorous bat for the Rockies in the lineup.

CHECK OUT THE 2018 ROCKIES PREVIEW: BULLPEN EDITION

Wolters will split time with Iannetta behind the plate, assuming the Rockies do not add another catcher via trade or free agency. After starting the season strong — .285 batting average through the first three months of the season — Wolters slumped in the second half of last season, which resulted in a trip down to Triple-A Albuquerque late in the year. In addition to his stats at the plate taking a dip, his once-touted defense, specifically pitch framing, also diminished in 2017.

Spring Training will be important for the Rockies when evaluating Wolters and his role with the team for the 2018 season. A strong showing in the Cactus League could cement Wolters as the Rockies second catcher alongside Iannetta. In addition, Wolters could serve multiple purposes for the Rockies as he converted to a catcher after playing the infield.

That said, Wolters could benefit from time in the minor leagues as he has only been a full-time catcher for a handful of seasons. In Triple-A Wolters could develop offensive game while learning the intricacies of the catcher position, which includes how to handle a pitching staff.

If the Rockies feel Wolters is not ready for a full-time job at the major-league level they could explore Tom Murphy once again or look elsewhere to fill the void at catcher. Garneau is no longer an option, as he was claimed off waivers last August by the Oakland Athletics.

Free agent Alex Avila would be a nice addition and makes a ton of sense for the Rockies on offense. Avila, 31, hit .264 in split time with the Detroit Tigers and Chicago Cubs last year and is a proven commodity behind the plate, having played nine seasons at the major league level. A tandem of Iannetta and Avila is enticing and would act as a balancing act with Iannetta more power driven and Avila who can hit for average. However, Avila's market value sits around \$8.6 million per year. That may be too pricy for Colorado, who just committed more than \$100 million to its bullpen this offseason.

The catcher position has big potential for the Rockies in 2018. Bud Black has a few intriguing options he can mix-and-match based on relationships with pitchers and opposing teams. All three catchers currently on the roster bring different skill sets the team can utilize, but the option remains for Colorado to explore outside options in an attempt to bolster the offense for the impending season.

Rockies offseason report: Nolan Arenado & Co. ready for postseason run

By Dylan Sinn / USA Today | Jan. 30, 2018

The Rockies made the playoffs for the fourth time in franchise history and the first time since 2009. The 87-win campaign was their third consecutive season of improvement after going 66-96 in 2014. Colorado is loaded with young pitching talent, boasts a franchise cornerstone in third baseman Nolan Arenado and reigning National League batting champion in Charlie Blackmon. USA TODAY's Dylan Sinn takes an inside look at the team (*prospect):

Catcher

With trade-deadline acquisition Jonathan Lucroy a free agent, the Rockies signed veteran Chris Iannetta. He hit .254 last season with 17 home runs and 43 RBI for the Arizona Diamondbacks. Tony Wolters is more than capable defensively but was limited to a .284 slugging percentage in 83 games. Tom Murphy is a better hitter — .327 average with 19 homers in Class AAA in 2016 — but he is mediocre defensively and struck out 36% of the time in Class AAA last season.

Depth chart: Iannetta, Wolters, *Murphy

First base

Ryan McMahon, 22, had a breakout season in the minors, hitting .355 with 20 homers between Class AA and Class A and could get starts at first. Ian Desmond could shift back some to first base after mostly occupying left field last season.

Depth chart: *McMahon, Desmond, Pat Valaika

Second base

DJ LeMahieu, 29, fell back some from his career 2016 season. He hit .310 but with little power, and his on-base-plus-slugging percentage fell from .911 to .783. He also stole six bases, down from 23 in 2015. For the next few seasons he'll probably remain a good defensive second baseman who gets a lot of hits but isn't really a run producer. Brendan Rodgers hit .387 with a 1.078 OPS in High-A in 2017. LeMahieu is a free agent after next season, and Rodgers, the team's top prospect, is the heir apparent.

Depth chart: LeMahieu, Valaika, *McMahon, *Rodgers

Shortstop

Trevor Story's propensity to swing and miss caught up to him in 2017, as he struck out in nearly 35% of his plate appearances, dragging down the rest of his batting line. The power was still there (24 homers), and he hit the ball harder more often than any shortstop besides Corey Seager, but Story will rise and fall based on how well he limits his strikeouts. If he can get back to his 2016 levels, he has star power. Story also improved on defense in 2017.

Depth chart: Story, Desmond, Valaika, *McMahon, *Rodgers

Third base

Arenado has improved his OPS every year, and his .959 mark last season was tops at his position and eighth overall. He posted career highs in average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage in 2017 while driving in at least 130 runs for the third consecutive year. Couple that with his usual elite defense, and Arenado is a perennial MVP candidate.

Depth chart: Arenado, Valaika, *McMahon, *Colton Welker

Left field

The first year of Desmond's five-year contract with the Rockies was a disaster as the 32-year-old was limited to 95 games by injuries and wasn't very good when he was on the field. He hit .274 but slugged just .375 in a hitter-friendly park. Colorado has to hope his bat will recover once he's healthy. Gerardo Parra got significant time in left field last season, although he'll probably shift to right next year. Raimel Tapia, 23, could see at-bats in left after hitting .369 in Class AAA.

Depth chart: Desmond, Parra, *Tapia, *Jordan Patterson

Center field

Blackmon slugged a career-high 37 homers while winning the NL batting title with a .331 average. He enters a contract season with the potential for a huge payday. Rockies fans should enjoy watching him play while they can. Mike Tauchman, 26, hit .331 with 16 homers and 16 steals in Class AAA and could be the next man up if Blackmon gets hurt.

Depth chart: Blackmon, *Tauchman, Desmond, *Tapia

Right field

Parra, who was average with the bat and solid with the glove in left field, is the mostly likely replacement for Carlos Gonzalez, who became a free agent. A more exciting option could be Patterson, who has a great arm in right field and hit at every level of the minor leagues. He piled up 26 homers and 92 RBI in Class AAA in 2017.

Depth chart: Parra, *Tapia, *Tauchman, *Patterson,

Starting pitching

The Rockies have focused heavily on pitching at the top of the draft the last five years. That started to pay dividends in 2017 as the team had five starters younger than 26 make at least 16 starts. The best of the group is 2013 No. 3 overall pick Jon Gray, a prototypical ace with a 96 mph fastball and a hard slider and changeup. He had a 3.67 ERA last season and struck out more than a batter per inning while limiting his walks. He got his first postseason start but left after giving up four earned runs in 11/3 innings. German Marquez, 22, who posted a 4.39 ERA and threw 162 innings as a rookie, could be a capable No. 2 starter one day. There will be plenty of competition for the three other spots, with more on the way in the next few years. Yency Almonte, 23, posted a 2.00 ERA in Class AA in 2017, while Riley Pint, 20, has a fastball that hits 102. Pint is a few years away, but Almonte could make his debut late in 2018.

Depth chart: RHP Gray, RHP Chad Bettis, RHP Marquez, LHP Tyler Anderson, LHP Kyle Freeland, RHP Antonio Senzatela, RHP Jeff Hoffman, *RHP Almonte, *RHP Pint

Bullpen

Wade Davis agreed to a three-year, \$52 million deal, giving him a record \$17.3 million average for a closer. Davis, 32, an All-Star the last three seasons, had a 2.30 ERA and 32 saves with the Chicago Cubs last season. Colorado also signed Jake McGee and Bryan Shaw to three-year, \$27 million deals. Senzatela was more effective as a reliever (3.04 ERA) than as a starter (5.03) in 2017. Soft-tossing left-hander Chris Rusin's 85 innings were the second most of any pitcher who didn't make a start in 2017.

Depth chart: RHP Davis, LHP McGee, RHP Shaw, LHP Rusin, RHP Adam Ottavino, LHP Mike Dunn, Senzatela, RHP Scott Oberg, Hoffman, Anderson, *Pint

Top 5 prospects

Excerpted from BaseballHQ.com's 2018 Minor League Baseball Analyst. To order: <http://www.baseballhq.com/minor-league-baseball-analyst>

1. Brendan Rodgers, SS: Rodgers, 21, dominated advanced Class A with a .387 batting average, earning him a midseason jump to AA, but an August hand injury cost him three weeks. He features plus bat speed and above-average power but tends to be pull happy. He has a plus arm and good hands.

2. Ryan McMahon, 1B: McMahon, 22, bounced back from an injury-plagued 2016, cutting his strikeout rate from 30% to 18% while hitting .355 across Class AA and AAA. His smooth stroke generates loft and natural power. The 23-year-old has little left to prove in the minors and could see major league time in the infield or even the outfield.

3. Riley Pint, RHP: Pint, 20, has top-of-the-rotation stuff but struggles repeating his mechanics and finding the strike zone (59 walks in 93 innings at Class A). His fastball sits in the high 90s and is backed by a plus curveball.

4. Colton Welker, 3B: Welker, 20, has an advanced plate approach that has led to a .341, batting average, .385 on-base percentage and .496 slugging percentage over two seasons. Plus bat speed allows him to barrel balls to all fields, and he's an above-average defender with a strong arm. He'll likely jump to high Class A.

5. Ryan Castellani, RHP: Castellani, 21, had a 4.81 ERA at Class AA, but he'll likely head to Class AAA in 2018. His mid-90s fastball has good, late sink, but he leaves too many balls up. His slider and changeup give him the tools to be a solid No. 3 starter.

-- Rob Gordon