



MEDIA CLIPS – March 7, 2018

Desmond adjusting hands for Coors Field

Injuries and timing caused outfielder to hit better on road in 2017

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

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The Rockies' **Ian Desmond** experienced his "ah-ha" moment one day in the batting cage at home in Sarasota, Fla., this offseason.

Taking the idea -- lowering his hands while in his batting stance -- into games takes time. After an 0-for-3 day in Wednesday's **5-4 Cactus League victory over the Rangers**, he is 1-for-16 in six games.

But if the changes lead to better extension on his swing -- which in turn can deliver solid contact that will play well at Coors Field -- his cold start will be attributed to normal Spring Training adjustments.

"The goal is to be a better hitter," Desmond said. "I feel good. It's a work in progress. I'm working really hard with the hitting coaches, trying to get it ironed out. But it's still early. Trying to get that timing is key."

Desmond, 32, joined the Rockies on a five-year, \$70 million contract last season, only to sustain a broken left hand when he was hit by a pitch during a March 12 Spring Training game. He missed the first month, and later in the year went to the disabled list twice with right calf strains. He managed a .274 batting average with seven homers and 40 RBIs in just 95 games, but never quite found his timing.

But Desmond didn't settle for the notion that good health would allow him to make an impact.

As a productive, but at times streaky, player with the Nationals (2009-15) and Rangers (2017), the right-handed-hitting Desmond's blessing was an ability to pepper balls to all fields. His **Statcast™** 2015-16 spray chart of singles and extra-base hits demonstrates no tendency to the pull side or the opposite field

But what would happen if Desmond were to extend his arms in a swing that could lift more balls to the pull side? Lowering his hands was something he had done before, and it occurred to him during that fateful hitting session.

"One day I was out in the cage messing around," he said. "I actually had done this in 2014 or 2015, I can't remember. I had a month where I was just on fire.

"We had one of the best records in the league, so we had a seven-day off period. I had a terrible postseason -- not terrible, but bad postseason, and I abandoned it. Then I hadn't gone back to it until this offseason. I was looking through some video after I did it in the cage one day and said, 'I'm gonna go back.' I remember that feeling and watched some video. There was some really good stuff in there."

He is making the adjustment during a different spring. The current Collective Bargaining Agreement between MLB and the MLB Players Association reduced the number of practice days between when position players begin workouts and the start of Cactus League games.

"The day I got here, there was live BP. I've never had that in my career," he said. "But it's also good at the same time. What we're sacrificing now will benefit us in the end."

Manager Bud Black also is testing Desmond at the leadoff spot in an attempt to move **Charlie Blackmon** to third in the order. Blackmon led the National League in hitting, and drove in 104 runs (including a Major League-record 103 from leadoff), so the Rockies want to see if moving to No. 3 can maximize his talents. So Black is letting Desmond -- who has the speed the Rockies desire, but must show the ability to reach base -- work through the hand adjustment in the Cactus League.

"That's going to be a continued work, just getting his timing and balance, and doing what all hitters need to do this time of year," Black said.

Desmond was more effective on the road, with a .283 batting average, .347 on-base percentage and a .416 slugging percentage in 48 games, than at home with .265/.304/.331. He wants to change that.

"The one thing I feel is I've hit the ball hard, consistently over the course of my career," he said. "Last year, it happened to be straight into the ground. But that had a lot to do with timing.

"As long as I can find the barrel, I feel like I have a really good chance to have success. Hopefully this allows me to get to the barrel a little bit further out front and put the ball out in gaps, and use Coors Field to my advantage."

Bettis honing craft after healthy offseason

Pitcher able to recover from cancer in 2017, refining motion and mental focus

By Thomas Harding MLB.com [@harding_at_mlb](#) | Mar. 7th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Rockies right-hander **Chad Bettis** intended to concentrate on the feel of a certain part of his delivery during Wednesday's "B" game against the Angels. But giving up four runs, two on a **Carlos Perez** homer, didn't feel good.

After that, Bettis threw three scoreless innings, and took the outing as an overall positive. Bettis' fastball topped out at 91 mph -- considerably below the 92.8 mph he averaged while going 22-14 over the 2015 and 2016 seasons. But his cutter, curve and changeup were effective, and he finished with five strikeouts.

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The cerebral Bettis, who made nine starts late last season after overcoming testicular cancer, decided he wanted to get the feel of the "balance point." In layman's terms, it's between where the windup ends and the actual pitch begins.

"I was trying to feel the gathering, and the strength and power of coming up to that pivotal point in my windup and my stretch," Bettis said. "[But] I felt that throughout my whole delivery, instead of saying, 'I got into that position. Now, go.' It was, 'Let's ride this out.'"

The result was a flat fastball, and a hanging curve to Perez -- a hitter who, little did Bettis know, sits on breaking pitches early in an at-bat. Manager Bud Black mentioned that after the outing.

Bettis also used the outing to work on a quick pitch with runners on base. Two were good, two others needed some work.

Catcher **Tony Wolters** was excited by how Bettis reversed the rough early going.

"He's athletic, and Chad knows his strengths and weaknesses, and that makes it quicker in how he can adjust," Wolters said. "His strength is the mental side of it. How he uses an outing is he sees the positive side of it and sees some of the things he needs to work on."

In nine starts after recovering from testicular cancer treatments, Bettis' four-seam fastball averaged 90.4 mph. He had averaged as high as 93.4 mph previously in his career. Bettis is coming off a full and healthy offseason, and expects to throw harder.

"Maybe not everybody, but it's natural for me," Bettis said. "I don't know where I was at today. I felt like the ball was coming out good."

Senzatela makes a statement

Righty Antonio Senzatela held the Rangers to one run -- a home run by Joey Gallo -- and four hits in four innings of the **Rockies 5-4 win on Wednesday**. He's attempting to earn a starting rotation spot, and the zero walks will catch his managers eye.

"I did pretty good with that, because last two outings I walked people," Senzatela said. "I don't like that."

Last spring, Senzatela made the Opening Day rotation despite not having pitched at a higher level than Double-A -- 34 2/3 innings -- the previous year. This time, like last, he's not obsessing about the competition.

"I don't put too much attention on that," he said. "I just go out, do my job, compete in the game and throw the ball for a strike."

Extra work

Outfielder **David Dahl**, seeking better timing, went 2-for-4 in the "B" game against Angels right-hander **Nick Tropeano**. Dahl had gone 0-for-3 with two strikeouts against the Mariners on Tuesday night. But Dahl's day wasn't over after the "B" game. He started in left field against the Rangers, and had an RBI groundout in three at-bats.

"I feel good. I want as many at-bats as I possibly can get, because it does take a little bit of time to really get going," Dahl said, after 10 at-bats in less than 24 hours. "In '16, I had a great year, but I didn't feel really great until the end of April or May."

Injury report

- Outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, who underwent surgery to remove a broken hamate bone in his right hand just before Spring Training, took batting practice Wednesday against Minor Leaguers, and expects to begin Cactus League play soon. Black said he potentially could pencil Parra into the leadoff position this spring, as the Rockies figure out ways to move **Charlie Blackmon** from No. 1 to No. 3 in the order.
- Infielder **Pat Valaika** hit off a tee Wednesday for the first time since straining his left oblique early in camp. He has been taking ground balls and throwing.
- Righty **Yency Almonte**, the **Rockies' No. 10 prospect according to MLB Pipeline**, took Tuesday off after being hit on the right shoulder by a line drive on Monday. But he said the injury has healed and he will proceed as normal.
- Catcher **Chris Iannetta** was hit on the left hand by a fourth-inning pitch from Rangers starter **Clayton Blackburn**, and left the game after running the bases. But he was smiling while talking to athletic trainers in the dugout, and was not accompanied by the trainers when he left. The Rockies reported after the game that he was fine.

Up next

Lefty **Kyle Freeland**, who has yielded five runs in five innings in his two Cactus League appearances, will start Thursday against the Reds at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick at 1:10 p.m. MST. Additionally, righty **Ryan Castellani**, the Rockies' No. 8 prospect, is also scheduled to pitch.

Chad Bettis' experiment with a quick-pitch nets mixed results; Gerardo Parra sets his timeline for return to Rockies

"This is something that is very new to me," Bettis said. "It's something I'm experimenting with. And if it works, I'll take it into the season."

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

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — **Chad Bettis** broke out a sucker-punch pitch Wednesday, a "load-and-go" windup that he never used before. The 28-year-old right-hander, the veteran member of the Rockies' young pitching staff, threw three quick-pitches from his windup in a minor-league scrimmage against the Angels.

Bettis was testing out a new look. The quick pitch, something pitchers employ at times to disrupt the timing of a hitter, can be an effective weapon. But it takes some getting used to.

"This is something that is very new to me," Bettis said. "It's something I'm experimenting with. And if it works, I'll take it into the season."

ADVERTISING

Bettis pitched four innings in a "B" game on a back field as the Rockies used their Cactus League matchup at Salt River against the Rangers to pitch Antonio Senzatela.

Bettis gave up four runs on five hits in four innings, but he struck out five and did not walk a batter.

All four runs came in the first inning, on a home run, a double and two singles. All three outs in the first were strikeouts.

His quick pitches netted two bad throws and a strike. But they were all surprises. Rockies lefty longman **Chris**

Rusin throws a bothersome quick-pitch at times. **It has nearly cleared the benches** in Los Angeles after frustrating Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner. Bettis wants the same weapon for his own.

"One of the good ones was in on a righty. Good execution, good feedback," he said. "Ended up a groundball to the shortstop. The other two? They were a little too fast. Right now, it's trial and error."

Swinging again. Veteran outfielder Gerardo Parra (hand surgery) wants to make his Cactus League debut Saturday or Sunday, he said, after a pain-free batting practice session.

Parra faced live pitching for the first time since a surgeon removed the hamate bone from his right hand Feb. 9. He will take another BP session Friday and if it goes well, he wants in a game.

"No pain. That's the best part," he said. "My timing is a little off, but I have time to get it right."

Footnotes. Infielder Pat Valaika (oblique strain) swung off a tee and took groundballs in his slow recovery. His pain is improving, manager Bud Black said, but they will proceed with caution in Valaika's rehab. Oblique strains can often worsen without time to recover. ... Catcher Chris Iannetta was hit by a pitch on his left hand during an at-bat against the

Rangers. He remained in the game to run, but the Rockies pulled him between innings. "I haven't heard anything yet," Black said after the game. "So that's a good thing."

Their time will come, so the Rockies are schooling a young catching corps with a molecular map in spring camp
"It's like chess," said Tony Wolters. It takes a lifetime to master.

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

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The honeycomb returned to a white board in an office next to the Rockies' clubhouse last week. Their manager calls it a molecular model. It is a map of every pitch they want to throw this season.

"We're probably going to have another meeting about it tomorrow morning," Colorado manager Bud Black said. "It's a catcher's chart. It's a model that we use to help catchers with game-calling."

The ongoing education of Colorado's young catching corps continued again this spring with a new veteran backstop and a demanding manager leading the way. The Rockies signed Chris Iannetta to a two-year, \$8.5 million deal in early December because **Tony Wolters** and **Tom Murphy** are not quite ready to take over a full season of responsibility. The Rockies were not about to flirt with the risk of developing two young catchers on the fly in their drive to return to the postseason. But their tutelage is no less pressing. That's why Black, a 15-year pitcher, spends so much of his time instructing his catchers with a firm hand.

On the white board in his office, written in erasable ink, is a bracket of every ball-strike count and its succeeding permutation. It starts 0-0. Then branches to 0-1 and 1-0, then 0-2, 1-1 and 2-0. And so on. Black quizzes his catchers on what pitch they should call in each count, for every pitcher on Colorado's staff, against any hitter in the league.

"It's like chess," said Wolters, 25. Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona **converted him from a middle infielder to a catcher** in the minor leagues in 2013 and came to catching late. His learning curve was stunted. Catching and game-calling takes a minute to learn and a lifetime to master.

"There aren't right moves at any time," Wolters said. "Just keep mixing. You're not trying to trick anyone. But you're trying to use your pitcher's strengths and throw pitches that are low risk. You don't want high-risk pitches in certain counts. There's no science to it."

Murphy, 24, debuted last season but played in just seven games. He broke his hand a year ago when he smacked into a bat trying to throw out a runner at second base. He swings a power bat, an enticing plus for a defense-first position. But his defense is also still developing.

The Rockies nearly went headlong into last season with two catchers who, combined, carried one year of major-league experience. It was a risk, to say the least, with four rookie starting pitchers about to break through. Former Colorado general manager Dan O'Down once said that young pitching paired with young catching is a recipe for disaster.

So Black and his staff pulled back the reins and general manager **Jeff Bridich** added two veterans, Jonathan Lucroy at the trade deadline and Ryan Hanigan late in spring training, to help carry the load. It worked. They helped guide an untested staff into the postseason.

Lucroy left for free agency and the Rockies instead signed Iannetta as their newest veteran game-caller. He debuted with the Rockies in 2006 but left after the 2011 season for Anaheim. His defense improved over time and the catcher who returned to Colorado is markedly better defensively than when he left.

“For a catcher, maybe you had a conversation with a pitcher that changed his mentality, and then he pitched a great game,” Iannetta said of a catcher’s responsibility. “Or another guy gets a hit in a certain situation, and maybe you helped the pitcher relax in a certain situation. You can’t put that on a stat sheet.”

Nearly every pitch in a Rockies game is called by the catcher, save for a few scripted sequences that Black will improvise between innings or on a visit to the mound. Their catchers are like quarterbacks, they need to determine the sequence of decisions.

“Hitting is hard. So I’m going with our pitcher’s strengths,” Wolters said, explaining his philosophy for pitch-calling.

“Establish down and away, establish in, establish one off-speed pitch. Then keep bringing him in as we go.”

The white board chart is not universal. And the map changes by the day. Every pitcher is different and unlike even themselves from a previous start. Maybe their curveball hooks like a whip on Monday but flattens out on Saturday. The catcher must corral them in the moment.

“They’ve done a really good job getting to know us and how we work with certain pitches and how they want to manipulate that,” veteran right-hander **Chad Bettis** said of Wolters, Murphy and Colorado’s young catchers. “It’s all built off communication.”

Last month, the Rockies scheduled a series of sit-downs between every pitcher on the staff and their group of catchers, seven total in big-league camp. They took notes and grilled their pitchers with questions, like an interview or a casting call. They need to learn when to throw a fastball inside in certain counts, for example. Or when to throw away. When to break out a backdoor breaking ball or when to get creative when they’re behind in the count. Usually getting tricky “might not be the most ideal thing,” Black said.

Once they learn pitchers, Wolters and Murphy can start to scout the hitters. Is he an early-count hitter? Does he swing inside-out? Is he a contact guy? Go hard up and in? Soft away? Does he sit soft, looking for breaking balls? Is he hunting fastballs? Everything, including the specific terminology, is important.

“Depends on the hitter. Now that I’m learning, I can really see it,” Wolters said. “You have to keep adapting and evolving.”

Colorado's catchers have a lot going on. They have to answer to Black, their boss; their bench and catching coach, Mike Redmond; the pitching coaches; the hitting coach; 13 pitchers at a time. And themselves.

There is no headset for them to take instructions during a game. That's why Black and his staff are trying to imprint the honeycomb-looking molecular model on their minds.

"It doesn't happen overnight," Black said. "Growth and maturity takes time. But since last year — strides."

Rockies get the band together against Texas with a lineup that hints at opening day

Trevor Story, hitting fifth, went 2-for-3 with a triple and a double off Blackburn.

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

Rockies 5, Rangers 4

At Salt River Fields

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The Rockies on Wednesday fielded what looked like a potential opening-day look, with their core hitters together in the middle of the order. There was Nolan Arenado at the back of a 2-3-4 trio fronted by DJ LeMahieu and Charlie Blackmon.

“It’s good to have a majority of our lineup together today,” LeMahieu said. “It felt good to string some good at-bats together.”

The three of them combined to go 5-for-9. Blackmon homered in the third inning off Texas right-hander Clayton Blackburn. LeMahieu doubled off him.

Trevor Story, hitting fifth, went 2-for-3 with a triple and a double off Blackburn.

“Everyone seems to be getting their timing better and guys are feeling better at the plate,” LeMahieu said.

On the mound: Antonio Senzatela continued to refine a new changeup. He threw six of them. “They felt good,” he said. He struck out four in four innings and did not walk a batter. He gave up a solo home run to Joey Gallo in the fourth and three other hits, but did not allow another run.

“I really like his intent with the fastball,” manager Bud Black said.

Colorado closer Wade Davis, in his second outing of the spring, gave up two runs on two hits in one inning. Robinson Chirinos doubled and Drew Robinson homered to start Davis’ fifth inning. His first outing was markedly better, when he needed only seven pitches to cruise through three outs last week. ... Adam Ottavino struck out two and walked one in a hitless frame.

Worth noting: The Rockies went ahead 5-0 in the third inning on Mike Tauchman’s sacrifice fly to left field. Tauchman, an outfielder, continues to impress. He’s hitting 9-for-27 in spring with 18 total bases and a 1.091 OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage).

Up next: Rockies vs. Reds at Salt River Fields, Thursday, 1:10 p.m. Kyle Freeland is scheduled for four innings against Reds RHP Luis Castillo.

Rockies front office under Jeff Bridich aggressive in two areas

Under Bridich, the Rockies have spent early in the offseason and have been willing to trade prospects

By Eric Garcia McKinley / Purple Row | Mar. 7th, 2018

Last year's state of the position about the front office was about the “dual hallmarks” of the Jeff Bridich era. Under his leadership, the **Rockies'** front office has exhibited two major traits since taking over in 2014, one a strength and one a weakness. The strength is the ability to identify minor-leaguers who will turn into major-league contributors, such as Germán Márquez. The weakness is the reverse. Bridich's free agent spending on veterans like **Gerardo Parra** and **Ian Desmond** has turned out poorly so far.

At the moment that analysis still holds. The strength was evident during the 2017 season, but a better understanding of the weakness will have to wait until Bridich's most recent has a chance to prove or disprove the narrative.

Prospects aren't untouchable

When the Rockies included Kevin Padlo in the trade to the **Rays** for McGee and Márquez, it signaled that Bridich was willing to trade from the team's pool of prospects. Padlo wasn't, and isn't, a great prospect, but he was well thought of and displayed excellent on base ability. The Rockies actions during the 2017 season suggest even more that Bridich will trade prospects as win-now moves.

On July 26, the Rockies sent three prospects to Philadelphia for reliever Pat Neshek. The package included 20-year-old shortstop José Gomez. Then, on July 31, the Rockies traded for catcher **Jonathan Lucroy** for a player to be named later. That player ended up being 19-year-old outfielder Pedro González. Like Padlo, neither Gomez nor González are currently great prospects, but they do have organizational value. Unlike previous regimes, Bridich will trade good prospects.

There's also an indication that Bridich will trade certain types of prospects. Gomez and González both have large range of possible outcomes, and they're also both far away from the majors. It makes sense for a team seemingly entering a competitive window to trade low-level prospects, but it's also not unheard of for those same teams to trade major-league ready prospects. The **Brewers**, for example, traded top 20 prospect and ready contributor **Lewis Brinson** to the **Marlins** for **Christian Yelich**.

If the Rockies are once again in the thick of a playoff race come the trade deadline, don't be surprised if the Rockies trade players like Will Gaddis or Tyler Nevin to strengthen the major-league club. The splashiest the Rockies would get is probably Colton Welker or Ryan Vilade.

Spend early and often

The Rockies under Bridich appear to know what they want to accomplish during the offseason and take action early to do it. The Rockies signed Ian Desmond relatively early in between the 2016 and 2017 seasons. While it was a December signing, the Rockies inked him to play first base while there were still several other more proven first basemen on the market. Signing Desmond wasn't a misreading of the market since Desmond was not thought to be a part of the first base market. But the first year of the contract went about as badly as it could, and Desmond is not due to make \$22 million in 2018, the peak of the contract. About a week after the Rockies signed Desmond, they inked left-handed reliever Mike Dunn to a three-year contract.

This offseason, the Rockies wanted to either recreate their 2017 bullpen or identify other free agents that will approximate it. The Rockies then committed \$106 million to three relievers over the next three seasons—**Wade Davis**, **Jake McGee**, and **Bryan Shaw**, and they did it before the calendar turned to 2018. In a typical year, that timeline wouldn't be called early. But in this glacially moving offseason, it can be. Earlier in the offseason the Rockies offered **Greg Holland** the same three-year/\$52 million contract they gave eventually gave Davis, but Holland turned it down.

While the spend early on the market act resembled the previous offseason, where the Rockies spent the money was new. The Shaw signing can be viewed as an approximation of the Dunn signing, but investing in McGee and Davis is a new act. Remember, when the Rockies signed Holland, it was extremely low risk. He only had \$6 million guaranteed. He ended up making more money, but that was because he hit his incentives. This time around, the Rockies are making the commitment outright. How well this relief trio does will tell us a lot more about how well Bridich plays the free agent market. We only know for sure that he's willing to act early.

The outcomes from Bridich's previous actions have created a pattern, and that pattern has turned into narrative. If the Rockies once again have the best bullpen in the National League, thanks to the free agent signings, the weakness could look like a strength. Similarly, if Bridich and team starts missing on assessing the potential of minor-leaguers (internal or external), then the strength could start to look like a weakness. For now, Rockies fans can just hope that those two characteristics can strike a balance on the field and lead to competitive baseball for a few more seasons.

Why the Colorado Rockies should use a six-man rotation

By Noah Yingling / Rox Pile | Mar. 7th, 2018

Nick Groke of the Denver Post recently discussed the idea of the Colorado Rockies having a six-man rotation but he still mentioned how Rockies manager Bud Black still is a little bit apprehensive of doing that at the moment. However, in the long term, I think that it could benefit the franchise.

The Colorado Rockies have a plethora of young pitchers that can, and will, make at least a few starts for the Rockies this season.

With those young pitchers, none of them have shown previously that they can pitch more than the 168 innings that Jon Gray pitched in the 2016 season. Part of the reason is due to their health but that is part of the reason why the Rockies should do this: less innings means less chance of getting injured or overworked.

With only using five starters in 162 games (which almost never happens), it would give two starters 33 starts and three of them 32 starts. With a six man rotation, it would give each starter 27 starts. None of the Rockies starters made more than 29 starts in 2017.

Play Video

Also, tied in with that, the Rockies starters could devote more innings to starts in the postseason. If the Rockies were to use a four man rotation in the postseason (like most teams do) or even a three man rotation for a full postseason slate (which is 20 games if all series are played to the maximum), those starts would be going for another five to seven starts). So, essentially, if the team does well enough, they would still be making the starts they usually would in the regular season.

Say that does happen. In 2019, the Rockies starting pitchers would not be as worn down entering the new season and less prone to injury.

An example of this is Corey Kluber of the Cleveland Indians. Combined between the regular season and postseason (in which they went to Game 7 of the World Series), he pitched 249 1/3 innings. Even though he won the American League Cy Young Award last season, he was out for 4 weeks with a back injury.

What would the rotation look like?

We've established that it would help lessen the workload of the starters in the regular season to save them for a long postseason run and it would lessen the chance of an injury but would the Rockies be able to realistically do it? With the potential of the starters, they definitely could. Here's what the rotation could look like.

1. Jon Gray
2. **German Marquez**
3. **Chad Bettis**
4. **Tyler Anderson**
5. **Kyle Freeland**
6. **Antonio Senzatela**

Even with the six-man rotation, pitcher **Jeff Hoffman** would still be on the outside looking in. Also, **Yency Almonte**, who could be somebody that could be in the Rockies rotation later this year or next year would also be on the outside looking in.

Final Thoughts

As mentioned in Groke's article, Bud Black said that it's not something that the Rockies would do at the moment because because "I still think where our starters are at, mentally and physically, I don't think they need an extra day's rest."

However, if you think about the rotation long term with potential injury concerns and using them for postseason play, the six-man rotation should be heavily considered.

Colorado Rockies: German Marquez talks about his Tuesday outing

By Olivia Greene / Rox Pile | Mar. 7th, 2018

On Tuesday night, German Marquez was the starter when the Colorado Rockies won against the Seattle Mariners 3-2. Rox Pile was able to interview him, along with Bud Black, on his three-inning outing.

Marquez pitched a good game only giving up one run, thanks to a Dee Gordon leadoff single to open the game and a Robinson Cano RBI single. Despite a first inning that saw him give up hits to two of the first three batters he faced, the 23-year-old right-hander had a very solid outing.

Our own Kevin Henry, on site this week for Rockies spring training, interviewed him after his start to talk about how he was pitching. In the postgame interview, Marquez spoke about how he had a really good combination of pitches with the breaking balls going for him. Having a good combination of those breaking ball pitches got Marquez four strikeouts in his three innings pitched. The scoreboard down in Peoria told everyone how well Marquez was mixing his pitches.

Facing Mike Ford in the second inning, Marquez hit 96, 89, 83, 83 and 96 again that led to a groundout. It was an example of how Marquez changed speeds and kept Seattle batters off-balance.

My slider was really good and change up was good.

-German Marquez

Bud Black later commented on how well Marquez threw against the Mariners. Black goes on to say how Marquez was going to work on his slider and it shows. Black also praises Marquez for his ability to mix up his pitches, even discussing situational pitching against left-handed hitters.

Good tight slider. Threw some change-ups to the left-handed hitters.

-Bud Black

With German Marquez being able to evolve his breaking balls and handle left-handed hitters, he may continue to secure his spot on the rotation. High praise from manager Bud Black shouldn't be taken lightly either, especially since Black is a former pitcher himself he can see more than some. As long as Marquez keeps up the repertoire he has going in Scottsdale, he will once again cement himself into the rotation.

Colorado Rockies: Is the bullpen being over-hyped?

By Olivia Greene / Rox Pile | Mar. 7th, 2018

First, I talked about what it really meant when the Colorado Rockies signed Wade Davis. Then I went on to question had the Rockies focused too much on pitching. Now here we are, once again I'm going to talk about something that's been occupying everyone since December . That's the exact reason as to why I'm wondering if the bullpen is over-hyped.

I'll just get this out of the way and say; in no way, shape, or form is this bullpen mediocre or average. The Rockies are looking at a gold mine. Perhaps, though, maybe these guys are being put on a very high pedestal. Colorado made the needed moves to answer the offseason question they had. This is what most teams do during the offseason, so why exactly is it being compared to an odd phenomenon?

Play Video

After news broke back in December of last year that the Rockies had signed Bryan Shaw and Wade Davis, fans were ecstatic. I mean who wouldn't be?

The front office had tackled what they believed was a big problem going into 2018. It's great, but look at it at face value, two veteran arms that have shutdown innings. Now I know you're wondering 'what's wrong with this?'

Well, the Rockies had a good bullpen in the first place. The most slept on guy is Chris Rusin. Essentially, he seems to be so overlooked in the bullpen. It doesn't help his case now that he'll most likely be overshadowed by these other two guys. Even my colleague, Mike Macesich, wrote about how he's been their best bullpen arm for awhile now, and he's not wrong.

Final Thoughts

Rockies fans across the nation are very happy to see the super bullpen in action. I am too, but I'm not going to over-hype it to the extent of others.

Holding these guys up so high may cause blowback when they underperform. The outcome for that may be bad.

All in all they're doing their jobs, but don't overlook the rest of the toys in the bin for the shiny new ones.

Colorado Rockies: Chris Iannetta reportedly OK after injury scare

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | Mar. 7th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE — *The Colorado Rockies may well have dodged a bullet on Wednesday afternoon in their game against the Texas Rangers at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick.*

In the third inning during his at-bat, starting catcher Chris Iannetta was hit on the hand by Texas starter Clayton Blackburn. The 34-year-old Iannetta, the only position player signed by the Rockies in the offseason, immediately winced and trotted to first base. He was met there by Colorado manager Bud Black and head trainer Keith Duggar.

After a short examination, Iannetta stayed in the game and ran the bases the rest of the inning. He was lifted in the top of the fourth for Jan Vazquez behind the plate.

He was reportedly seen in the dugout laughing before leaving with his bag and heading into the clubhouse. Iannetta had already left the clubhouse by the time media was allowed in. However, Black said after the game that he had not heard anything that would raise alarm.

"I'll let you know when I get in there (clubhouse) but I haven't heard anything so that's a good thing," Black told Rox Pile and other reporters after the win over the Rangers.

Rockies fans remember the injuries that happened during last spring training, including Ian Desmond being hit in the hand by a pitch that forced him to miss Opening Day and not appear in his first game in Colorado uniform until April 30. Colorado fans also remember last season when Nolan Arenado was hit in the hand by a pitch during a regular-season game in Miami in August. However, after looking like potentially an injury that would force the All-Star third baseman out of the lineup, Arenado returned in a pinch-hit role one night later.

Play Video

Iannetta is expected to share time behind the dish this season with Tony Wolters and/or Tom Murphy as one of the more interesting and intriguing battles of spring training.

Colorado Rockies: Thoughts on a bullpen cart in Denver

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | Mar. 7th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE — *On Tuesday, the Arizona Diamondbacks announced that they were bringing back the bullpen cart as part of their 20th anniversary celebration. With the Colorado Rockies celebrating their 25th season this year, it begs the question of whether the bullpen cart will be making a return to Coors Field or not.*

Is there any indication a bullpen cart is coming to Denver? No, but it's fun to think about, right? Sure, it would be "retro cool" to have the bullpen cart as part of the game at 20th and Blake, but, if it were to happen, what shape would that cart actually take? There are several options.

Of course, the golf cart look is a possibility, and there are plenty of folks who come to Colorado to hit the links. But there are also plenty who come to Denver and head straight up I-70 toward the mountains. What if the Rockies bullpen cart had some resemblance to a snowmobile? Using a purple snowmobile to come out of the bullpen would be something to see, wouldn't it?

One of the most Colorado things we see every day (no offense to Kyle Clark and our friends at 9News with that reference, of course) are Subarus driving around everywhere. Maybe some type of Subaru could be worked in as the bullpen cart sponsor and provider. It seems to be the unofficial car of Colorado, right?

With the trees and water near the bullpen area, what if we get a little nature-friendly with the bullpen cart? A jacked-up 4x4 that could drive over any boulder near Boulder (or anywhere else)? An eco-friendly car that could save on gas while zipping in from the bullpen?

I am sure there is some way to work a marijuana reference in with the bullpen cart as well. It is Colorado after all, right? Plenty of smoke coming out of the back, vape style?

Rockies reliever Adam Ottavino has an idea if the bullpen cart were to ever come to Coors Field.

"I would take it in Denver. I've had plenty of experience jogging to the mound and being a little out of breath or not having any saliva to speak of," Ottavino told Rox Pile. "What I'd really be interested in is us having it and the other team not having it."

For reliever Mike Dunn, it's more about questions.

"It'll be interesting. How long does it take to get the cart out and get the cart there? I've never done it before so it would be weird and a change," Dunn told Rox Pile.

And what would Colorado manager Bud Black think of having the return of the bullpen cart?

"I came through an era when there were bullpen vehicles," Black, who pitched from 1981-1995, told Rox Pile. "I'm OK with it. I'm a traditionalist at heart but I'm OK with some of the funny business. I'm OK with it."

If not Charlie Blackmon, who should bat leadoff for the Rockies?

By Casey Light / Mile High Sports | Mar. 7th, 2018

With each passing Cactus League game, it seems more and more likely that **Charlie Blackmon** will be moving out of the leadoff spot in **Bud Black**'s lineup and bat third for the Colorado Rockies.

Blackmon set a MLB record with 103 RBI from the leadoff spot (104 total) and led baseball with 14 triples in 2017. He won the NL batting title with a .331 average. In moving Blackmon to the third spot in the lineup, Black can surround the centerfielder's already dangerous bat with a pair of All-Star hitters in **Nolan Arenado** and **DJ LeMahieu**. The latter has hit above .300 in each of his last three seasons, including a NL-best .348 in 2016, and the former has hit 37-plus home runs and driven in at least 130 runs over each of the past three seasons. The move also allows Black to go right-left-right with his 2-3-4 hitters.

The move has the potential to help LeMahieu, Blackmon and Arenado push their combined numbers even higher in 2018, but it will require a capable hitter in the leadoff role to get on base for that trio to do their damage.

So far in Spring Training Black has experimented with several options atop the lineup, yielding mixed results.

Ian Desmond seems a logical option; however, an icy start to the spring could complicate his candidacy.

A three-time Silver Slugger, Desmond is as versatile in the lineup as he is in the field. Just like he can play virtually any position outside of the battery, Desmond has the potential to be effective anywhere in the lineup.

He has not been effective in any role, however, through five Cactus League games in 2018.

Desmond is just 1-for-16 through six starts this year, with no runs scored and no walks. He has struck out five times. It's a somewhat disconcerting start for the two-time All-Star who is coming off a disappointing first season in Colorado complicated by a hand injury suffered in Spring Training.

Black doesn't put much stock in Cactus League stats, but Desmond's five strikeouts in just 16 at-bats do not bode well. Against Chicago on Monday, a 5-4 loss, he struck out looking to lead off the game. His next two at-bats were no more productive — a ground out to lead off the third inning and lining into a double-play to shortstop to end the fifth.

On Wednesday against the Rangers he was 0-for-3 with a flyout, an inning-ending fielder's choice and a strikeout. He stranded four baserunners.

For his career, Desmond is a .267 hitter and his strikeout-to-walk totals (110:42) are much higher than Blackmon's (156:41) on a 162-game average basis. Desmond has been a consistent base-stealer throughout his career, though, averaging 22 steals to only six caught per 162 games.

Desmond as a leadoff hitter has 434 career plate appearances (less than 10 percent of his career PAs), with a .272 average and .303 on-base percentage. His numbers when leading off an inning are right around his career average — .268 / .317 in 1,069 PAs.

None of that is particularly inspiring when compared to Blackmon's recent stats, but that comparison may be a bit unfair given Blackmon's proficiency of late. He was a .287 hitter out of the leadoff spot prior to his breakout seasons of 2016 and '17.

Matching that prior average of .287 seems within reason for Desmond, although the Rockies would love to see that number climb closer to .300 — a mark Desmond has never reached for his career.

Gerardo Parra, who is coming off his first season hitting above .300, presents the next most logical case among Black's choices for batting leadoff. The problem with Parra is that he has yet to take an official at-bat so far this spring.

The left-handed outfielder not only turned in a Gold Glove finalist performance in the field in 2017, he also had his one of his best statistical seasons at the plate. His .309 average and .341 OBP were both career highs, as were his 71 RBI.

Unfortunately, he has been unable to try and build off that campaign as he recovers from surgery to remove a bone from his hand. Parra was already at the team facility in February when pain in his right (bottom) hand revealed a broken hamate bone. The timeline for his return should have him back before Spring Training ends, but he will have limited time to get up to regular-season playing speed.

Parra has more experience in the leadoff role than Desmond, logging 954 plate appearances there over his nine-year career. That's just under 22 percent of his career PAs. He has a career .281 average out of the leadoff spot, and has hit .318 as the first batter of a game for his career.

Parra doesn't bring the same base-stealing prowess that Desmond would — the lefty averages just 10 stolen bases and six caught stealing every 162 games — but his strikeout to walk numbers (102:35) on a 162-game average are mostly in line with what Desmond offers (110:41). Parra cut down his strikeout total in 2017 with 67 in 115 games, a 162-game average of 94.

Us Parra in the leadoff role also keeps a left-handed bat atop the lineup and allows Black to go left-right-left-right through his first four hitters. Of course, Parra has to get back to full health in order for that to happen.

Black has limited options in his starting lineup beyond Desmond and Parra.

Shortstop **Trevor Story**, a right-handed hitter, strikes out far too much (he led the National League in 2017). Rookie first baseman **Ryan McMahon**(left) will need the protection of more established hitters around him. And **Chris Iannetta** (right) is a catcher.

Beyond the aforementioned players, Black will have at least one — possibly two — players on his Opening Day roster who would slot in nicely in a leadoff capacity; however, that would mean putting either Desmond or Parra on the bench.

Raimel Tapia, **David Dahl** and **Mike Tauchman** are all battling for the fourth outfielder position, and another could end up on the bench depending on **how Black decides to utilize his fourth bench spot**.

Tapia has the long-term potential to be a prototypical leadoff hitter for Colorado — think **Dexter Fowler** but hitting strictly left-handed. Dahl and Tauchman, who also hit left-handed, profile much more like Blackmon — power-hitters but also capable of posting high averages and runs scored.

Of course, playing any of those three would mean benching one the established veterans, Desmond or Parra (not to mention either \$10 million in 2018 salary for Parra and \$22 million for Desmond).

With their stats being so equal, Parra seems like a better fit than Desmond simply for the fact that he is much more the “spark plug” type player both in the locker room and on the field. Plus, having that left-handed bat atop the lineup means Black can avoid going right-pitcher-right when his lineup flips (assuming Iannetta or Story hits eighth).

What seems most likely, at least to start the season, is that Black will platoon hitters atop the lineup. Desmond very well could get that chance first simply because of his health, while Parra and one (or two) of those young outfielders platoon as the established veteran gets back up to full speed.

Of course, Black could always decide to put Blackmon back into that leadoff spot if he doesn't feel completely comfortable with the alternatives. A true pro's pro in the batter's box, returning to the leadoff spot wouldn't faze Blackmon in the least.

Kyle Freeland is moving 'onward and upward' following his storybook rookie season

By Aniello Piro / Mile High Sports | Mar. 7th, 2018

The 2017 season was like something out of a storybook for Colorado Rockies starting pitcher **Kyle Freeland**. A native of Colorado and a graduate of Thomas Jefferson High School, Freeland was selected by his hometown team with the eighth overall pick in the 2014 MLB Draft. He beat the Los Angeles Dodgers in the home opener in his Major League debut and was two outs away from a no-hitter in front of the home crowd in July. He capped his first big-league season with a trip to the postseason.

It fulfilled a dream that many players fantasize about as kids. For Freeland, last year was a dream come true and an experience he relished.

"I think I embraced it to the full extent," Freeland, now preparing for the 2018 season at Rockies Spring Training, said of his rookie season. "It was really cool. At times, it felt like there was some pressure, but that's part of the game, and that's part of the story. Embracing it is the best way to go about it, that way you get the full feel of every situation."

Freeland dazzled in his rookie year. He won 11 games while posting an ERA of 4.10 in 28 starts. While his first season in the majors was a success, Freeland is pressing to get his sophomore year started with a year of professional experience now on his résumé.

"It feels good," Freeland said of having experience in the major leagues. "Still a lot of work to do and a lot of things to work on, but it's good to be able to know that I have that. I have that comfort level of having a year under my belt and being able to face all those hitters throughout last year and understand how things work, how things operate, and all the ropes that come into it."

Freeland admitted that playing in his hometown as a rookie was nerve-racking at times. Although he did a tremendous job of remaining composed on the mound throughout the year, the shock and awe of being a rookie from the Mile High City was an outside factor he had to battle with. He also had to deal with all that comes with being a starting pitcher in baseball, let alone being a featured arm in a young rotation with multiple pitchers under the age of 27.

Now a year removed from a season loaded with extravagance, Freeland is looking forward to buckling down a bit to focus on his craft with the outside factors subsiding.

"After a year of being in Denver, and having that story sink in and start to lay lower now, it's going to be nice to have that comfortable time where I can go out there and be focused on what I need to do."

Not quite 25 years old, Freeland understands that it will take time for him to reach his peak performance ability. This season Freeland hopes to become a more well-rounded pitcher, which starts with pinpointing areas of his game that need to be improved.

“One thing I learned last season was at the end of each season, look at your stats and pick a stat, not ERA or strikeouts, but pick a stat that kind of hides and improve upon it for the next year,” Freeland told Eric Goodman and Les Shapiro of Afternoon Drive on Tuesday. “My stat that I’m going to improve upon for this year is my walks throughout the year. They kind of got a little high last year, and that’s one thing I like to improve myself on is not walking a lot of people.”

While the 2017 season was magical for Freeland due to the circumstances and his performance, it was memorable all-around for the Rockies organization as they returned to the postseason for the first time in nearly a decade. Colorado grabbed the second National League Wild Card bid, but wound up losing to the Arizona Diamondbacks 11-8 in the one-game playoff.

That game represented the first time a majority of the Rockies players, specifically their young rotation, were exposed to the tension of playing in baseball’s big dance. It was a high-pressure situation, and starting pitcher **Jon Gray** crumbled under the intensity. He allowed four earned runs and seven hits in 1.1 innings pitched and took the loss.

Freeland says everyone in the Rockies clubhouse — not just Gray — learned from that experience, and now are ready to enter the fire of trying to become a perennial playoff team in the sport.

“In that game, it was the first time for a lot of us — whether you were starting or not, but talking with some of the guys in the dugout — hearing that crowd and being in that atmosphere and feeling that energy. You can only learn about it by being in it and experiencing it, so that’s something we were all able to experience. Playing or not, it’s something we have to take with us into this season and when we get to that point to not let it affect us.”

Despite Colorado’s impressive season, critics have been hesitant to say the Rockies can repeat their success of last year, largely in part because of their young rotation. However, the Rockies had four 10+ game winners in Freeland, Gray, **German Marquez**, and **Antonio Senzatela**, all of whom were under the age of 27 last year. Their performance, mixed with the fact that each pitcher is now more experienced, has Freeland believing that the staff, regardless of age, has what it takes to lead the Rockies back to the promised land.

“Absolutely,” Freeland said. “It’s great that we all went through the same thing last year. As rookies, we came together as one really and did an incredible job and kind of shocked a lot of people in the baseball world with what we can do. Now we all have a year under our belts, and it’s only onward and upward for us.”