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**MEDIA CLIPS – April 10, 2018**

### **Gray stung by Padres' two-out power**

**Thomas Harding / MLB.com | Apr. 9th, 2018**

DENVER -- Rockies starter Jon Gray called his line "ugly." There was no other way to describe 10 hits and seven runs in five innings Monday night's 7-6 loss to the Padres. But he saw enough beauty to feel good about it, even while acknowledging he has to be better.

In his first start after holding the Padres scoreless and striking out seven in seven innings in a win last Wednesday at Petco Park, Gray didn't put away the Padres with two out in the second and fourth in innings at Coors Field, with the fourth featuring a three-run homer by pitcher Clayton Richard followed by Carlos Asuaje's first homer of the season -- both on 0-1 counts.

Add to that a run he coughed up in a fifth inning that manager Bud Black gave him to ease the bullpen's workload, and Gray (1-2) was left looking for positives that had omitted job one -- keeping the team in winning position. The Rockies are 1-3 in their six-game homestand.

"You can take the line and it looks ugly, yeah," said Gray, who managed six strikeouts. "But I executed a lot of pitches and got a lot of soft contact. But that's what I can do every time. I can get better this week. That's what I want to do. But i don't think we took a giant step back. I really don't."

A couple of two-out hits by Austin Hedges were soft. But at Coors Field, and as the No. 1 pitcher on a team looking to return to the postseason, you can't follow up by giving up no-doubter homers to a pitcher who has three long balls in his career and a second baseman who has five in 107 Major League games.

"When Jon gets off to a good start, usually there's that momentum that he carries over," Black said. "It looked to be a good night for the job."

"But in the middle part of the game, it got away from him, for sure. That's something that we'll address, that we've got to keep the focus from pitch one."

An offense that managed just six runs while dropping two of three to the Braves over the weekend woke with an Ian Desmond solo homer in the second and a Chris Iannetta three-run shot in the fifth off Richard (1-1), who gave up four runs and five hits in five innings. Carlos Gonzalez added a sky-high, two-run homer to left off Jordan Lyles that was reviewed for fan interference (and led to Padres manager Andy Green's ejection.).

But Craig Stammen and Brad Hand (three saves) held the Rockies scoreless and hitless over the final three innings.

"We're really close. It's April 9," said Desmond, who snapped an 0-for-16 skid but has three homers and a team-high eight RBIs. "I'm the first to tell you these games matter, because I've been part of a team where we were pretty much out of it in the beginning. But I feel like we're showing a lot of life offensively. We just need to put the whole team together."

#### **MOMENTS THAT MATTERED**

Soft route to the showers: Gray had two outs in the second and fourth innings before any runs scored, but Hedges did him in with softly hit balls. Hedges' 48-foot grounder up the third-base line kept the second alive for Manuel Margot's RBI single. In the fourth, Hedges' chopper short-hopped Nolan Arenado at third for a double. After Margot was intentionally walked, Richard and Asuaje hit back-to-back homers.

Kick him while he's down: Iannetta's three-run homer in the fourth cut the difference to 6-4. With the Rockies playing another nine straight days, every bullpen inning counts. So Black wanted to squeeze one more out of Gray in the fifth. But the Padres had none of that, as Jose Pirela's RBI double provided the run that kept the Padres in the lead after Gonzalez's two-run homer in the sixth.

"It wasn't well-executed," Gray said. "When they hit singles, they weren't over the middle of the plate. We stayed outside. But I've just got to be better. If I at least get it down, it's gonna be a ground ball."

#### **QUOTABLE**

"What's going to serve you is what you need to hold onto, and what's going to serve him tonight is to hold onto the fact that he made some really good pitches and dominated for the first portion of that game -- Iannetta, complimenting Gray on his defiance

#### **SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS**

Rockies righty Bryan Shaw fanned Hunter Renfroe in the eighth for his 400th career strikeout. But Shaw forgot about it until he heard screaming for the ball. However, Shaw is more interested in a milestone more befitting of what he holds dear -- 500 appearances. He needs 19.

"I've got the ball up there; obviously, they gave it to me," Shaw said. "But for me, I'm not a big strikeout guy anyway. More for me, I like my appearances."

### **DEPTH TAKES A HIT**

Starting pitching depth at Triple-A Albuquerque has taken a hit because righty Yency Almonte left the team's Opening Day start with a nerve problem in his right elbow, Black said. Black said Almonte will miss a few starts but should be OK because he has dealt with the issue before.

### **MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY**

In the sixth inning, Gonzalez hit a high-arching bloop that barely cleared the right-field wall. A fan in the first row attempted to make a two-handed catch, but the ball was already in the glove of a leaping Cory Spangenberg. There was a little contact, but it appeared that Spangenberg's impact with the wall was what caused the ball to drop into the bleachers. Crew chief Brian Gorman initiated a review for fan interference, but the call would stand. Green came out of the dugout to protest and earned an automatic ejection for arguing a replay decision.

### **WHAT'S NEXT**

Look at the numbers through two games for lefty Tyler Anderson (0-0, 7.56 ERA) and you see trouble. But after coughing up seven runs in 2 1/3 innings at Arizona, Anderson subdued the Padres (one run, six hits in 6 1/3 innings) in his last start. He faces them again Tuesday at 6:40 p.m. at Coors Field.

## CarGo's homer leads to Green's ejection

Shot stands after review to determine whether fan interfered with Spangenberg's robbery attempt

Thomas Harding / MLB.com | Apr. 10, 2018

DENVER -- The Rockies' Carlos Gonzalez could crack a slam-dunk joke after his two-run bloop homer to left field, which bounced out of the glove of the Padres' Cory Spangenberg in his jump ball with a fan at Coors Field, survived a replay review in Monday night's 7-6 Padres win.

"He made the catch, but when he was coming down, on video it looks like he dunked the ball -- like it was an alley-oop or something," said Gonzalez, whose homer off former Rockies teammate Jordan Lyles brought the Rockies within one run in the sixth inning.

Convinced the homer only happened because of interference by a fan in the front row, Spangenberg and Padres manager Andy Green believed it should have been a slam-dunk reversal for replay officials. However, it was allowed to stand because a review couldn't definitively determine the fan, rather than Spangenberg's impact with the wall, caused the ball to jar loose.

Green argued the decision with crew chief Brian Gorman -- the second-base umpire -- and earned an automatic ejection, the sixth of his career and first this season.

"You feel like the fool at the airport yelling at the flight attendant that your flight's delayed, because Brian didn't make that call," Green said. "It's not his fault. It's not [third-base umpire Dan Iassogna's] fault out there in the outfield. You're not going to make that call, but there's nobody to yell at about that call. I probably would have been smart to put the headset on and yell at [the replay officials]."

Spangenberg said he felt the fan hit his glove.

"I felt the ball go in my glove, and then all of a sudden when I was bringing it back I felt the ball change directions, which I don't think happens by just hitting the wall," Spangenberg said. "I think the replay says it all.

"[Robbing a homer] was an awesome feeling. I've never done that in my career. Obviously it didn't last too long."

"Seemed pretty simple to me," Green said. "I've had calls overturned on us plenty of times when a fan's fingers or hands are over the railing and they touch the player's glove or touch the ball. Both of those things happened. Left hand touches the glove. Right hand literally spins the baseball in his glove while both hands are over the field. To me, that's literally the definition of spectator interference."

Gonzalez said he thought the hit "was going to go farther," and complimented Spangenberg for getting in position to make the catch.

According to Statcast™, it would be hard for Gonzalez to hit a softer homer.

It was Gonzalez's second homer of the season, but totally different from the first. That one, in an 8-3 loss to the Braves in the home opener, was measured by Statcast™ at 113.7 mph. This one was clocked at 96.7 mph. For perspective, just 11 of the 277 home runs hit in the Majors entering Monday had a Statcast-measured exit velocity of less than 97 mph.

It was also Gonzalez's second-softest homer since Statcast™ began tracking exit velocity in 2015. On Sept. 2, 2015, he lobbed one out against the D-backs' Matt Stites at 94.3 mph.

## **The Morning After: Rockies struggling to pair effective pitching with strong offense in same game**

Reliever Adam Ottavino have been almost untouchable

**Patrick Saunders / DenverPost.com | Apr. 10, 2018**

Leave it to Carlos Gonzalez to put things in perspective. After the Rockies lost 7-6 to the Padres at Coors Field Monday night, CarGo offered the following:

“It’s been pretty bad, these first couple of games at home. Normally we play better than that. Yesterday (in a 4-0 loss to Atlanta) our offensive performance was poor, and today it was just the opposite. We understand we are better than that.”

That was the bottom line from a frustrating game that left the Rockies 5-6 overall and 1-3 at home in the young season.

### **Here are five other takeaways from the game:**

No. 1: Starter Jon Gray’s roller-coaster ride continues. After a brilliant start at San Diego in his last game, the right-hander was gone after just five innings Monday. He allowed seven runs on a career-tying 10 hits. His seven earned runs were his most allowed since August 21, 2015 vs the Mets.

No. 2: Adam Ottavino continues to dominate opposing batters. The right-handed reliever struck out three of the Padres’ best hitters in a perfect ninth, fanning Chase Headley, Eric Hosmer and Jose Pirela. That prompted manager Bud Black to say: “The opposition doesn’t know what’s coming. It could be a fastball, it could be a breaking ball, it could be a little variance of the breaking ball, it could be a fastball with some movement.”

No. 3: Ian Desmond snapped an 0-for-16 hitless streak with a solo home run in the second inning. It was his third homer of the season and he leads the Rockies with eight RBI.

No. 4: Nolan Arenado entered the game batting .571 with runners in scoring position this season, but he struck out in the seventh with a chance to tie the game.

No. 5: Gonzalez’s two-run homer in the sixth inning almost wasn’t.

CarGo hit a deep, high fly to the left-field wall where Cory Spangenberg camped out, hoping to make a leaping catch. He almost did, but a fan reached out and became entangled in the play. The Padres called for fan interference, but the replay official “could not definitively be determined that spectator interference occurred.” It appeared that Spangenberg had the ball in his glove and that the impact of the wall dislodged the ball from his glove and carried the ball over the fence for the homer. Nonetheless, San Diego manager Andy Green earned an automatic ejection for arguing a replay decision with crew chief Brian Gorman, the second-base umpire.

**Quotable:** “We have to keep the focus from pitch one to the very last pitch. ... You can’t vary from that, because big-league hitters will make you pay. These are growing pains from some of these guys and they have to learn to get through it. That could be the separator in some of these guys’ careers moving forward.” — Black on the continuing problems of Colorado’s young starting pitchers.

## Five-run fourth inning dooms Jon Gray's start as Rockies fall to Padres in series opener

San Diego pitcher Clayton Richard hit a three-run dinger in the inning; Desmond, Iannetta and CarGo all had homers for Colorado

Kyle Newman / Denverpost.com | Apr. 10, 2018

The Rockies' Jon Gray seemed to be in ace mode at the start of Monday night's series opener against San Diego. He struck out the side in the first inning, then rebounded from one run allowed in the second by setting down the Padres in order in the third.

But Gray's night quickly unraveled in the fourth inning in front of a sparse crowd at Coors Field, as the Padres went off for five runs in the frame to take a lead they never relinquished on the way to handing the Rockies a 7-6 defeat.

"He was locating the fastball early, he had a good, tight slider — and then from there you could see it start to waver a little bit," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "You saw the ball come up, you saw the ball in the middle of the plate."

**BOX SCORE:** Padres 7, Rockies 6

San Diego's big fourth began on Austin Hedges' two-out double that one-hopped its way down the third baseline past Nolan Arenado — a play fans have come to expect the all-star to make in his sleep — to give the Padres a 2-1 advantage.

Then came the back-breaker, with Padres pitcher Clayton Richard hitting a three-run dinger a few batters later. Richard's third career homer was followed by a solo shot from Carlos Asuaje, and suddenly the Rockies were down 6-1.

Chris Iannetta proceeded to cut into the lead in the bottom half of the fourth with a three-run homer, the veteran catcher's first of the year to continue a hot start that has him hitting a team-leading .345.

But the Padres (3-8) got a run right back the next inning, with Jose Pirela's double extending the score to 7-4. Gray's night ended with an unsightly line of seven earned runs on 10 hits in five innings pitched.

In defeat, the club's No. 1 starter was confident implosions as seen during the fourth inning wouldn't become the norm this season.

"There was a few times in the game I tried to shut the door with people on bases," Gray said. "But I'm still not getting away from anything — I can tell you right now that it's a fluke. Something like that (fourth inning) doesn't happen all the time. It was a couple of bad pitches."



Carlos Gonzales continued the Rockies' rally in the sixth with a two-run homer off Jordan Lyles that was upheld after being reviewed for fan interference, but the back end of San Diego's bullpen blanked Colorado (5-6) through the final three innings, with Brad Hand recording the save.

Colorado Rockies starting pitcher Tyler Anderson throws to the plate during the first inning of a baseball game against the San Diego Padres in San Diego, Thursday, April 5, 2018.(AP Photo/Alex Gallardo)Colorado Rockies starting pitcher Tyler Anderson throws to the plate during the first inning of a baseball game against the San Diego Padres in San Diego,

Anderson's first two starts this season were night and day — he lasted just 2½ innings while allowing seven runs, five hits and four walks in his 2018 debut against Arizona, then bounced back with a quality start last week at San Diego. The southpaw must maintain sharpness deeper into the game — opponents are hitting .429 against him on the second trip through the lineup. Lucchesi, a rookie, is seeking his first major-league victory.

Wednesday: Padres RHP Luis Perdomo (1-1, 6.00 ERA) at Rockies RHP German Marquez (0-1, 6.52), 1:10 p.m., ATTRM

Thursday: Rockies RHP Chad Bettis (1-0, 2.53) at Nationals LHP Gio Gonzalez (1-0, 1.59), 5 p.m., ATTRM

Friday: LHP Kyle Freeland (0-2, 5.56) at Nationals RHP Tanner Roark (1-0, 4.50), 5 p.m., ATTRM

## Rockies can't afford early funk from Ian Desmond, Trevor Story and CarGo to become early slump

Charlie Blackmon returns to lineup after missing Sunday with tight back

Patrick Saunders / DenverPost.com | Apr. 9, 2018

Manager Bud Black finds the topic ludicrous, and it raises a skeptical eyebrow from Ian Desmond.

The subject is the relatively tepid start by the Rockies' offense. Specifically, three key players whose 2017 seasons were colored by early-season funks that turned into major slumps: shortstop Trevor Story, right fielder Carlos Gonzalez and Desmond.

And although Black's big-picture view of the season is valid, the Rockies can't afford history to repeat itself if they're going to compete for their first National League West title.

Entering Monday night's game against San Diego, Story was batting .211 with a .286 on-base percentage and 14 strikeouts in 38 at-bats (37 percent); Gonzalez was hitting .250 with 12 whiffs in 36 at-bats (33 percent); and Desmond, after going 0-for-12 with five strikeouts in the weekend series vs. Atlanta, was batting .229 with a .229 on-base percentage and 11 strikeouts in 35 at-bats (31 percent).

"A full benchmark is usually more than 30 at-bats, and you need a bigger sample size to determine where a player really is at the beginning of the year," Black said prior Monday's game.

Sure enough, Desmond hit a 384-foot homer to right-center in the second inning Monday night.

Still, the slow start by the trio warrants scrutiny because of their molasses-like April a year ago. Indeed, Story's numbers through the first 10 games mirrors last season when he batted .129 (4-for-31) with 13 strikeouts, 0 homers and no RBIs. The difference is that that this spring, Story had two homers and four RBIs at the 10-game mark.

Desmond, driving the ball with some power after some offseason tinkering, went 8-for-23 (.348) with two homers and seven RBIs on Colorado's seven-game road trip to begin the season before going 0-for vs. the Braves.

"Of course I'm happy with my adjustments," said Desmond, who changed his approach at the plate by lowering his hands and then worked on the technique throughout spring training. "I got off the a pretty strong start, and then hit the skids here a little bit when we got back to Colorado. But I understand that it's a process, and anytime you make changes, you have to trust the process. I do trust it, and I think over the course of 162 games, I think it's going to be very fruitful."

It would certainly be presumptuous to panic after just a handful of games. Except in New York, where Yankees fans lustily booed newcomer Giancarlo Stanton on Sunday, when, for the second time in a six-game homestand, Stanton struck out

five times and went 0-for-7. That led the New York Post, a tabloid known for its flashy and infamous headlines, to print: “Stan the Fan.”

Black says he’s not concerned about the trio because:

— “With CarGo, we’ve seen some good swings that haven’t resulted in hits. We’ve seen some balls hit on the nose.”

— “With Ian, with just a few more hits, his average would look better and he’d have a better on-base percentage.”

— “There is no doubt that Trevor’s series in Arizona was a rough series, but since then he’s bounced back.”

Chuck’s back. After sitting out Sunday’s game against Atlanta because of spasms in his lower back, center field Charlie Blackmon returned to the starting lineup.

“It was just a combination of things, but it’s better now,” said Blackmon, whose back was wrapped prior to the game. “It was general tightness, more like spasms. It was nothing acute.”

Blackmon, who last week signed a new contract worth \$108 million, said the cold weather in Denver over the weekend might have contributed to his back problem, adding that he didn’t think the problem would linger. He also brushed away the idea that he might need more days off.

“I would rather not take days off unless I feel like I’m not going to be productive,” he said.

## **Richard homers, helps pitch Padres over Rockies 7-6**

**Associated Press / ESPN.com | Apr. 9, 2018**

DENVER -- Pitcher Clayton Richard's no-doubt, three-run homer that reached the second deck at Coors Field helped the San Diego Padres withstand Carlos Gonzalez's disputed home run for the Colorado Rockies.

Richard connected for his third career homer as part of a five-run fourth inning in San Diego's 7-6 win over the Colorado Rockies on Monday night.

He drove the first pitch he saw from Jon Gray (1-2) above the Rockies bullpen in right-center. Carlos Asuaje followed Richard with a home run, the second time this season the Padres have gone deep in successive at-bats.

"Clayton really got us going (offensively)," Padres manager Andy Green said. "That's not actually what you expect to happen. That ball was absolutely crushed."

Richard, who last homered Aug. 27 at Miami, said his towering home run was pretty much a stroke of good fortune.

"I got lucky. Let's be real," he said.

Richard (1-1) allowed four runs in five innings. Brad Hand struck out the side in the ninth for his third save.

Ian Desmond, Chris Iannetta and Gonzalez homered for the Rockies. Gonzalez's two-run drive came in the sixth off Jordan Lyles, pulled the Rockies within 7-6 and led to the ejection of Padres manager Andy Green.

Left fielder Cory Spangenberg made a leaping attempt at the wall and actually had the ball in his glove for an instant, even as a fan tried simultaneously to make a barehanded catch. The fan appeared to make some contact with the glove and may have even gotten a hand in the mitt before backing his hands away as Spangenberg dropped back to the ground.

Spangenberg's dangling glove hit the top of the wall and the ball bounced out, dropping into the stands. The homer was upheld on replay review, and Green was ejected after vehemently arguing over what he saw as fan interference.

"I've had calls overturned on us plenty of times when a fan's finger or hands were over the railing and they touched the player's glove or the ball and both of those things happened," Green said.

Spangenberg, with his back to the wall, played the ball well and timed his jump perfectly. He was dumbfounded when he came back down to the ground and realized the ball wasn't in his glove.

"I felt it go in my glove and as I was bringing it back I felt something un-lodge it," he said. "I went to throw it back in and I realized it wasn't there. ... From my perspective, I thought I saw and felt a hand touch the ball but I guess that's not what they saw. It was a big home run at the time but we were able to escape with a win and that's that counts."

Gonzalez said he thought the ball was going to clear the fence by a little more.

"But Spangenberg did a good job," Gonzalez said. "He was playing deep and he got to the spot quick and he made the catch. When he was coming down, it looks like on the video he dunked the ball, like that was an alley oop or something. I got lucky on that one. It really gave the team momentum but it was a tough loss."

Gray opened impressively, striking out the side in the first, but then quickly got into trouble. He gave up four singles around a double play, including Manuel Margot's RBI hit in the second, and was tagged for five runs in the fourth.

Gray, who allowed seven runs and 10 hits in five innings, said he felt he pitched pretty well overall, though he wished he could have the pitch back that he threw to Richard.

"Just a pitch up. That's all I can say," he said. "If it would've been down, it would've been fine. That's all I had to do was throw a fastball down but didn't get it there. It cost me."

## **TRAINER'S ROOM**

**Padres:** Placed RHP Kirby Yates on the 10-day disabled list with right ankle tendinitis, retroactive to Sunday. LHP Buddy Baumann was recalled from Triple-A El Paso to shore up the bullpen. "We were looking at three, four, maybe five days before he felt comfortable going out there again, and coming out here to Colorado, we didn't want to run into it with a short bullpen," Green said.

**Rockies:** CF Charlie Blackmon was back in the starting lineup after missing Sunday's game with a back injury. He was taken out of Saturday night's game in the 10th inning because of back spasms. "I'm glad it cleared up quickly," Blackmon said earlier Monday. "One game (off) here and there is sometimes a necessity." ... RHP Jeff Hoffman, on the DL with right shoulder inflammation, is slated to make his first rehab start Tuesday for Class A Lancaster.

## **UP NEXT**

**Padres:** Rookie LHP Joey Lucchesi (0-0) is slated to make his first career start on the road.

**Rockies:** LHP Tyler Anderson (0-0) pitched six scoreless innings in his previous outing against the Padres, though he came away with a no-decision.

## After Lost Weekend, Rockies Welcome Padres to Coors Field

Tracy Ringolsby / [InsidetheSeams.com](http://InsidetheSeams.com) | Apr. 10, 2018

What kind of a weekend was it for the Rockies?

Well, they managed to pull out a victory on Saturday against the Braves, but it took three consecutive two-out walks in the bottom of the 10th inning for the Rockies to claim that 3-2 victory against the Braves.

What kind of a weekend was it for the Rockies?

Well, Brandon McCarthy earned the victory in the Braves 8-3 win in the Rockies home opener on Friday afternoon, surviving innings in a ballpark where he had been winless with a 7.94 ERA and .324 batting average allowed in his four previous appearances.

What kind of a weekend was it for the Rockies?

Well, the Rockies scored a total of six runs in the 28 innings (including the 10 innings on Saturday) at Coors Field, of all places.

Time for the Rockies to turn the page.

Monday night they welcome the Padres to Coors Field for a three-game series, looking to get things back in order.

The Rockies did take three out of four from the Padres in San Diego last week, and they have had more success against the Padres throughout the years than any other team except the Nationals and the Brewers. The Braves, by the way, are the NL team against which the Rockies have the worst record all-time.

What can't be overlooked, though, is that among NL teams, the Braves had the worst record at Coors Field over the five previous seasons, but won two out of three the past weekend. The Padres arrive with the second-worst record at Coors Field in the last five years. The Rockies have had success against the Padres at Petco already this year. Can they build off that at home the next three games?

The match-up would seem to favor the Rockies for the series opener Monday night with Jon Gray starting for the Rockies. He ranks among the best among active pitchers in baseball who have made at least 10 starts against the Padres.

More than anything, the Rockies need to get their offense going. They go into Monday ranked seventh in the NL in hits per game, and seventh in strikeouts per game. They have played only three games at Coors Field, but they did score only six runs in those three games.

It is, however, a bit early to get too worked up. The first 10 games are not really a good barometer of what's going to happen. The best 10-game start in franchise history was when the Rockies won eight of 10 to open 2011. They finished in fourth place that year. They have claimed wild-card berths four times and the success in the first 10 games has ranged from 7-3 in 1995 to a 4-6 start in 2009.

## **Monday 4X4: Padres, Rockies Meet – Again**

**Tracy Ringolsby / InsidetheSeams.com | Apr. 9, 2018**

Even though the Padres and Rockies both train in Arizona, the two teams never played during spring training. They are making up for that in the opening three weeks of the regular season.

After three games with the Braves during the weekend, the Rockies open a three-game series against the Padres, who last week hosted the Rockies for four games. Oh, and two weeks from Monday the Padres will be back at Coors Field for another three games.

Now the Rockies did open the season with a three-game series at Arizona, but that's the only time the Rockies will play an NL West team other than the Padres until they open a four-game series in San Francisco May 17.

There are 16 active players with at least 150 plate appearances against the Padres who are hitting .300 or better, including Rockies second baseman DJ LeMahieu and center fielder Charlie Blackmon.

The Rockies 4.60 ERA in their first 10 games ranks 12th in the NL. Of the Rockies previous 25 seasons there are only six in which the Rockies had a lower ERA.

Jon Gray went into Monday night with 21 victories in 60 starts. Among pitchers in Rockies history, only four others had more than 21 wins in their first 60 starts.



## **Monday April 9: Murphy Making Presence Felt for Isotopes**

**Tracy Ringolsby / InsidetheSeams.com | Apr. 9, 2018**

Tom Murphy, the top catching prospect in the Rockies system, is healthy this year and has made a strong statement in the opening week of the season at Triple-A Albuquerque.

Murphy, who opened the 2017 season on the big-league disabled list with a fractured right forearm that sidelined him for three months, is hitting .571 in the Isotopes first five games. He has two home runs and five RBI.

### **In Monday's Games:**

AAA Albuquerque (3-2) lost 5-4 in 11 innings at Salt Lake City. Murphy was 2-for-5 with two RBI. Chris Jensen started and allowed two runs on six hits in five innings. Jensen struck out five. The Isotopes play their home opener Tuesday.

AA Hartford (0-5) lost 5-2 at Richmond. Garrett Hampson was 3-for-4 with a run scored, double and triple. Parker French suffered the loss, giving up three runs on five hits in six innings.

High A Lancaster (3-2) lost 4-0 against San Jose, suffering its first home shutout in two years, 364 days. San Jose also was the last team to shut out Lancaster at The Hangar on April 10, 2015. Longan Longwith allow four runs in six innings and suffered the loss.

Low A Asheville (1-4) won 7-6 in 10 innings at Kannapolis. Ramon Marcelino delivered a two-run double in the 10th. Chad Spanberger was 3-for-5 with a double, home run and three RBI, and Marcelino was 4-for-5 with three doubles and four RBI.

## Sarris: Has Jon Gray conquered the Coors curveball problem?

Eno Sarris / theAthletic.com | Apr. 10, 2018

Jon Gray had never thrown a curveball before he was drafted by the Rockies. And Coors Field is where curveballs go to die. So, did he notice when he finally threw more curveballs than sliders in two of his last three starts in 2017?

“Oh yeah,” laughed the mop-headed righty. “I finally got comfortable with the pitch.”

It was not an easy thing, getting used to the curveball when the movement is so different at home and away. Dan Rozenon once showed that the atmosphere in high altitude robs curves of 1.5 inches of drop, on average, which was backed up by theoretical physics research by Professor Alan Nathan. As a result, pitchers avoid the curve more than any pitch not named a sinker when they're home. Even though these numbers are from 2013, these trends have generally held since.

Type	Away From Coors	Coors Only	Difference
Sinker	10.2%	7.0%	-3.2%
Curve	9.4%	8.1%	-1.3%
Change	11.0%	9.8%	1.2%
Cutter	5.4%	5.0%	-0.4%
Split	1.2%	1.4%	0.2%
Slider	15.3%	18.5%	3.2%
Four Seam	36.6%	42.7%	6.1%

If you want to see what this yo-yoing in movement looks like for Gray, specifically, watch this graph of his curveball drop yo-yo up and down as he goes on the road and returns home.

There are a couple adjustments you have to make when faced with learning a new pitch in this environment.

First, Gray had to find a grip he liked. He settled on a 'finger up' grip because it felt comfortable. This spring, he's gripping it deeper in his palm, tighter on the thumb.

“That makes it come out slower,” said Gray this spring. “That takes a little more speed off and gives it more depth.” As you can see from the graph above, he has been getting more drop this year than he did late last year, and the pitch has softened about a half tick. It still hums along at an above-average 80+ mph.

But he still had to find a way to deal with the Coors effect on his curveball. Turns out it's all about release point, by way of... tunneling?

"I noticed when I was in Coors I needed to throw the curve so that the hitter thinks it's a fastball," he said, before mimicking two different release points for his curve.

The best way to see this adjustment might be a graph that's basically the inverse of the graph above: his release points on the curveball over time. At home, he releases the pitch lower.

He shares this trick with fellow curveballer and Rockies pitcher Jeff Hoffman, though their visualization techniques are a bit different. Gray thinks of making it look like a fastball, and Hoffman aims the beginning of his break at a different point.

"Starting point," Hoffman said of his Coors adjustment. "On the road, the shape of the curve is bigger, as opposed to Denver, so if I'm looking at a hitter's front elbow on the road, I'm looking at an umpire's front shoulder at home."

It all makes too much sense to be really surprising; the curveball doesn't drop as much, so aim lower. But, in terms of curveball mechanics, that doesn't leave a lot of in-game time and consistent repetitions for figuring out that next step, so crucial for any pitch: Manipulating the pitch, or commanding it.

Late last season, something clicked for Gray.

"I've been throwing it as two different pitches," he said. "I've been throwing a slow get-me-over and a hard one more like my fastball. Stealing a lot of strikes, and I can still throw my slider if I've got something else."

Though he hasn't gone to the curve as much this year, that adjustment was plenty obvious late last year. Here's the get-me-over curve.

And now, two mph faster, the curve for swinging strikes.

Wicked. If this holds, he'll have three breaking balls to pair with his high-nineties four-seam velocity. Of course, Gray is not yet in mid-season form, having gone to the curve less in the early season this year, with fewer of the 82-84 mph devastating whiff curves to be found.

And after giving up seven runs last night in Coors, this might seem like a bad time to be writing about his curveball. But! He threw 15 curves yesterday, most so far in the year, and got four whiffs, which is almost double what you'd expect from an average curve. He also sat over 82 on the curveball, meaning he had his hard curveball back.

Either way, Jon Gray has developed his curve to the point where it's at least a decent third pitch. Away or home. And that'll be huge for his future, even if Coors is still a tough beast to tame.

## Even in hitter's counts, here's why pitchers are throwing the Rockies fewer fastballs

Nick Groke / [theAthletic.com](https://www.theathletic.com) | Apr. 10, 2018

DENVER — Charlie Blackmon saw something on Saturday that made him do a double-take. Against Atlanta's Aníbal Sánchez in the third inning at Coors Field, he watched the first three pitches dart out of the zone. And then — wait, what?

“Yeah, yeah. I got a 3-0, like, split-finger the other day,” Blackmon said, pausing again in disbelief.

That's a hitter's count. Blackmon worked a 3-0 count 19 times last season and walked in every one, so what was Sánchez doing throwing a junk pitch when he needed a strike? Suddenly the Rockies can't trust their eyes.

“I have noticed,” Colorado manager Bud Black said. “That might become a trend. Fastball usage is down.”

A year ago, the Rockies saw more fastballs than any team in baseball, well above the league average. They now rank 22nd in fastballs faced, a 3.3 percent dip since 2017. And even when pitchers are desperate for a strike, they keep getting tricky with the off-speed stuff, even at Coors Field.

Baseball is firmly in the true outcome era, with strikeouts, walks and home runs all on the rise. And average pitch velocity continues to climb. Those things are connected. Faster pitches create more power off the bat. But a pitcher living on fastballs is like a kid who only eats ice cream. It's going to hurt eventually.

“Guys keep hitting balls over the fence if you throw them a fastball,” Blackmon said. “I think pitchers are trying to be less predictable.”

Since 2008, the number of fastballs thrown throughout the major leagues dropped every year, from 59.7 percent of total pitches to 54.6 percent.

The Rockies, though, are an outlier. Because they play 81 games at Coors Field, where tall tales of moonscape aerodynamics have been passed down among pitchers through the decades, the Rockies have seen more fastballs than any team in baseball. Pitchers tend to fear the flat movement of their breaking balls at altitude. Colorado faced 58.4 percent fastballs last year — the league average hasn't been that high since 2009.

“At home, it's different because pitchers are afraid of making mistakes or hanging a breaking ball over the plate,” Carlos Gonzalez said. Coors Field's reputation carries.

But that idea is flipping. Not content with a 3-0 splitter, Sanchez came back at Blackmon with four more pitches and three were off-speed. This is a pitcher who once threw 61.2 percent fastballs in 2007. He now throws them 43.2 percent of the

time, and not because of a significant drop in velocity (Sanchez's velo is down off just 0.6 mph compared to 2007). Blackmon eventually walked in that at-bat, but not without consternation.

"Guys now are like, 'I'm ok with walking people.' People don't care about walks anymore," Blackmon said. "The game is just getting better. Pitchers have the ability to throw off-speed pitches for strikes more than they used to because they have to, out of necessity. Guys are really good at hitting and hitting fastballs. They see fastballs every game. They don't see sliders or changeup or splits. It's different now."

Black said part of the rise of breaking balls stems from relief pitchers focusing on what they do best instead of variety for the sake of it. If a reliever has a good slider or curveball or a splitter, he can sprint through one inning with little else.

On Monday, in the Padres' 7-6 victory over the Rockies at Coors Field, San Diego starter Clayton Richard threw 76 pitches and 67 were breaking balls. His primary pitch is a sinker anyway, with strong tailing action, so his offering was not a surprise.

But he did nothing for the Rockies if they were hoping for fastballs. Blackmon said he suspects the off-speed numbers will keep rising. Before Monday night's game Colorado ranked seventh in the NL with a .708 team OPS and 12th in wRC+.

"It's about surviving," Gonzalez said. "The game is a circle. They're going to try to figure it out, we're trying to figure it out. It's a battle. It's a game of adjustments. Whoever makes the adjustment is going to win."

## Getting time and space to understand more, and provide needed context

Nick Groke / [theAthletic.com](http://theAthletic.com) | Apr. 10, 2018

Late in spring training two years ago, I sat with Nolan Arenado in a mostly empty Rockies clubhouse as he wolfed down a yogurt pack and three Red Bulls and explained the ins and outs of a never-ending Wiffle Ball game. In his head, everything about the game fit together perfectly: the made-up rules, the rosters, the rotating ballfields in search of late-night light.

"I can't imagine ever stopping that game," he said.

The great thing about baseball: there is always time for stories. The game never stops. So when The Athletic asked if I wanted to write about baseball and the Rockies for its impressive, young publication, I wasted no time thinking and said "Yes." I might have cursed for good measure. There are too many stories still to write.

If you are in Denver and new to The Athletic, it is excelling quickly across the country with a cast of writers I would go out of my way to read. And they have already explained their reasons for joining The Athletic very well. I unanimously share their sentiments.

Why would I write for and read The Athletic? Because there is time and space here to understand more, to discover context beneath the surface, to ignore an arbitrary deadline and newsprint word count that amputates many of the good details about baseball. Why rush to print the surface details when I can pause and ask more questions? Notice one more detail? Learn one more truth?

And because The Athletic readers tend to be engaged, educated and passionate fans, I finally feel free to use WRC+ without fear of scorn.

The hard truth about baseball, especially a major league team, is that we only get to know a small percentage of what really happens. So much of the game seeps through the cracks. It has been my goal over five years of covering the Rockies and baseball to dig into what might otherwise drip away. I have to provide something that you might not see on TV or at Coors Field, otherwise what's the point?

I worked for The Denver Post since I was high school, back when we answered phones and took boxscores from the Western Slope and Eastern Plains. I can still taste the ink. I will miss it dearly. The Post continues to pace a grand tradition of important, community journalism.

I am also thoroughly excited The Athletic is charging so hard. Did you see what Joe Maddon told Jayson Stark? Right on. I shouted when Ken Rosenthal wrote that this is the site he would have built himself. Agreed. It's what I want to read.

(Oh and hold on for a beat: Have you noticed this website and app? No pop-up ads or auto-play crap. Nothing cynical or obnoxious. Nobody is trying to stab your eyes for a few click-through pennies. It is such a relief.)

Did Arenado's yarn about his perpetual Wiffle Ball game matter in the National League standings? No. But it was a hell of a story about baseball. And there are a lot more stories still to tell.

So join the party. Let's have fun. And to grease the gears, here is a link to 30 percent off and a free T-shirt. It's less than a third the cost of Netflix. Game on.



## For Rockies' Pat Valaika and family, the heartache of a patriarch not gone but silent

Ken Rosenthal / [theAthletic.com](http://theAthletic.com) | Apr. 10, 2018

One by one, the Valaika brothers walked their sister, Briana, down the aisle, a relay team in formal wear, delivering the bride.

They went from youngest to oldest, Nick, then Matt, then Chris. The only brother missing was Pat, whose team, the Colorado Rockies, was on the verge of clinching a National League wild card. But it was not Pat's absence last Sept. 30 that created such an emotional void for the family and approximately 135 guests in attendance at Bella Vista Groves, an outdoor venue in Fillmore, Calif.

An even bigger presence was missing — Jeff Valaika, the driving force in the professional baseball careers of all four of his sons, and a man who loved his wife, Ilona, and daughter, Briana, just as deeply.

Jeff had coached the boys in baseball youth leagues and travel ball and also in soccer and basketball. He was so demanding that after a bad game, the boys sometimes would ask to ride home with Ilona rather than face his questioning. But Jeff and Ilona had an agreement — once home, Jeff immediately transformed back into a dad. He loved talking to his kids. He loved talking about his kids. He was gregarious with his friends and grew so lighthearted with his children as they grew older that Briana calls him, “the funniest person ever.”

Jeff always wore blue Adidas tracksuits to his boys' games. For the wedding, Ilona cut a small heart out of one of those suits and sewed it underneath Briana's dress, making it her “something blue.” Ilona also gave Briana a small charm with a photo of Jeff to attach to her bouquet. Still, Briana needed a physical replacement for the man who was supposed to walk her down the aisle. When Ilona proposed to her sons that they take turns, each immediately said yes.

Pat participated in the rehearsal two days before the wedding, on an off-day for the Rockies, but had to fly back to Denver the next morning to rejoin the team, which ended up clinching the wild card the next night, capping Briana's wedding day. “It didn't feel right leaving the team when it was that close,” says Pat, who was completing his first full season in the majors. Briana understood — she knew the date she had picked was perilously close to the postseason. She also was accustomed to such disruptions after growing up in a house with four brothers who played shortstop, almost in succession, for Hart High in Santa Clarita, Calif.

Chris, 32, a member of the Cincinnati Reds in 2010-11, the Miami Marlins in '13 and the Chicago Cubs in '14, is now an assistant coach with the Cubs at Triple A. Matt, 30, spent one season in the St. Louis Cardinals' organization before an aortic aneurysm ended his career; he now works in construction. Pat, 25, hit 13 home runs in 195 at-bats as a utility man for the Rockies last season. Nick, 22, was the Pittsburgh Pirates' 24th-round pick last season out of UCLA, which also is Pat's alma mater.

If only Jeff could see them now. If only he could have seen Briana, whose academic achievements brought him as much pleasure as the boys' baseball accomplishments, on her wedding day. Nick says walking Briana down the aisle without their father present was a difficult, painful moment. Ilona says watching her sons escort their sister was "beautiful but so bittersweet." When it came time for the father/daughter dance, Briana stepped out with Ilona first, then each of her brothers who were present. The song she chose for her dance with her brothers — "My Girl," by the Temptations — was one of her father's favorites.

"It was one of the happiest days of my life," Briana says, "but everyone was thinking the same thing: There is this big person who is not here."

Jeff Valaika is not actually gone, at least not physically. But in separate conversations, Chris and Nick use the same word to describe him, saying their father is a "shell" of what he once was.

Jeff, 66, has been in a coma since January 2015.

As Pat recalls, he and his mother were asleep on the floor in a lounge at Providence St. John's Health Center in Santa Monica, Calif., when they heard the chilling words — "Code Blue" — with Jeff's room number.

One week earlier, doctors had operated on Jeff to repair an aortic aneurysm and also performed a triple bypass. Everything went well with the surgery, Ilona says, but Jeff quickly faced complications. His lungs were not properly saturating oxygen.

Doctors put him on Propofol, a sedation medication, to render him unconscious, calm him down, let his body relax. Every day they would give him a "sedation vacation" to reassess his condition, then return him to his previous state. But the "Code Blue," coming in the middle of the night, marked a dramatic turn for the worse.

The Valaikas live in Valencia, nearly 40 miles northwest of Santa Monica. All five children were home for Jeff's surgery, and one of them camped out with Ilona each night at the hospital. On this night it was Pat's turn, and he sprinted to his father's room, with Ilona not far behind. They arrived to find an assemblage of medical personnel gathered around Jeff, trying to revive him.

Jeff had suffered a heart attack — and that was the least of it. A blood clot formed in his lung, then spread to his brain, causing extensive swelling and putting him into a coma from which he has yet to emerge.

The date was January 22, 2015. Since then, Jeff has missed the weddings of three of his children — Matt, Briana, and Pat. Sixteen months ago, he missed the birth of his first grandchild, Tristan Jeffrey (the son of Matt and his wife, Amanda), whose middle name matches his grandfather's. Another son, Nick, is engaged to be married in December.

Jeff had been a property manager for a real estate company in Santa Monica. As the Valaika children drove on the crowded 405 freeway every day from Valencia to the hospital, they gained a better appreciation for the sacrifices their father had made for them, driving through traffic to work and then back for practices and games.

Eventually, though, the children had to resume their lives. Chris and Pat would head to spring training. Nick would continue his freshman year at UCLA. Matt and Amanda, not yet married, would move into the family's home to provide Ilona with support.

Briana was the first to depart, just days after her father went into his coma. She had to return to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, where she was working on her teaching credential.

Pat drove her to the airport, and Ilona instructed him, "Push her out of the car if you have to." Difficult as it was seeing his sister so distraught, Pat obliged. "I remember being so mad at him," Briana says. "He was like, 'Mom told me to do this. She said I can't let you back in the car.' He just shut the door on me."

Ilona gave each of her children the same message, leaving no room for self-pity.

"There is no better way to honor your dad than to go out and do what you're meant to do the best way that you can," Ilona said.

Understanding their mother's words was one thing. Living them was another.

As the 2015 season approached, the three Valaikas playing baseball had to face an unsettling new reality — the emptiness created by their father's condition, the anguish of moving on without their lifelong coach.

Chris knew '15 probably would be his last season as a player. He had accomplished his dream of reaching the majors. He had even played for the Cubs in '14, a particular thrill given that his father's family — Jeff is the sixth of eight children, with five brothers and two sisters — is from Stockton, Illinois.

The way the '15 season played out helped convince Chris it was time to retire — he spent the entire season at Triple A and never got a call-up. All season, he ached to speak with Jeff. All season, he lived with the frustration that no conversation was possible. "It was hard going about it in my last year, having had him coach me and watch me my whole life, not really having him on my farewell," Chris says.

With everything going on, Chris knew his playing career was ending at the right time, knew as the oldest of the five children that he wanted to be closer to home.

After 11 weeks at the hospital in Santa Monica, Ilona had Jeff moved to a hospital about 15 minutes from the Valaika's home, a subacute facility at Providence Holy Cross Medical Center in Mission Hills, where he has been ever since. Chris transitioned away from life as a player by completing his degree in history at UC-Santa Barbara and helping coach the UCSB team that went to the 2016 College World Series.

Pat Valaika spent all of '15 with the team's Double A affiliate in New Britain, Conn., struggling like Chris to deal with his father's condition. "I was constantly checking in to see how he was doing," Pat says. "I was on the other side of the country and kind of felt helpless."

The Rockies told Pat he could go home at any time, but he stayed with the team the entire season, playing in 124 of 140 games. He batted just .235 with a .642 OPS — his worst offensive season as a professional — but to this day refuses to blame his performance on his father's condition.

"It was my first year of Double A and the talent was better than I had ever faced consistently," Pat says. "I never want to blame my failures or successes on outside circumstances. That's one thing I know my Dad wouldn't want me to do. When I'm at the field I have one job and that's to try to do whatever to help my team win. That's what he taught me."

Nick, the youngest of the Valaika children, was perhaps the most overwhelmed by his father's condition. As a freshman at UCLA, he was at least close to his family. But he was already going through a major adjustment — he no longer was in a big fish in a small pond, the way he was at Hart High. He was a little fish in a major program, facing the added pressure of following three brothers who had reached pro ball.

People would tell Nick, "Use baseball as an outlet," but as a freshman, he was not even a starter. "How was I supposed to use baseball to satisfy me, keep my mind off things?" Nick says.

At the end of the school year, Nick had an opportunity to play for the Duluth (Minn.) Huskies of the Northwoods League, a collegiate summer baseball league. It was then that he made a decision, the same decision all five Valaikas and their mother made while Jeff was ailing: to keep going.

"I came to this point where I was like, 'OK, it's been about 5-6 months since everything has gone down. Can I use this as an excuse not to go out and play? Kind of hold it over me? Or am I going to grow up, be a man, go away, play summer ball and kind of get my swagger back on the field?'" Nick recalls.

"That was the decision I made. I went out played summer ball, actually ended up hitting five bombs, regained some confidence on the field. That kind of transitioned into how I viewed the situation. I was like, 'All right, I've got to step up, be tough. It's tough for everyone in my family. We're all going through the same thing.'"

Last Thursday, when Pat batted for the Rockies in an afternoon game against the San Diego Padres, Ilona held up her phone to Jeff's ear so he could listen on her MLB app. Ilona had no way of knowing whether her husband could process the broadcast. But every day, without fail, she visits Jeff for an hour or two, updates him on how everyone is doing, even tickles the bottom of his feet. The tickling usually draws a response — in Ilona's mind, a positive sign.

"Sometimes, it's good he can't talk back because I'm sure he wouldn't like some of the stuff I tell him — 'I put a scratch on the car,' stuff like that," Ilona says. "Sometimes I do get a response. People say I imagine, you see what you want to see. But he does occasionally open his eyes. He will turn his head toward me. And he will react with the boys, who don't get to see him often."

The Valaika children speak reverently of their mother's toughness and devotion — "I know she was strong. But I never knew how strong until these past few years." Pat says. Each day, Ilona offers a glimpse of her spirit with a quote she posts on her Instagram page. Nick calls his mother, "the most optimistic person I've ever met."

Among Ilona's recent entries on Instagram:

— "Rivers never go reverse. So try to live like a river. Forget your past and focus on future. Always be positive!"

— "Train your mind to see the good in everything. Positivity is a choice. The happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts."

— "Good things are coming. Just keep believing."

"How does she stay so positive? It's something we all wonder," Briana asks. "Her mental state has never wavered. I'm sure she struggles on her own, by herself, when none of the kids are around, because she has to be strong for us. But she's superwoman. I honestly don't know how she does it."

Ilona, though, rarely has been alone for the past three-plus years, even if she has been without her husband. Her second-oldest son, Matt, and his then-fiancée, Amanda, moved in with her for six months in February 2015, around the time Chris and Pat left for spring training. "It was good for all of us," Matt says. "I couldn't let her bear that burden, not being around anybody."

Matt and Amanda eventually bought their own house in Valencia, but Nick came home from summer ball that August, and Pat returned after his minor-league season ended in September. By the time Pat departed again in February, Ilona had new housemates — Briana and her future husband, Frankie, who had left Wisconsin to move back home.

“Your significant others play a huge role in this,” says Briana, who is a substitute teacher and part-time operations assistant for Fox Sports, while her husband — after managing a restaurant in Wisconsin — is a records coordinator for a law firm. “He had no problem picking up his life and saying, ‘Yep, let’s do this. I’m here for you.’”

Ilona, a computer teacher at an elementary school, leaves for the hospital every day at about 2 or 2:30 p.m., spends her time with Jeff, then returns home before rush hour. On the rare occasions when she is ill, she makes sure one of her children visit the hospital instead.

This is her life now. She refuses to get down.

“I’ve always looked at the bright side of things,” Ilona says. “What’s the option? You want to be miserable or do you want to make the best of any situation?”

“I feel like that’s what I try to do — be thankful for what we have and know that it’s all for a reason. Who knows what that reason is? I just refuse to give in. I’m stubborn. I’m a fighter, always have been.”

Jeff Valaika remains a fighter, too, even in a coma. Over the past three years, he has displayed startling resilience while unconscious, overcoming a staggering list of ailments.

Colon cancer. Pneumonia. Multiple organ failures. Infections. The amputation of the big toe on his left foot due to gangrene.

Ilona chose Providence Holy Cross in part because the main hospital is across the street from the subacute facility where Jeff spends most of his days. She and her children view Jeff’s numerous recoveries as proof there is still energy in his body.

“I have hope,” Ilona says. “Where there’s life, there’s hope. In my thought process, I feel like he has been kept alive for a reason. There have been many, many instances where it was touch-and-go with his health. I just feel his fighting spirit just comes through every time. I told the doctors, ‘As long as there is breath in me, I’m not giving up.’”

The odds are slim, however, that Jeff will ever wake up and resume life as the man his family knew.

Dr. Jan Claassen, the medical director of the neurological intensive care unit at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center, said it is not unheard of for someone to spend years in a coma. Claassen, speaking generally, without specific knowledge of Jeff’s condition, acknowledges there is much doctors do not know, but offers little encouragement for a positive outcome.

“If you look at patients that are unconscious from a non-trauma reason, a large number of them die within the first year . . . more than 50 percent,” Claassen says. “If you make it out — to a prolonged comatose state, a persistent vegetative state or unresponsiveness wakefulness syndrome — then you can be in that state for quite a long period.”

“We’ve now seen some patients that were in this for a long, long time. It’s very rare, but they actually may wake up in a delayed fashion, even after a year, even beyond a year. Obviously, three years is quite a long time. The longer it goes, the less likely it becomes. If he hasn’t shown any recovery, that obviously is not a good sign.”

Ilona has her own views.

“Nobody can tell me he will never wake up. It’s not in their hands,” she says. “ We’ve had to have these tough conversations with doctors, and they would want me to sign a ‘Do not resuscitate’ order. My feeling is, if God places somebody in a position to help my husband, then that’s what they need to do. Because when the time comes when God decides that he wants to take him, nobody is going to be able to do anything. It’s God’s will. And I’m not going to make those kinds of decisions.”

Her children are of the same mind.

Chris: “We just kind of wait and hope and pray that one day he’ll wake up. He shows brain activity. It’s lower frequency brain activity. But there’s still brain activity.”

Pat: “There is absolutely a chance. Miracles happen every single day. I always thought I’d rather have him around, be on this earth than not. And he is.”

Briana: “You always have to have hope. When you lose that, you just go to a different place. What’s the alternative, not to be hopeful?”

Just the other day, Pat asked his sister in a text, “Gosh, how long has it been?” Briana replied, “three years,” not quite believing it herself.

“That’s just crazy for us, when you see a number on it,” Briana says. “Damn, three years without our dad.”

Time passes. Life continues. The Valaikas push forward, Ilona, Matt and Briana in California; Chris, Pat and Nick with their baseball careers.

Rockies manager Bud Black says no one would ever know Pat was dealing with hardship in his family. Members of the Rockies’ front office and some of Pat’s teammates are aware of Jeff’s condition, but Pat doesn’t talk much about it, and even Black is only vaguely aware of the details.

“He is as steady as any young player I’ve been around, as far as his everyday approach mentally,” Black says. “He’s a second-year player acting like he’s a 15-year veteran.”

Cubs vice president of scouting/player development Jason McLeod says much the same thing about Chris, who rejoined the organization as a hitting coach in rookie ball last season before becoming an assistant coach at Triple A this year.

“I can’t speak highly enough about how positive Chris has been in light of this,” McLeod says. “As a player with us, he was universally respected by his teammates and coaches due to his positivity, leadership and clubhouse presence. He has carried that on as a coach.”

Pirates director of minor-league operations Larry Broadway says Nick, too, is coping better and better, which, of course, is what Jeff would have wanted — no, demanded. Nick draws a “V” in the dirt behind him every time he takes the field, honoring his family and reminding himself that his father would want him out there, fulfilling his love for baseball.

Several of the Valaikas speak of a new normal, but their situation, of course, is not normal at all. Ilona longs for her husband’s companionship. Matt yearns for his son to meet his grandfather. Chris, now a coach himself, wishes he could call his father for advice.

“When I get kind of stuck, not knowing how to get through to somebody, trying to say things in a different way, I always think of how he would talk to me,” Chris says. “That has been the hardest thing, not being able to hop on the phone and call him and say, ‘This is my situation. I’m sure you’ve dealt with something like this. What do you got?’”

Yet, for all the sadness, the Valaikas take a certain pride in the mere fact they’ve endured. Any of them, in Briana’s words, could have “stopped and wallowed,” but each did just the opposite.

“It’s hard, but our family has become so strong because of it,” Chris says. “I have nothing to hide or be ashamed of. It has shaped me. I try to live more in the moment because of all this.”

If only Jeff could see his children now. Briana as a wife. Matt as a husband and father. And the sons who remain in baseball.

“His biggest joy was watching all of them doing what they’re doing,” Briana says. “The fact they’re all prevailing and being so strong, despite his condition, he’d be so, so proud of them. That maybe keeps them at ease. They know they’re doing the right thing.

“It’s almost like his heart is living in them.”



## Colorado Rockies: Nolan Arenado's lesser known family member

Olivia Greene / RoxPile.com | Apr. 10, 2018

Nolan Arenado has cemented his name in Rockies history forever. With Nolan at the forefront of the family, we forget about his brother Jonah Arenado, who is also playing baseball in minors for the San Francisco Giants. However, today, I won't be talking about Nolan's brother, I'll be talking about the cousin of the Arenado boys, Josh Fuentes.

Not many people know that Josh Fuentes is related to the Arenado's, though some now do know because of the annual wiffle ball tournament they host as he appears in them. Fuentes is, ironically, in the minor league system of the Colorado Rockies. As a result, he doesn't get as much air time as Nolan. Another thing to add is that Josh Fuentes is pretty good.

Not all Rockies fans pay attention to the minors as much as we should, but with Fuentes, he has been a sight to see. Last season, he was with the Rockies' Double-A affiliate, the Hartford Yard Goats. While there he was on quite a tear. He had 127 hits, 15 home runs, and 72 RBI. Along with that, he had a nice slashline of .307/.352/.517. That's not a bad season at all.

It was so good that he was even called up this season to the Colorado Rockies Triple-A team, the Albuquerque Isotopes. However, as of now, he's struggling a little with only just two hits in 17 ABs. The minor league seasons do start later than the MLB so don't write him off just yet.

It's puzzling to not see him on the MLB pipeline for the Colorado Rockies. Here you have a solid first/third baseman that can put up some good numbers and has a lot of potential. Sadly he's slept on by the pipeline. In my opinion, he's more than deserving to be in the top 30 prospects within the Colorado Rockies organization.

Now, I'm far from a scout but I'd say his ETA could be as early as next year, if he keeps developing like he did in 2017. I truly believe Josh Fuentes can help the Colorado Rockies out. Next season, we'll most likely see top Rockies prospect Brendan Rodgers get called up to the main stage and all eyes will be on him.

However, if Josh Fuentes is also called up, I'd keep an eye on him. A lot of eyes will be on Rodgers but Fuentes could make a big splash and have eyes on him as well. He may be in Nolan's shadow as of now but I see Fuentes becoming an underestimated break out star. When that happens, he'll no doubt be making a name for himself.

## Colorado Rockies morning after: All about four batters and poor location

Kevin Henry / RoxPile.com | Apr. 10, 2018

A four-batter stretch. That was the difference between winning and losing for the Colorado Rockies on Monday night at Coors Field.

With two outs in the fourth inning, the San Diego Padres turned a solid outing from Jon Gray into a nightmare, putting together a triple, double, intentional walk, home run and home run (five batters, four official plate appearances) for a stunning five-run sequence on their way to a 7-6 win in Denver.

How could a game that started with Gray striking out the side in the first and striking out two of the three batters he faced in the third go downhill so quickly? A lack of focus was the answer heard from Colorado manager Bud Black after the game.

“Four batters changed the game around from being an electric outing to one where we’re kind of questioning some things and talking about the next steps,” catcher Chris Iannetta said. “The part for me I’ll take out of it is the first inning of that game where he was really dominating and that’s what he’s capable of doing and what we need to get out of him for six or seven innings every time out.”

The killer of that ugly fourth-inning sequence? An 0-1 fastball that came in belt high to San Diego pitcher Clayton Richard. He showed that anyone at the plate can take advantage of a mistake, smacking the pitch 418 feet into the right field stands for a three-run homer and stunning the crowd of 20,291.

“A pitch up. That’s all I can say,” Gray said. “If it would’ve been down, it would have been fine. All I had to do was throw a fastball down.”

And that’s the razor-thin difference between a harmless pitch and one that changes the complexion of the game entirely. Location hasn’t been there for Gray in two of his three starts so far this season, losing both outings against National League West rivals.

“We have to keep the focus from pitch one to the very last pitch,” Colorado manager Bud Black said. “Locate the ball. When we talk about location and making pitches, you can’t vary from that because big league hitters will make you pay.”

Richard did, as did San Diego second baseman Carlos Asuaje, who followed the three-run shot by the pitcher with a solo homer of his own into the right-field stands. It was suddenly 6-1 and a Rockies offense that had been struggling was forced to put some things together.

One day after getting shut out by Atlanta, however, Colorado did respond in the bottom of the fourth. A three-run rally was punctuated by Iannetta's three-run homer, his first of the season. It was one of three homers logged by the Rockies on Monday night, marking the third time this campaign that has happened.

The loss drops the Rockies to 5-6. Gray's line looks horrific, giving up seven runs and 10 hits in five innings as his ERA on the season ballooned to 5.63. That's the bad news. Are you ready for the good news? Gray says things looked worse than they really were.

"I think today I threw the ball well," Gray said, again citing location as the issue. "We executed a lot of pitches and got a lot of soft contact. That's what I'm trying to do every time. I can get better this week. That's what I want to do. I don't think we took a giant step back. I really don't. I feel like the pitches are there. I feel like they're sharp. For the most part, everything's there except for the few I left up."

Those few pitches will cause issues, another lesson that the 26-year-old right-hander will continue to learn. It's another step along the path for Gray, who will get his next start later this week in Washington against the Nationals.

We are constantly reminded that it's still early in the season and that it's hard to know anything about a team after just 11 games. However, after three starts, it's clear that the difference between Gray being the ace most envision or facing a short and tough night on the mound is location and focus, two key assets for any pitcher, no matter his age or pedigree.

## Rockies prospect Chad Spanberger notches 3 hits, including home run

Prospect news and game results from the Rockies minor league affiliates from Monday, April 9th 2018

**Nick McIntyre / PurpleRow.com | Apr 10, 2018**

The Asheville Tourists got their first victory of the season in ten innings Monday, scoring one of their two runs from the new extra inning rule in MiLB that puts a runner on second base to begin each half inning. Ryan Vilade (no. 7 PuRP) extended his hit streak to four games (credit: Charlie Drysdale). Chad Spanberger (no. 29 PuRP) hit his first home run of the season and knocked in Vilade with a double in the ninth to tie the game at 6.

The Albuquerque Isotopes lost in extra innings Monday. Tom Murphy (no. 11 PuRP) started the 10th inning on second and scored. Unfortunately for the Isotopes and Jairo Diaz (no. 27 PuRP), the Bees also started with a runner on second in their half of the 10th and scored a run on a wild pitch by Diaz to tie the game.

★ ★ ★

Triple-A: Triple-A: Salt Lakes Bees 5, Albuquerque Isotopes 4

Raimel Tapia: 1-for-4, 2B, RBI, R, 1 SO

Tom Murphy (no. 11 PuRP): 2-for-5, 2 RBI, R, 1 SO

Jordan Patterson (no. 14 PuRP): 1-for-5, 2B, R, 3 SO

Jairo Diaz (no. 27 PuRP): 1 IP, 1 R, 1 K, 2 BB

Noel Cuevas (HM PuRP): 1-for-4, 2 BB

★ ★ ★

Double-A: Richmond Flying Squirrels 5, Hartford Yard Goats 2

Brendan Rodgers (no. 1 PuRP): 0-for-4, 1 SO

Garrett Hampson (no. 9 PuRP): 3-for-4, 2B, 3B, R

Brian Mundell (no. 13 PuRP): pinch hitter - 1 BB

Sam Hilliard (no. 17 PuRP): 1-for-4, 3 SO

Yonathan Daza (no. 19 PuRP): pinch hitter - 1 SO

Wes Rogers (HM PuRP): 1-for-4, R, 1 SO

★ ★ ★

High-A: San Jose Giants 4, Lancaster JetHawks 0

Colton Welker (no. 5 PuRP): 0-for-3, 1 SO

Forrest Wall (no. 16 PuRP): 0-for-3, 1 BB

Willie Abreu (no. 26 PuRP): 0-for-4

Vince Fernandez (no. 28 PuRP): 1-for-3, 1 SO

★ ★ ★

Low-A: Asheville Tourists 7, Kannapolis Intimidators 6

Riley Pint (no. 3 PuRP): Placed on DL Monday

Ryan Vilade (no. 7 PuRP): 1-for4, R, SB, 1 SO, 1 BB

Will Gaddis (no. 23 PuRP): 5.2 IP, 8 H, 2 ER, 3 K

Chad Spanberger (no. 29 PuRP): 3-for-5, 3 RBI, 2B, HR, R, 1 SO

Tommy Doyle (no. 30 PuRP): 1.2 IP, 2 H, 1 ER, 2 K, 2 BB

Sean Bouchard (ninth round, 2017): 2-for-3, 2 RBI, 2B, 2 BB, 1 SO

★ ★ ★

Today's Probables

Triple-A Albuquerque: TBD vs. Las Vegas, 6:35p.m. MT

Double-A Hartford: Craig Schlitter vs. Richmond, 5:05p.m. MT

High-A Lancaster: Rico Garcia vs. San Jose, 7:35p.m. MT

Low-A Asheville: Antonio Santos @ Kannapolis, 4:35p.m. MT

## **Padres 7, Rockies 6: Jon Gray struggles as Rockies lose series opener**

The Rockies' top starting pitcher wasn't able to repeat his success against the Padres.

**Hayden Kane / PurpleRow.com | Apr 9, 2018**

The Colorado Rockies are now 1-3 on the season at Coors Field after losing to the San Diego Padres 7-6 on Monday night. Bad starting pitching and missed opportunities doomed them as a number of rallies fell short.

### **Clayton Richard goes yard**

Whoopsy. Gray teetered between greatness and disaster early in this one, ultimately coming down on the side of disaster. There's no better way to sum that up than to tell you that he missed his spot against his opposing pitcher and gave up a long three-run home run. Gray went on to get rocked to the tune of seven earned runs in five innings of work, but the Richard home run was definitely the turning point.

### **Rockies' dingers weren't enough**

Chris Iannetta hit a three-run homer. Ian Desmond and Carlos González each hit home runs themselves (more on CarGo's dinger in a second). That accounted for all six runs. On most nights that should be more than enough for Jon Gray, but it wasn't in this one.

### **Missed opportunities for the Rockies**

You might say six runs should be enough, but the Colorado offense had their chances to pull back ahead in this game with even more offense and failed to take advantage. Trevor Story left two runners on in the fifth inning. They had two on with nobody out for Nolan Arenado in the seventh inning. He struck out, and a couple weak groundballs later the Rockies came away empty-handed.

### **Carlos González goes deep-ish, gets help from Cory Spangenberg**

CarGo drove one the other way that would have just been a loud out if not for Spangenberg crashing into the wall and dropping a would-be catch into the stands. Padres manager Andy Green then got very upset, accused the fans of interfering, yelled bad words, threw his hat, and earned himself an ejection.

### **Adam Ottavino is striking everybody out**

Ottavino struck out the side in the top of the ninth inning in this game. That makes it 14 strikeouts on 22 batters faced this season. Spicy. The bullpen was already fun, but if you add a rebounding Ottavino into the mix you've really got something. The Rockies just need the starting pitching and the offense to start showing up on the same night.

### **Looking ahead**

The Rockies will try to bounce back on Tuesday with Tyler Anderson on the mound opposite Joey Lucchesi for the Padres.



## **Jon Gray struggles as Padres squeeze by Rockies**

**Aniello Piro / MileHighSports.com | April 9, 2018**

The Colorado Rockies faced off against the San Diego Padres Monday night at Coors Field in the first of a three-game series. A trio of home runs kept Colorado in the game, but the Rockies were unable to overcome a shaky outing by starting pitcher Jon Gray and lost 7-6.

Gray (1-2, 5.63 ERA) showed flashes of the dominance he exerted over the Padres last week when he pitched seven innings of shutout ball in a 5-2 Rockies victory, but a few bad pitches were his ultimate undoing Monday.

Gray started the game off strong by striking out the side in the first inning but struggled to find consistency on the mound moving forward. The Padres plated a run in the second inning as Jose Pirela leadoff with a single to right field and scored via an RBI single from Manuel Margot.

The Rockies scored a run of their own in the following half-inning when Ian Desmond blasted an opposite-field home run to right field.

The Padres pulled ahead big in the fourth inning, scoring five runs on four hits. After retiring the first two hitters in the inning, Gray surrendered a triple to Freddy Galvis to give the Padres a runner in scoring position. Catcher Austin Hedged then ripped a double to left, scoring Galvis. The Rockies then intentionally walked Margot to face pitcher Clayton Richard, who slammed a three-run home run to right field. Still rattled by the home run allowed to the opposing pitcher, Gray slipped in the following at-bat against Carlos Asuaje, who follow up Richard's home run with solo shot of his own to give the Padres a 6-1 lead.

Colorado would claw back within one in the bottom half of the fourth. Trevor Story ripped a one-out double to left, which was followed by an Ian Desmond walk. With two runners on, catcher Chris Iannetta blasted a three-run home run to center field and put the Rockies back in the game.

Bud Black stuck with Gray in the fifth inning, but it would be Gray's last. Eric Hosmer hit a single to start off the inning and was then driven home by a Priela double to deep right field.

Gray's night ended with a disappointing line of five innings pitched, surrendering 10 hits and seven runs. He struck out six batters and walked one (intentional). Gray has 13 strikeouts to just the one walk over his last two outings.

Richard (1-1, 5.29) matched Gray's five innings, allowing four runs on five hits, striking out three and walking three.



Antonio Senzatlea worked a clean sixth inning and the Rockies pulled within one run after a Carlos Gonzalez two-run, opposite-field home run off former Rockies pitcher Jordan Lyles to make the score 7-6 after six.

Lyles put runners on first and second with no outs in the seventh, but Craig Stammen worked out of the jam to earn his third hold. Stammen struck out Nolan Arenado before forcing Story and Desmond to ground out.

Adam Ottavino continued his strong start to the 2018 season, striking out the side in the top of the ninth.

Brad Hand, who allowed three unearned runs and took a loss on April 5 against Colorado, struck out the side in the bottom of the ninth to end to earn his third save on the season.

**NEXT UP:** The Rockies and Padres continue their series Tuesday night at Coors Field. Tyler Anderson (0-0, 7.56) will square off against Joey Lucchesi (0-0, 2.79). First pitch is scheduled for 6:40 p.m. MDT.