



MEDIA CLIPS – March 13, 2018

CarGo officially back, 'poised to have good year'

Rockies hope veteran power hitter builds off strong September

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Mar. 12th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Rockies manager Bud Black waited until the final months of last season, expecting **Carlos Gonzalez**'s game-changing bat to produce. Interestingly, Black noticed that opponents also were expecting Gonzalez to ignite at any moment.

"I just notice how other teams pitch him," Black said Monday, when the club announced Gonzalez's one-year, \$8 million contract after he passed his physical. "He's dangerous.

"In the second half, he took his walks. He ran deep counts. His September stats were great. ... It's a threat, and the other side knows it."

Gonzalez has been in Scottsdale for a few days, but he and the club agreed that he not address the media immediately, with the final details and the physical pending. He is scheduled to do so Tuesday morning.

So insert Gonzalez back into the lineup, most likely in the No. 3 position ahead of **Nolan Arenado** on most occasions. Against difficult left-handers, it's more likely **Trevor Story** bats fourth and Gonzalez fifth.

Gonzalez finished last season hitting .262 with 14 home runs in 136 games. From Aug. 1 to season's end, he hit .325 with a .407 on-base percentage and .583 slugging percentage, plus eight home runs and 31 RBIs. He was at his best in September. As the Rockies locked up their first playoff berth since 2009, Gonzalez surged to .377/.484/.766 with 12 doubles and six homers.

"What he did the last six weeks of the season was more like the CarGo that we've seen in the past," Black said. "He's poised to have a good year. Time will tell, but I'm sure when Dick [Monfort, the Rockies' owner, chairman and CEO] and Jeff [Bridich, the general manager] talked with CarGo, that was the same feeling. I think CarGo feels it, too.

"He's a bat in the middle of the order, which I think we need. He balances us out with some of our right-handed hitters, so the lineup gets a little deeper. And coming back to the Rockies -- he told me that he's a Rockie. He feels that this is his team."

Without Gonzalez or a big bat to replace him, Black experimented with moving **Charlie Blackmon** from leadoff to No. 3. But from the beginning of last season, when Gonzalez and the club couldn't reach a multi-year extension, through an offseason when Gonzalez became one of many accomplished players seeking a job, the sides stayed in contact.

The Rockies originally acquired Gonzalez from the Athletics in November 2008, mainly for outfielder **Matt Holliday**. Gonzalez was a catalyst for a team that went to the playoffs in 2009. He won the National League batting title in 2010 with a .336 average and has represented the Rockies in three All-Star Games.

But injuries became an issue. In 2014, he had a tumor removed from his left index finger and had season-ending surgery on his left knee after playing 70 games. He hit 40 home runs in 2015, and batted .298 with 25 homers and 100 RBIs in 2016 before last year's struggles. Some bad bat-holding habits and a sleep problem affected him, but he was his old self by season's end.9th, 2018

Gonzalez has hit .292 with 211 home runs and 685 RBIs in a Rockies uniform.

While most players were in Spring Training, Gonzalez stayed in shape in Florida. Black said the Rockies will "catch him up to speed as soon as possible, in a practical way."

To create room on the 40-man Major League roster, righty relief prospect **Rayan Gonzalez** -- who missed last season because of Tommy John right elbow surgery and will not be ready to start this season -- was placed on the 60-day disabled list.

Bettis' adjustments starting to pay off

Righty strikes out four, gives up two runs in five innings in Rockies' win

By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb

Mar. 12th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Righty **Chad Bettis** spent earlier outings testing various parts of his delivery, and it paid off Monday, when he threw five strong innings in a 4-2 Cactus League victory over the D-backs.

In his last outing, a "B" game against the Angels, Bettis worked on the balance of his delivery and initially had difficulty forgetting the mechanics and pitching with freedom. But on Monday he struck out four and held a regular D-backs lineup to two runs on six hits.

"There were a couple of pitches I felt got away from me a little bit, but for the most part I tried to approach this as game-like as I possibly could," Bettis said.

Bettis' fourth inning started with hits by **A.J. Pollock** and **Paul Goldschmidt**, then he induced **Jake Lamb** into a double play and eventually forced **Ketel Marte** to line out, giving up just one run in the fourth. He allowed another in the fifth.

Bettis used his cut fastball and a changeup, and was happy with the movement. He ran his fastball to 92 mph -- a tick above his best in the "B" game.

"Honestly, I feel like there's a lot more [velocity] in there, but today approaching it like a game, you try to find your times to add a little bit," he said. "But it was more so keep everything under control. However hard it's going to come out, it's going to come out."

Bettis also used his developing quick-pitch and, as usual, pitched with a high tempo.

"What I liked was the pace at which he threw, the fastball command, and the change," Rockies manager Bud Black said.

"All his pitches were crisp, he kept ball down and moved it around. In my eyes, that's how Chad Bettis works."

Stating his case

Righty **Antonio Senzatela**, trying to improve his pitch mix in an effort to make the season-opening rotation, knifed through four scoreless innings, with one hit and two strikeouts. He started working against front-liners, but many of the substitutes

he faced had Major League time. Though the changeup has to become a greater part of his repertoire, his outing was similar to his better ones last season, when he dominated with the fastball. 7th, 2018

"He hit spots away to the righties, in to the lefties," Black said. "The glove-side fastball was really good today, and some good breaking balls, as well."

Position competition

Ryan McMahon, who has impressed the Rockies with his defensive aptitude at first base and his offensive start but must show his hitting against frontline pitching during the final two weeks of Spring Training, went 1-for-4 with a strikeout. But his best at-bat was a bases-loaded, two-run double past first base during a left-on-left matchup against **Andrew Chafin**.

"A hanging breaking ball from Chafin -- we've seen 'Mac' stay on some breaking balls, which is good to see," Black said. "That one hung from Chafin, and Mac hit it squarely, got it in the right spot." 8th, 2018

- Outfielder **Mike Tauchman** was productive throughout. He was hit by a pitch, walked, stole a base and, in the sixth, tripled to right field against **Brad Boxberger**. Tauchman also made a standout catch on an **A.J. Pollock** drive in the first inning. Tauchman has a .316 spring average as he pursues a job off the bench.

- **Tom Murphy**, trying to become part of the Rockies' catching picture, delivered an RBI single in the fourth off Chafin.

- Outfielder **David Dahl**'s best plate appearance came with two on and no outs in the fourth, when he fell behind Chafin, 0-2, but ended up walking after seven pitches.

Injury report

Non-roster utility infielder **Shawn O'Malley** (fractured left hand) expects to have the cast removed at the end of this week and will be in a brace, so he can start exercising.

"I can't stand this thing -- I'd probably be better off if, instead of a cast, I had a baseball glove on my hand so I could use my forearm a little bit more," O'Malley said.

Up next

Lefty **Kyle Freeland**, hoping for improved efficiency as he competes for a rotation job, will start Tuesday against the Mariners at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick at 2:10 MT. Bullpen members **Mike Dunn**, **Adam Ottavino** and **Bryan Shaw** are also expected to appear. The game can be seen on **MLB.TV** or heard on **Gameday Audio**.

Inbox: Is Gray Rox best homegrown pitcher?
Beat reporter Thomas Harding answers questions
By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb
Mar. 12th, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- The Rockies couldn't go wrong on the day of the 2013 MLB Draft. Picking third overall, they were going to end up with either Oklahoma right-handed pitcher Jon Gray or University of San Diego slugger Kris Bryant.

Of course, the Cubs took Bryant with the second overall pick, and he helped them make history. If all goes as it has so far, the rest of Gray's career could be a highlight in Rockies history.

Where Gray eventually will fall in the Rockies' annals is the subject of the first question in the Beat Reporter's Inbox presented by Edward Jones:

@DanielRutter1 -- Will Jon Gray be the best pitcher homegrown to ever put on a Purple uniform?

According to Baseball Reference's wins above replacement (WAR), the Rockies' best was Ubaldo Jimenez's 18.6, followed by Aaron Cook at 16.8 and Jorge De La Rosa (developed in other organizations) at 15.2. The bulk of Jimenez's production came during a three-year period (2008-10), when he averaged a 15-11 record with a 3.43 ERA. The period included a postseason trip in 2009 and a solid 2010.

Gray is off to a nice start with a 5.7 WAR during two-plus seasons, and last year's 10-4 mark with a 3.67 ERA puts him in a good place. He missed considerable time last year due to a foot injury, but has not had an arm issue, which is the key. Jeff Francis, for example, compiled a 7.4 WAR during his first three full seasons (2005-07), but a shoulder injury derailed him.

@TomcatNASCAR -- Based on what you've seen so far, what are you most excited about with the upcoming season?

I posted a story Sunday about Trevor Story's improved situational hitting. People around me are probably tired of me talking about how he could become a star this season.

The other reason for my excitement is Ryan McMahon, who is competing for starts at first base. Drafted as a third baseman, he transitioned in 2016 and looks smooth defensively. He also has had competitive at-bats and strong numbers

this spring. The final days of the Cactus League against frontline pitching will determine whether he can force his way on to the Opening Day roster and start regularly. Even if he isn't at that point yet, he will eventually, and I see a guy who will display physical ability and rare intangibles.

@ginaindenver -- Now that #CarGo is back how do you see the #Rockies outfield lining up?

Not only is **Carlos Gonzalez** back under a one-year contract to play right field, but left fielder **Gerardo Parra** is healthy after undergoing surgery on his right hand at the start of Spring Training. They join center fielder/leadoff hitter **Charlie Blackmon**.

Also, depending on McMahon's readiness, the Rockies could use **Ian Desmond** in left when he's not at first base. On days Parra doesn't start, Gonzalez likely will be a late-innings defensive replacement who can be a lefty-hitting threat.

@MasterGBHurd -- Who do you see making the Opening Day roster with Pat Valaika and Shawn O'Malley injured. Who will be the 4th outfielder David Dahl or Raimel Tapia?

First, Valaika and O'Malley are infielders, so defensively that's a whole different deal. But that reserve outfield position is worth exploring.

Tapia handled the job well last year, after a slow start. Dahl has been groomed as a starter, and it's possible the Rockies would send him to Triple-A rather than have him play a bench role -- especially because a rib injury limited him to 77 Minor League at-bats last year. But Dahl appears to have found his swing this spring, and doesn't seem fazed by coming off the bench.

But let's not limit it to those two, especially because **Mike Tauchman** -- who saw some off-the-bench time last year -- has had a solid spring offensively at all three positions, and offers speed and power. **Noel Cuevas** is in play as a right-handed hitter who plays all three positions, and lefty-hitting **Jordan Patterson** had the added dimension of playing first base.

To round out the bench, the Rockies must decide if they need a middle infielder, with non-roster righty hitter **Daniel Castro** the obvious candidate.

@5208BallCast If the Rockies are challenging for their first NL West pennant in late July, which prospect would they be willing to jettison in order to add that needed missing piece?

Patrick Lyons@5280BallCast

If the Rockies are challenging for their first NL West pennant in late July, which prospect would they be willing to jettison in order to add that needed missing piece?

Interesting down-the-road question, because we don't know exactly what the missing piece might be. When they beefed up the bullpen (**Pat Neshek**) and catching (**Jonathan Lucroy**), they were clearly trying to match with teams that wanted young prospects whom they didn't have to protect on their 40-man rosters after the season. Rockies GM Jeff Bridich rarely trades prospects who can help the big club now or in the near future.

Carlos Gonzalez's return to Rockies on one-year deal becomes official

All-star outfielder will make \$8 million in 2018

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

March 12, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — CarGo, being CarGo, just couldn't wait for the official word that he was back in the fold.

The Rockies' three-time all-star outfielder — officially known as Carlos Gonzalez — was signing autographs at the batting cages for jubilant fans Monday morning, hours before the club formally announced his one-year, \$8 million contract. The deal contains no options.

Gonzalez is not scheduled to meet with the media until Tuesday morning, but Black is eager to get Gonzalez back in the lineup as soon as he can. Gonzalez is in good shape, Black said, adding that he expects Gonzalez to begin playing in Cactus League games "pretty quickly."

"It's a good thing that CarGo is back, in a number of ways," Black said. "He's going to add to our team, most importantly, on the field. I think what CarGo did the last six weeks of the (2017) season was more like CarGo, like you guys have seen in the past. I think he's poised to have a good year. Time will tell, but I just sense that. ... I think CarGo feels it, too."

Added Black: "He's a bat in the middle of our order, which I think we need, and he balances out with some of our right-handed hitters, so our lineup get a little deeper."

Last week, when news first broke that Gonzalez was likely to return, his veteran teammates were thrilled.

"He's a good player with a lot of ability. But also, I really enjoy off-the-field CarGo," center fielder Charlie Blackmon said.

"He keeps things light. He keeps things in perspective. He lets you remember that we're playing a game and that it's supposed to be fun. Especially when you're down the stretch and trying to make a playoff run, you need to remember that occasionally."

Gonzalez, 32, spent the last nine seasons in a Rockies uniform, hitting 215 home runs with a .292 batting average and an .873 OPS (on-base percentage, plus slugging). His sweet left-handed swing netted him six seasons of 20-plus home runs, including 40 in 2015. He is a three-time Gold Glove winner and a two-time Silver Slugger.

The seven-year, \$80 million contract extension he signed after the 2010 season came to an end last year, enabling Gonzalez to test the free-agent market. The Rockies approached Gonzalez last spring about an extension worth as much as \$45 million over three years, but he decided to look elsewhere.

But it turned out that the market was not kind to veteran free agents this season, leaving Gonzalez without a team until deep into spring training. It didn't help that he was coming off one of the worst seasons of his career. He slashed .262/.339/.423 with 14 home runs in 136 games.

Gonzalez, however, did have a strong final month of the season, putting up a line of .377/.484/.766 with 12 doubles and six homers from Sept. 1 through the end of the regular season.

"I just know that CarGo is a threat in our lineup, and the other side knows it," Black said. "He's still at a place in his career, age-wise and body-wise, where he can do a lot of things to help us win."

To make room for Gonzalez on the 40-man roster, right-handed pitcher Rayan González was placed on the 60-day disabled list as he recovers from Tommy John surgery.

Q&A: Charlie Blackmon on the problem with park-adjusted numbers, Statcast and the Rockies' outfield

"I stopped caring about what all the defensive metrics say about me and I just try to do the best I can."

By **NICK GROKE** | ngroke@denverpost.com | **The Denver Post**

PUBLISHED: March 12, 2018

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Charlie Blackmon has a particularly keen interest in what the metrics of baseball and advanced statistics say about him as a defender, even if, on occasion, some players remain distrustful of what they say.

The Rockies' center fielder is persistently seeking ways to improve himself as a player, both physically and in the numbers. And he is leery of some numbers and how they are adjusted between ballparks.

Blackmon's relationship with Coors Field is rocky — very much in the same way stats struggle to account for playing at altitude. Now 25 years into their history as a club, we are still trying to figure out how to quantify playing at altitude. The all-star last week answered some questions for The Denver Post about what the stats say about him as a player:

Q: Are there defensive numbers that understand you in an honest way?

Blackmon: If I had to pick something, route efficiency is the best thing to look at. Outside that, it's too influenced by park factors and everything is adjusted and I don't know how well they're adjusted. Route efficiency, across the board, is not adjusted. I think. The only problem with that is, you play at altitude, then you go on the road and the balls fly differently. In theory, if every other game the ball flies differently, you shouldn't be running good routes compared to someone who consistently plays at sea level. If you see a guy from Colorado running with a good route efficiency, you should assume he's doing a really good job.

Q: Do you feel like you get docked in some stats just by the spaciousness of the outfield in Denver?

Blackmon: There's more space out there. Which means there are more places the ball can land. The ball gets in the gap. There is a greater chance at Coors Field for a triple than a double compared to another park. So you get hurt for that extra base. And there's not much I can do about that except play deeper, but you always give up something else instead. There's a lot of that. Yes, there are more bases when I'm in the outfield at Coors Field than Cincinnati, but it will be the same problem for someone else too.

Q: What defensive metric do you look at when you determine the best center fielders in the league? Or do you know it when you see it?

Blackmon: Really, a lot of it is the eye test, which is old-school. Sorry. But you can't put that on paper. I think I would know. If you look at a lot of different stats, you might have an idea about what kind of player a guy is defensively. But I honestly don't trust anything that is park-adjusted.

Q: Do those stats measure you unfairly in that way?

Blackmon: That's why I stopped caring. I think I'm a good defender. You can ask the guys on my team if I'm a good defender and they might tell you something different. But my defense doesn't necessarily match up with what some of what the metrics say. And guess what? WAR and all the big ones people talk about are also tied into defensive metrics. Everything that is park-adjusted should be taken with a grain of salt.

Q: There was a disconnect for awhile between the statistics teams had access to and those the players had access to. Are you more in line now?

Blackmon: You're seeing a market be driven by offensive numbers. Defense is becoming important and teams are more aware of it. If you're not good at defense, you may not be playing that much. If you're good enough to run out there, then you must be good enough that your offense outweighs your defense. Guys are getting paid on their offense.

Q. It seems sometimes in arbitration traditional stats matter to teams when they want them to, and I mean batting average and RBIs. And advance statistics come in to play when it gives them some bargaining leverage.

Blackmon: On both sides you're going to have people say that my strengths are the most important thing or your weaknesses are the most important thing. That's negotiation. That's normal. But traditionally, offensive statistics carry more weight. The advanced stats are gaining traction in negotiations, but it's a little risky to take that into a court room at an arbitration hearing. It's becoming more prevalent and it's not being ignored now. Teams aren't solely making decisions based on offensive ability and traditional numbers. It's just risky spending your one hour at an arbitration hearing talking about something that's not as quantifiable as home runs and RBIs.

Q: Do you have access to the numbers you want to help make you better?

Blackmon: There is some proprietary stuff the Rockies have that I don't have. There's that. And I don't know that I can just go look up my route efficiency. Some of that Statcast stuff, they can use it on MLB Network and put up my information, stats about me on TV, but they also won't let me look at it. I think. I stopped caring about what all the defensive metrics say about me and I just try to do the best I can. I used to get mad about it and now I don't care.

Rockies officially re-sign Carlos González: What the head and the heart say

Two Nicks argue over the decision to bring CarGo back to the Rockies

By nick.the.walsh and Nick McIntyre

Mar 12, 2018

Some major questions have arisen since the announcement that Carlos González is coming back to the Rockies. Now that the **González has passed his physical and the deal is official**, it's time to answer those questions. On the one hand, should fans be worried that González looked like a shell of his former self most of 2017? Should we be worried that his bat speed is really gone? On the other hand, should Rockies fans just forget it and be happy that CarGo's possibly infectious positivity and smile is back, along with that sweet swing (however much speed has been lost on it)?

The answer to these questions is "yes."

The Rational Nick (McIntyre):

It is true: Baseball is a game driven by nostalgia, feeling, and an inner love for our team that transcends rosters, managers, and periods of highs and lows.

It is also true: Nostalgia, feeling, and love for sports are cultivated through winning and special teams that you can look back and remember fondly because of the great moments, playoff victories, and, ideally, championships.

The Emotional Nick (Walsh):

Those eyes. That smile...

The Rational Nick:

Fans will often say, "Stop being so obsessed with the numbers or the manager's decisions and just enjoy this for a while."

I think that comments like this are a misjudgment of why analytical thinking, sound decision-making, and informed reason are important. We don't rip on emotional decision-making because we are soul-crushing, lifeless number-crunchers who don't care about the people.

Rather, it's the opposite. We want to take a game (and a team), that has given us memories, happiness, and some turmoil, and actually learn more and enhance our understanding of something we already love on the emotional level. We

should look at Carlos González through an objective lens because the Rockies are a good team that we want to see win, first and foremost.

The Emotional Nick:

Okay, I have to ask: Is there an example of a grown man swinging a baseball bat, crushing a baseball, and doing it with more swagger than CarGo? Well, I'd have a hard time finding any **Rockies** player who has a prettier swing than Carlos González since he joined the Rockies in 2009.

It's no surprise González has solidified himself as a fan-favorite. He trails only **Todd Helton** and Larry Walker in Games Played for the Rockies, and could surpass Larry if he plays in 56 more games this year. CarGo has established himself as a face of the franchise, and did so by creating a career highlight reel of moonshot homeruns, Superman-esque Gold Glove plays in the outfield, community engagement through his **Carlos González Foundation**, and of course, getting us all Taco's by **hitting for the cycle with a walk-off home run** in 2010.

He's the whole package folks. Looks, skill, humor, and compassion. Some nay-sayers will try and tell you CarGo is on the decline and entering his age 32 season (not even a year older than me...) after an abysmal 2017 campaign. His free-agency stalled this offseason, and it appeared teams were giving up on him. Well, I say it's their loss and our Car-Gain.

The Rational Nick:

Signing Carlos González to a \$8 million, one-year deal is an emotionally-driven decision. The decision to sign González wasn't based in an analysis of wins-gained or on-field value. For a team that is currently within a winning window and plays in a difficult division, it is disappointing that \$8 million was spent on a player who is unlikely to bring on-field value above what other players already on the roster could bring, or other free agents that were available this winter and signed for far less elsewhere.

Let's take a look at González's 2017 performance—but more importantly, his trends going forward. Digging into the underlying numbers, there is plenty of cause for concern.

On the surface level, the numbers were unimpressive. González had a .262/.339/.423 - roughly league average across the board. **On defense, Gonzalez was also less than stellar, with a career low in outfield arm runs and 1.7 runs**

below league average according to UZR/150. Statcast had González at **+1 Outs Above Average**, meaning he was essentially league-average in catch probability.

The Emotional Nick:

Yes, Carlos had a down year in 2017. It's easy to get caught up in that and expect the worst—it was disappointing. But like a sweet, innocent child, you can dislike their actions but still love them. How could you ignore eight great memory-filled years because of one stinker? In a 162-game season, players can have bad months — but that doesn't mean they're washed up. There are ups and downs in baseball, and no one is immune. Not even our CarGo.

But that swing...

It's important to point out a key fact about this example of CarGo demolishing a baseball—it happened at the end of *last year* in a September that saw him slash a scorching .377/.484/.766, hit for 59 total bases, and six of his fourteen total HRs. Those aren't the numbers of a washed up *or* declining player—CarGo ended 2017 by figuring out his slump, which bodes well for a successful 2018.

The Rational Nick:

González was a negative WAR player in 2017 overall. For comparison, **Carlos Gomez**, who was a very serviceable **2.3 fWAR player** for the **Rangers** in 2017 (and is the same age as CarGo), signed a 1-year, \$4,000,000 deal with the **Rays**. Curtis Granderson (who is 36) also signed a 1-year, \$5,000,000 deal with the **Blue Jays**, despite being a **2.1 fWAR player in 2017**. CarGo will be taking up considerably more salary than those higher-performing players.

To take this a step further, the Rockies had been considering adding depth at first base. **Adam Lind** had a quietly impressive year at the plate for the **Nationals**, posting a 122 wRC+ and an .875 OPS. Although he was poor in the field, he put time in at both first base and left field. Lind was only able to muster a **minor league contract** from the **Yankees**, with the possibility of maxing out at \$2 million if he makes the 40-man roster.

The Emotional Nick:

It's not all about the numbers. Not only is CarGo a fan-favorite, he's a clubhouse favorite, and brings a valuable veteran presence, postseason experience, and infectious positive attitude. Like **German Marquez said earlier this month**, "[CarGo's] a good person and he's a veteran guy and he was my friend. He gave me confidence." And while it's hard to quantify, it's clear his teammates wanted him back because he makes this team better.

The Rational Nick:

Looking beyond the raw numbers, CarGo's skills aren't improving, but it's not all terrible news. According to **Statcast's Sprint Speed**, CarGo topped out at 26.6 MPH, good enough for 312th place in baseball last year (26.8 and 26.7 in 2016 and 2015, respectively). Carlos Gomez, for comparison, topped out at 28.1 MPH, 100th in the league. That doesn't bode well for an aging outfielder in a difficult outfield.

When it comes to plate discipline, González has been **pretty consistent from 2015-2017**, however it is concerning that his numbers declined at the plate despite this. González used to hit some of the hardest balls the most consistently, but not so in 2017. **Gonzalez only "barreled" balls in 3.9% of his plate appearances**, ranking 202nd among those with at least 100 batted balls. In 2016, he had barrels in 6.3% of plate appearances.

Is this the worst signing in the world? Of course not. In fact, it's almost certainly not even the worst signing of the 2017 offseason. The Rockies definitely overpaid for González and determined clubhouse value to be worth a couple million dollars. Seeing players like Gomez and Granderson sign for less is disappointing (albeit earlier in the offseason), but even seeing players with high value such as **Lance Lynn** sign for one-year, \$12 million elsewhere is disappointing from a Rockies perspective. There's no reason to think Lynn would have come here, but with the market tanking like it has, you would have liked to have seen the Rockies go after someone with a lower price and higher upside—not the opposite.

If González proves me wrong, that would be excellent news for the Rockies, and they really could use some depth in the outfield. What I fear most is that González will take away playing time from developing talent like **Raimel Tapia** and Mike Tauchman (and possibly David Dahl) while also not providing positive value above what those players could provide. We should assess González on the margin, not by his total value, given that he was signed as a free agent.

The Emotional Nick:

At the very least, one teammate in particular made a strong case for CarGo's return, and who could argue with him?

Colorado Rockies: CarGo a welcome addition in crowded outfield
by Nick Bunney |RoxPile
March 13, 2018

It's official: The Colorado Rockies and Carlos Gonzalez have agreed on a one-year deal to reunite for the 2018 season. This is a big signing for the Rockies, who have drawn a bit of criticism from fans for the lack of moves concerning position players this offseason. As a note, Jonathan Lucroy just signed with the Oakland A's on a one-year deal as well while Mark Reynolds, as of this writing, has yet to find a home.

For the Rockies, the return of CarGo is a welcome sight (**just ask Chris Iannetta**) as they continue to work out who will flank **Charlie Blackmon** in the outfield. Gonzalez will join a crowded room of applicants, as already names such as **Ian Desmond, Gerardo Parra, Raimel Tapia, David Dahl** and **Mike Tauchman** are vying for the two spots.

I would think if CarGo shows, in a limited spring, that he is fit, ready and still squaring the ball up like only CarGo can, that his exceptional arm and defense would give him an inside track to his familiar right field gig. After all, he did finish last season on fire, batting .325 with eight of his 14 home runs in August and September. It's possible that he might get more days off against lefties, but as of now, I find it hard to imagine a guy like him on the bench.

If that is the case, that would mean all of the other outfielders would be competing for the left field spot as well as bench positions on the opening day roster. Parra and Desmond would presumably have the leg up to grab the starting position, and could even alternate based on the handedness of the pitcher if neither of them separate themselves. Desmond also might get some or a lot of time at first base, depending on the continued development of **Ryan McMahon**.

That isn't to say that one of the young guys won't surprise us. Tauchman has had a very strong spring, hitting .316 through 17 spring training games with a homer, three doubles and three triples. He also brings a speed element with two stolen bags. Tapia has struggled a bit, hitting just .273, striking out 13 times in 44 at-bats and has been caught on three of his five attempted steals. Dahl, who understandably started the spring off extremely slow after missing all of the 2017 season with a rib injury, has recently come on as well, hitting a couple of home runs in the past week.

Whether left field is manned by a veteran like Desmond or Parra, or one of the young guns, the addition of Carlos Gonzalez in right should make Rockies fans everywhere feel good. Not only is he a fan favorite, but he is a player who has shown the ability to completely carry the Rockies for stretches of the season and he provides a gold-caliber glove in right field.

All of this considered, the reason I am most excited about this development is because I truly believe that CarGo is hungry to erase the memory of 2017. The one-year deal is essentially a tryout for him before re-entering free agency next

offseason. I think he comes out in a similar groove that he ended 2017 in and provides a big lift for an already dangerous Rockies lineup.

Is it Opening Day yet?

McMahon Faces Big Test in Final Days of Spring
Tracy Ringolsby | Inside The Seams
March 12, 2018

SCOTTSDALE – Ryan McMahon has made an impression this spring.

The 23-year-old ranked the No. 2 prospect in the Rockies system has delivered at the plate. He has been impressive in the field at first base and third base. He has made it clear he will be a part of the Rockies future.

The question is: How soon does the future begins?

The next two weeks will provide the answer.

With the return of Carlos Gonzalez, the battle for spots on the Rockies season-opening roster has tightened up. Gonzalez will return to right field with Gerardo Parra expected to move back to left field.

Following that line of thinking, Ian Desmond would be the likely move back to first base, the position he was signed to play a year ago only to have that plan interrupted when he suffered a broken hand during spring training in what became the first of three trips Desmond made to the disabled list.

Manager Bud Black isn't making any proclamations, however.

He wants to see more of McMahon, who went into Monday's game against the D-Backs hitting .366 with five doubles and a home run. And with Desmond starting at first base, McMahon was at third, a position he wouldn't likely see much of during the regular season in light of the presence of Nolan Arenado, who has started all but 15 of the Rockies 486 regular-season games the last three years.

"You look at the total package," manager Bud Black said. "You look at the offensive side. You look at the defensive side. You look at the at-bats, and the bat speed. You look at what he does against certain fellows who are in the big-league picture."

And in the next two weeks, when rosters are cut down and teams get focused on the opening of the season the last weekend in March there will be more of those "fellows who are in the big-league picture" on the mound later in the game than there has been.

"You want to see how things go when the pitchers tighten down and get ready for the season," said Black. "Those at-bats matter."

Black paused.

“This is his third big-league camp,” Black said. “He has a comfort level interacting with the players in the clubhouse. Spring training is easier for him. It’s not new to him.”

What Black is confident about is that McMahon will be at home in the field. The scouting reports are good, and the actions on the field this spring have reinforced that.

“At first base he looks very comfortable and third base is his natural position,” said Black. “He is an athlete. He was a quarterback in high school. He can even play second base. He even played second base in the big leagues last year (as a September call-up) and turned a double play. He’ll be fine.”

But will he be at Chase Field for that March 29 season opener?

That is what spring training is about, especially the next two weeks when the level of pitching is ratcheted another twist or two.

It's Official: Gonzalez Returns to His Baseball Home
Tracy Ringolsby | Inside The Seams
March 12, 2018

SCOTTSDALE – Carlos Gonzalez is back where he feels he belongs – with the Rockies.

They did offer him a three-year, \$45 million extension last spring training which was declined.

But it's a team that he wanted to be with all along. How much did he want to stay in Colorado? Enough that when the off-season market for free agents went sour instead of being resentful, Gonzalez came back to the Rockies on a one-year, \$8 million contract that was officially approved by Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association on Monday.

His desire to be with the team was evident during the weekend when he showed up and spent time in the Rockies clubhouse, awaiting the results of a physical and the official approval.

Gonzalez indicated he will meet with the media Tuesday morning.

Monday afternoon, though, Rockies manager Bud Black made it clear he's glad to have the left-handed-hitting outfielder back in right field, and he focused on the way Gonzalez finished the season to help the Rockies claim a wild-card berth, rather than getting caught up in the overall season stats.

"The start he got off to put him in a place where he had to dig out of a big hole early," Black said. "He got in deeper and deeper, but he stayed positive."

There was a late season surge that was critical for the Rockies, who finished one game in front of the Brewers for the second NL wild-card berth. That was not lost on Black.

"What he did last six weeks of the season was more like the Cargo we've seen in the past," Black said. "Where Cargo is now physically, mentally, coming off the September of last year and coming back to the Rockies, is in a good place. He thinks this is his team and for him to come back is a great thing."

Even with Gonzalez's struggles last year, Black said the concern other teams had in facing him was apparent in how other teams pitched him.

“He’s dangerous,” Black said. “The second half he took his walks. He ran deep counts. He’s a threat and the other side knows it. He is in a place in his career age wise and body wise he can do a lot of things to help us win. We saw game-saving plays last year on defense.”

With the season opener 11 days away, Black said he is confident Gonzalez can get the at-bats to be ready for the March 29 season-opener against the D-Backs at Chase Field.

“He has been working hard in Florida,” Black said. “We will try and catch him up to speed as soon as possible. I have seen guys in shorter time frames get ready for a season and never miss a beat. He will be fine.”

And while this does mean some of the younger players – like Raimel Tapia, David Dahl and Ryan McMahon – could wind up back in the minor leagues, Black sees a benefit to bring Gonzalez back.

“We just got another good player which is great,” he said. “I think it is a good thing when you have good players. We have guys who are battle tested. This is a move that helps us create depth.”

And it is a move the Rockies feel can help them take another step in the post-season in 2018.

Rockies should dive back into free agent pool to bolster pitching staff for one year
By Aniello Piro | Mile High Sports
March 12, 2018

This offseason has been one of the strangest in recent memory for Major League Baseball. The Colorado Rockies were big spenders out of the gate, signing a trio of relievers for a combined value of more than \$100 million, but the market then cooled considerably for some of the top starting pitchers and position players available. Now, the Rockies have an opportunity to capitalize on the weak free-agent market and push the team over the top in 2018.

For a number of reasons, the free-agent market has been extremely sluggish this offseason. Teams not in contention are not spending big, and that has hurt the pool of free agents. Pair this with more clubs adopting a “Moneyball” mentality and there been a restructuring of sorts within the free-agent marketplace. This, mixed with the fact that teams have been reluctant to hand out long-term, big money contracts because a majority of the deals end up poorly, has altered free agency significantly.

Monster contracts given to players like David Price, Albert Pujols, Miguel Cabrera, Troy Tulowitzki, Matt Kemp, Prince Fielder, Robinson Cano and Joey Votto have yielded little-to-no return in contending for a World Series, let alone winning one. Teams have started to shift their approach when it pertains to attacking free agency.

Scott Boras, a super-agent known for getting maximum value for his clients, has struggled to obtain monster deals for his clientele this offseason. It took big-name guys like J.D. Martinez and Eric Hosmer until February to sign contracts. Outside of those two, a majority of Boras’ clients have failed to earn the deals he believes they deserve and are likely regretting playing hardball, as many turned down lucrative offers early in the offseason to test waters.

Carlos Gonzalez reportedly rejected a deal from the Rockies last offseason that could have been around three-years and \$45 million. Former Rockies catcher Jonathan Lucroy rejected a three-year, \$21-million offer from the Rockies this offseason, and joined other prominent players like Lance Lynn and Mike Moustakas (who declined a \$17.5-million qualifying offer) in addition to Gonzalez that were virtually forced to accept one-year deals in hopes of resetting their market value for next year.

It’s been an obscure offseason, and with a few prime names still searching for homes the Rockies would be wise to follow the one-year contract trend and bring in one of the top pitchers remaining on the market.

There are two primary arms that remain unsigned: former Rays starter Alex Cobb, and former Rockies (and Royals) closer Greg Holland.

Adding Cobb would be a plus addition to a rotation that features pitchers primarily under the age of 27. Right now, there is little to no definition within the Rockies' starting corps. A majority of the starters are still working to fine-tune or develop their repertoire. Jon Gray has the potential to be a frontline starter, eventually, and so does German Marquez and Kyle Freeland. However, they are not there yet. Entering a season littered with high expectations to return to the postseason and win there, relying solely on the young guns to up their performance and lead a rotation is a bit worrisome.

Cobb is not an ace (unlike Jake Arrieta, who just signed with Philadelphia for \$75 million over three years), but Cobb would improve the Rockies' rotation. He was 12-10 last season with an ERA of 3.66 as a member of the Tampa Bay Rays. He can pitch in the front of the rotation and would add maturity without question. There has been little market for Cobb, and as a result, he may be forced to take a one-year deal like many of his counterparts. The attractive part about Cobb is he will not be as expensive as Arrieta. It's unknown what his asking price is, but starting pitcher Lance Lynn just signed a one-year, \$12-million deal with the Minnesota Twins. A similar contract could be coming for Cobb, who earned \$12.2 million total over the past three years.

Holland might be the most bizarre story in the wacky baseball offseason. After reportedly turning down a contract from the Rockies similar to the one they signed Wade Davis to and a qualifying offer worth \$17.4 million, last year's National League saves co-leader has been unable to find a home. Interestingly enough, there almost seems to be no market for his services. This puts the Rockies in a position to reunite with him once again and fortify the bullpen as one that could be the best in the sport. Holland was sharp last season, recording 41 saves and an ERA of 3.61 in his return from Tommy John surgery.

Re-signing Holland would be a true power move. The Rockies already showed a commitment to strengthening the bullpen this offseason. Davis replaced Holland, Bryan Shaw replaced Pat Neshek, and Jake McGee re-signed. Bringing back Holland would upgrade Colorado's bullpen and make them the best in the National League without question. The ability to mix-and-match Holland, Davis, Shaw, McGee and others is incredibly enticing.

The Rockies should explore signing one of the remaining free agent pitchers on the market for one glaring reason: 2018 will likely be the last season the core of Charlie Blackmon, DJ LeMahieu and Nolan Arenado are all together. Blackmon and LeMahieu are set to hit free agency following the season and the same with Arenado in 2019.

The Rockies' best chance to win may be right now. The lineup has proven to be one of the best in baseball and was a significant reason Colorado returned to the postseason last year for the first time in nearly a decade. Now, with the team looking as strong as ever, signing one of the remaining power arms on the market to a one-year deal could be the move that pushes the Rockies atop the standings in the coming season. The Rockies have already increased their payroll significantly from years past, but a little more spending could have the team in a position to strike gold in 2018.

Which team would be MLB's best if every player were in his prime?

Sam Miller \ ESPN.com

March 13, 2018

For every player in Major League Baseball, a hope exists *somewhere* -- in the GM who signed him, the fans who will cheer for him, or the player himself -- that this year he will play as well as he's ever played. Whatever the player has done in the past, there's a little hope somewhere that he can do it again. It's true of 26-year-old backup catchers and 35-year-old Hall of Fame-bound second basemen. It's true of Aaron Judge, it's true of Mike Trout, it's true of Tim Lincecum and it's true of Darwin Barney.

The *hope* is true. The reality, of course, is very few players will hit their peaks this year. But what if they did? What if in 2018, every player played as well as he's ever played? If every player in baseball were in the middle of his prime for this one year alone, which team do you think has the best shot of winning the World Series?

So we did it. We found the 25 best players in every team's organization, where "best" means "best season they ever had," using Baseball Prospectus' model for wins above replacement. If they've never had a season as good as they're projected to have this year, we gave them credit for this year's projection. Such that 2007 Curtis Granderson (6.9 WAR) is now teammates with 2017 Marcus Stroman (4.4 WAR) and 2018 Max Pentecost (0.2 WAR). We weren't sticklers for position, but we did make sure every position was covered, including two catchers. We gave each team 13 hitters -- after the top eight, we scaled down their career-best WARs to reflect the reduced playing time that a bench player gets -- and 12 pitchers, who (through some extra steps) typically included a near-even split of relievers and starters. Unsurprisingly, replacing 2018 Curtis Granderson with 2007 Curtis Granderson (and pairing him with 2007 Troy Tulowitzki, 2009 Kendrys Morales, 2015 Josh Donaldson, 2016 Aledmys Diaz and 2017 Justin Smoak) makes the Blue Jays really good! But who does this exercise make *the best*? Think about it. Get an answer in your head. Be ready to guess. Are you ready? OK, but let's start with who it's not.

The worst team in its prime

Before they signed Jonathan Lucroy this past weekend, it was the A's, who, even under the most generous rules possible, managed to not have a single player who had earned even a 10th-place MVP vote in his "prime" season. Their best player, in this exercise, was 2013 Jed Lowrie, at just 3.7 WAR. Their second-best player was Matt Chapman's 2018

projection. Their best pitcher is 2014 Yusmeiro Petit, when he was a swingman with an ERA+ worse than the league average. Their 14th-best player was prospect A.J. Puk, who has thrown 64 innings in Double-A. This is an extraordinarily nondescript prime roster.

The 2014 version of Lucroy gives it some star power -- he finished fourth in MVP voting -- and gives the A's a late-spring push out of this exercise's cellar. They're replaced at the bottom by the White Sox, who manage just four above-average (2-plus WAR) position players. That is our floor.

The teams just above the ChiSox:

- 29. Padres, 48.8 WAR (2012 Chase Headley, 2015 Tyson Ross)
- 28. Marlins, 49.4 WAR (2017 J.T. Realmuto, 2010 Martin Prado)
- 27. Tigers, 50.9 WAR (2013 Miguel Cabrera, 2007 Victor Martinez at catcher)
- 26. Pirates, 53.0 WAR (2015 Francisco Cervelli, 2014 Josh Harrison)
- 25. A's, 53.1 WAR (2014 Jonathan Lucroy, 2013 Jed Lowrie)

The sneaky-prime league MVP candidates

When you start thinking this puzzle through, your mind probably goes in two directions: the massive superstars of yesteryear who are still hanging around (like Ichiro, Lincecum, David Wright, Albert Pujols), or the superstars of today. But building a spreadsheet of 750 players' best seasons reminds you of career years you've completely forgotten about, from players you've almost completely forgotten about. Remember the year Mike Aviles hit .325/.354/.480 as a shortstop? Remember when Aaron Hill had 36 homers and 108 RBIs as a second baseman? Remember when Mike Morse hit .303 with 31 homers?

Those guys are all unsigned free agents, assigned to none of our Prime rosters. But almost every team has at least one unexpected star in this game, perhaps none more unexpected than Cliff Pennington. Before he signed with the Reds this winter, before his years spent in Anaheim, Toronto and Arizona, Pennington was a pretty good Oakland A. In 2010 he stole a bunch of bags, played excellent defense and was a roughly league-average hitter, which was worth 4.8 wins above replacement. He has never topped 2 WAR since, and as a part-timer in his mid-30s he's unlikely to reach even one win this year. But the Prime Reds get to bank it: 2010 Cliff Pennington is their second-best position player.

Every team's sneaky MVP -- either a player you forget was good, you forget exists, or you forget was *that* good:

Angels: 2009 Yunel Escobar (5.7 WAR)
Diamondbacks: 2012 Kris Medlen (4.2 WAR)
Braves: 2007 Scott Kazmir (5.6 WAR)
Orioles: 2013 Colby Rasmus (3.9 WAR)
Red Sox: 2008 Hanley Ramirez (8.3 WAR)
Cubs: 2011 Peter Bourjos (2.6 WAR)
White Sox: 2007 James Shields (6.9 WAR)
Reds: Pennington or 2004 Oliver Perez (5.8 WAR)
Indians: 2012 Ryan Hanigan (4.5 WAR)
Rockies: 2011 Gerardo Parra (4.4 WAR)
Tigers: 2010 Francisco Liriano (5.5 WAR)
Astros: 2014 Collin McHugh (3.6 WAR)
Royals: 2008 Ricky Nolasco (5.9 WAR)
Dodgers: 2007 Rich Hill (5.4 WAR)
Marlins: 2010 Martin Prado (4.9 WAR)
Brewers: 2009 Yovani Gallardo (5.4 WAR)
Twins: 2011 Erick Aybar (3.9 WAR)
Mets: 2009 Adrian Gonzalez (7.9 WAR)
Yankees: 2009 Adam Lind (3.6 WAR)
A's: Lowrie
Phillies: 2014 Drew Hutchison (3.6 WAR)
Pirates: 2015 Francisco Cervelli (5.3 WAR)
Cardinals: 2011 Bud Norris (3.1 WAR)
Padres: 2012 Chase Headley (5.9 WAR)
Giants: 2012 Austin Jackson (5.5 WAR)
Mariners: 2013 Hisashi Iwakuma (6.0 WAR)
Rays: 2014 Denard Span (5.7 WAR)
Rangers: 2011 Doug Fister (5.1 WAR)

Blue Jays: 2008 [Russell Martin](#) (8.0 WAR)

Nationals: 2012 [Miguel Montero](#) (6.3 WAR)

Here are the next nine spots on our list:

24. Phillies, 57.4 WAR (2015 [Jake Arrieta](#), 2016 [Odubel Herrera](#))
23. Braves, 59.3 WAR (2016 [Freddie Freeman](#), 2008 [Nick Markakis](#))
22. Royals, 59.4 WAR (2011 [Alex Gordon](#), 2008 Ricky Nolasco)
21. Reds, 60.8 WAR (2017 [Joey Votto](#), 2004 Oliver Perez)
20. Rays, 61.4 WAR (2013 [Carlos Gomez](#), 2015 [Chris Archer](#))
19. Rockies, 61.9 WAR (2017 [Charlie Blackmon](#), 2016 [Nolan Arenado](#))
18. Orioles, 66.3 WAR (2015 [Manny Machado](#), 2013 [Chris Davis](#))
17. Twins, 68.4 WAR (2009 [Joe Mauer](#), 2008 [Ervin Santana](#))
16. Brewers, 69.1 WAR (2011 [Ryan Braun](#), 2015 [Lorenzo Cain](#))

The most interesting team in its prime

The Rangers are barely in the top half of our standings, but they're easily the nostalgist's favorite team. Consider the starting rotation alone:

1999 [Bartolo Colon](#), 18-5 with Cleveland -- 6.3 WAR

2007 [Cole Hamels](#), 15-5 with Philadelphia -- 6.3 WAR

2009 Tim Lincecum, 15-7 with San Francisco -- 8.3 WAR

2008 [Edinson Volquez](#), 17-6 with Cincinnati -- 3.7 WAR

2011 Doug Fister, 11-13 (with a 2.83 ERA) with Seattle and Detroit -- 5.1 WAR

The Year That ...

That pushes 2013 [Andrew Cashner](#) to the bullpen, which is so crowded that all sorts of once-pretty-good starters ([Matt Moore](#), [Mike Minor](#), [Martin Perez](#), [A.J. Griffin](#)) are left off the roster entirely. Colon's 1999 season is by far the most ancient "prime" season on our spreadsheet; the next oldest is also on the Rangers, [Adrian Beltre](#)'s 2004.

One thing that stood out putting these rosters together is how few "old" seasons made it -- which is another way to say how quickly the young replace the old in this sport. Well *more than* half of our Prime seasons either came in the past two

seasons or are anticipated this season. Fewer than 10 percent came in 2010 or earlier. Most major leaguers are either in their prime or were very, very recently. The Rangers' roster was a nice rebuttal to this rule. In addition to the pitchers named, there's 2011 [Mike Napoli](#), 2012 Darwin Barney, 2013 [Shin-Soo Choo](#) and 2014 [Trevor Plouffe](#) and [Kevin Jepsen](#). Those names used to mean something in our lives!

15. Diamondbacks, 71.7 WAR (2015 [Paul Goldschmidt](#), 2009 [Zack Greinke](#))

14. Cardinals, 74.5 WAR (2012 [Yadier Molina](#), 2013 [Matt Carpenter](#))

13. Blue Jays, 78.5 WAR (2008 Russell Martin, 2015 Josh Donaldson)

12. Red Sox, 78.7 WAR (2008 Hanley Ramirez, 2017 [Chris Sale](#))

11. Rangers, 78.9 WAR (2004 Adrian Beltre, 2009 Tim Lincecum)

The most present prime team

You might notice that we're into the top 10 and most of the actual best teams in baseball are still unmentioned. There's quite a correlation between how good a team is and how good its Prime team would be, it turns out. The Astros and Cubs, especially, are teams who tore down, rebuilt from scratch, and thus have almost no history before their current rosters.

Twenty-two of the 25 Prime Astros seasons came in 2014 or later; 14 came in 2016 or later. The only exceptions:

2008 [Brian McCann](#), 2011 [Justin Verlander](#) and 2012 [Josh Reddick](#), and you could easily swap in recent Verlander and Reddick seasons without losing much. The Astros have the best pitching staff in this exercise, just edging the Rangers.

10. Cubs, 80.1 WAR (2016 [Kris Bryant](#), 2016 [Anthony Rizzo](#))

9. Mariners, 81.7 WAR (2010 [Felix Hernandez](#), 2014 [Kyle Seager](#))

8. Indians, 82.4 WAR (2017 [Corey Kluber](#), 2017 [Jose Ramirez](#))

7. Astros, 82.8 WAR (2008 Brian McCann, 2011 Justin Verlander)

The team everybody thinks the answer will be

But it isn't.

The Giants traded for [Evan Longoria](#) and [Andrew McCutchen](#) this winter. [Pablo Sandoval](#) is still on the roster from last year; Austin Jackson is there, and was once upon a time better than we remember. [Johnny Cueto](#), [Buster](#)

Posey, Madison Bumgarner: There's a lot of older star power there. But there's no depth, and almost nobody on the roster has reached Prime in the past few years. Only six Giants' prime seasons came in 2016, 2017 or are projected for 2018. Those six are all close to replacement level: Ty Blach is on this Prime roster. Chris Stratton is on this roster. So is Steven Duggar.

Still, the Giants do very well in this exercise. So do the Mets, whom you also might have thought to guess: They get credit for 2007 David Wright (fourth in MVP voting), 2008 Jose Reyes (24th), 2009 Adrian Gonzalez (12th) and 2010 Jay Bruce.

So do the Angels, who have the best position players in this universe. Their lineup would look something like:

1. 2011 Ian Kinsler (.255/.355/.477, 32 HR) -- 6.0 WAR
2. 2015 Mike Trout (.299/.402/.590, 41 HR) -- 10.0 WAR
3. 2009 Albert Pujols (.327/.443/.658, 47 HR) -- 12.8 WAR
4. 2011 Justin Upton (.289/.369/.529, 31 HR) -- 5.6 WAR
5. 2017 Zack Cozart (.297/.385/.548, 24 HR) -- 5.3 WAR
6. 2010 Chris Young (.257/.341/.452, 27 HR) -- 5.3 WAR
7. 2014 Chris Carter (.227/.308/.491, 37 HR) -- 2.6 WAR
8. 2009 Yunel Escobar (.299/.377/.436, 14 HR) -- 5.7 WAR
9. 2014 Rene Rivera (.252/.319/.432, 11 HR) -- 5.1 WAR

Their starting lineup *alone* would tie the all-time team home run record, with excellent defense at almost every position.

Anyway, the best team is not any of these teams.

6. Giants, 83.6 WAR (2012 Buster Posey, 2014 Johnny Cueto)
5. Yankees, 86.7 WAR (2017 Giancarlo Stanton, 2008 CC Sabathia)
4. Angels, 87.5 WAR (2009 Albert Pujols, 2015 Mike Trout)
3. Mets, 89.4 WAR (2007 David Wright, 2009 Adrian Gonzalez)
2. Dodgers, 93.7 WAR (2011 Matt Kemp, 2015 Clayton Kershaw)

The best prime team

The Washington Nationals, if we're to believe that my playing-time adjustments and math are anywhere close to accurate, would produce about 98 wins above replacement, and win around 145 games against a typical league. This ... seems impossible. But let's consider this team. Here's the lineup:

1. 2016 Adam Eaton (.284/.362/.428, 19th in MVP voting) -- 7.5 WAR
2. 2015 Bryce Harper (.330/.460/.649, MVP) -- 11.2 WAR
3. 2009 Ryan Zimmerman (.292/.364/.525, 25th in MVP voting) -- 6.5 WAR
4. 2017 Anthony Rendon (.301/.403/.533, sixth in MVP voting) -- 6.2 WAR
5. 2016 Daniel Murphy (.347/.390/.595, second in MVP voting) -- 6.8 WAR
6. 2018 Trea Turner (.290/.340/.465, projected top-10 player this year) -- 5.3 WAR
7. 2012 Miguel Montero (.286/.391/.438, 32nd in MVP voting) -- 6.3 WAR
8. 2017 Michael Taylor (.271/.320/.486) -- 3.9 WAR

With a lot of career-best defensive ratings. Pretty good.

Rotation:

1. 2017 Max Scherzer, 16-6, Cy Young winner -- 7.4 WAR
2. 2012 Gio Gonzalez, 21-8, third in CY voting -- 6.1 WAR
3. 2014 Stephen Strasburg, 14-11, ninth in CY voting -- 6.0 WAR
4. 2009 Edwin Jackson, 13-9, All-Star -- 4.5 WAR
5. 2016 Tanner Roark, 16-10, 10th in CY voting -- 3.1 WAR

So all but one starting pitcher, and all but one starting position player, good enough to get named on an MVP or Cy Young ballot, and all of them stay almost totally healthy.

Bullpen:

1. 2010 Joaquin Benoit, 1.34 ERA -- 2.0 WAR
2. 2014 Sean Doolittle, 2.72 ERA -- 1.8 WAR
3. 2016 Shawn Kelley, 2.64 ERA -- 1.5 WAR
4. 2009 Ryan Madson, 3.18 ERA -- 1.9 WAR
5. 2013 Brandon Kintzler, 2.69 ERA -- 2.0 WAR

6. 2016 Sammy Solis, 2.41 ERA -- 0.6 WAR

7. 2015 Joe Ross, 3.64 ERA mostly as a starter -- 1.6 WAR

And the bench includes Matt Wieters' best season, Howie Kendrick's best season, Alejandro De Aza's 17 HR/20 SB season, and 16 homers from Matt Adams. They have 13 players better than the Prime A's best player. I don't think they'd win 145 games. But there's a little hope in me that someday, by chance or supernatural design, we'll see an exceptional roster of career years give it a good try.

Carlos Gonzalez, Rockies complete 1-year, \$5 million deal
Associated Press \ ESPN
March 12, 2018

The Colorado Rockies finalized a \$5 million, one-year deal to bring back three-time All-Star and popular clubhouse leader Carlos Gonzalez.

His agreement was announced Monday and includes \$3 million in bonuses based on days on the active roster.

Gonzalez had a \$20 million salary last year in the final season of an \$80 million, seven-year contract and became a free agent after nine seasons with the Rockies. The three-time Gold Glove outfielder struggled for most of last season as the Rockies returned to the postseason for the first time since 2009. He showed signs of breaking out of his funk down the stretch, though, hitting six of his 14 homers in September.

Keith Law's Cactus League takeaways: Searching for NL West's next rising prospects
Keith Law \ ESPN Senior Writer
March 13, 2018

The San Diego Padres traded Fernando Rodney to the Marlins on June 30, 2016, for a right-handed Class A pitcher named Chris Paddack. Paddack was absolutely, definitely not hurt in any way at the time of the trade ... but made just three starts in San Diego's system before his elbow blew out, leading to Tommy John surgery that left him on the sidelines for all of 2017. He's back now and threw on the back fields in Peoria on Saturday, showing most of what he had before the surgery and certainly justifying the trade and the team's patience with him.

Paddack was throwing 90-92 mph during a live BP session, touching 93 once, with a grade-70 changeup thrown at 78-81 where he has tremendous arm speed. He has a great body and frame, and throws with an arm action that gets him on top of the ball from a three-quarters arm slot; given his 6-foot-4 frame, that means he really gets downhill action on the fastball.

The question about Paddack was and remains his breaking ball. He has a curveball, which came in at 72-75 in Saturday's outing, and one of the ones he threw at 75 was a solid-average pitch, so he can definitely spin it but has yet to do so consistently enough to call it a viable third pitch. He has the slot for a good curveball, and given the control he already showed before his injury (12 walks, total, in 87 $\frac{1}{3}$ pro innings, for a 3.6 percent rate), he has mid-rotation upside.

- Adrian Morejon, my No. 72 prospect coming into 2018, then pitched in one of the two intrasquad games San Diego held Saturday. (The Padres are baseball's version of the old woman who lived in a shoe, as they have so many players, they have to keep playing B games and intrasquads to give them all something to do.) Morejon was throwing 95-97 mph with late, hard, tailing life, and showed an above-average changeup and curveball in his brief stint. The six-foot (or maybe 6-foot-1; he looked taller than I remembered him) lefty got a late start last year due to some shoulder soreness, but finished the year with Low-A Fort Wayne and should start the year there, with the stuff and control to move quickly. He just turned 19 at the end of February.

- Reggie Lawson, part of the Padres' massive draft haul in 2016, threw for the opposing squad in Morejon's game and was throwing 93-94 mph, complemented with a solid-average curveball at 78-79 and a new, hard changeup at 88-89 that had the action of a two-seamer. Lawson is an athletic kid who really hasn't tapped into his body's potential yet, but this is

already a big step forward from where he was in the spring of 2016, when changes to his delivery caused him to go from a probable top 20 pick to the end of the second round.

- Cal Quantrill was their first pick that year (and No. 8 overall) despite not throwing a pitch the whole spring while coming back from Tommy John surgery. He was underwhelming in the other B game, sitting at 90-91 mph as well as throwing an above-average changeup, but missing up too often with the fastball. Quantrill is now three years off surgery, two off rehab, and it is at least possible that the bigger stuff he flashed in 2016 isn't sustainable, which means he'll have to improve his command and likely his timing to get anywhere close to his ceiling.

- San Diego's seventh-round pick from last year has one of the best names in pro ball, Nick Margevicius, and was dominant in two short-season levels last year -- 62 strikeouts, eight walks and a 1.31 ERA in 48 innings -- as a 21-year-old out of Rider University. Margevicius is 6-foot-6 with broad shoulders and worked at 90-91 mph complemented with an above-average curveball at 73-74 with tight spin. At worst, this is a big league reliever in the making, but given his size and apparent command, I'd love to see him start for a year.

- The Padres acquired outfielder Edward Olivares from Toronto earlier this winter in exchange for Yangervis Solarte, betting on his athleticism and power/speed upside. He can run and has a lean, runner's build, and he shows good bat speed, but at the plate he has no stride or toe-tap or anything to help him transfer his weight to his front side. There are a few hitters who can hit for power like that, but not many.

- On Monday, I caught some minor league action on the Colorado Rockies' back fields and saw a couple of at-bats from several of their top hitting prospects. Forrest Wall and Tyler Nevin both DH'd, which is unsurprising given their respective injury histories. Wall crushed a homer in his first at-bat on a 94 mph fastball from right-hander Antonio Santos (92-94 mph, but his fastball got whacked around), having zero trouble turning around that velocity; he walked his second time up on four pitches. Nevin has a huge frame, like his dad Phil did at the same age, and should have similar power, although the way he cuts off his swing in his finish limits how well he can drive the ball the other way.

- Ryan Vilade, who had a tremendous pro debut last summer and is one of their most promising bats, struggled in the same game, punching out twice, with four swing-and-misses on fastballs in or just above the zone. He has a plus arm at short but his feet are probably too slow for it, which is why most amateur scouts projected him to move to third or second.

- Third baseman Colton Welker rifled a double the other way on a 92 mph fastball in on his hands, then grounded out sharply in a later at-bat. He's a well below-average runner, which may impact his ability to stay on the dirt, but he's tightened up his conditioning and moved well at the position in this particular game.

Carlos Gonzalez and the Value of Options
by Jeff Sullivan – Fan Graphs
March 12, 2018

Back on the other side of the weekend, word got out the Rockies were re-signing **Carlos Gonzalez** for a year and \$8 million. In one way, it's great news, because now Gonzalez has a job. Furthermore, **Nolan Arenado** said bringing Gonzalez back "**would be the greatest thing ever.**" So, from the Rockies' standpoint, and also from Gonzalez's standpoint, it's terrific to preserve some familiarity. In another way, this is disappointing news. It's disappointing to Gonzalez, because a year ago, he turned down what would've been a lucrative three-year extension. And it's disappointing to some fans, who now wonder what to make of the Rockies' outfield picture. There are some younger players who are knocking on the door.

When I chatted last Friday, I received several inquiries related to **Raimel Tapia**, **David Dahl**, and **Mike Tauchman**. There's an argument to be made that all of them are major-league ready. Gonzalez now gets in the way, because he's not re-signing to platoon, or to sit on the bench. Gonzalez is going to play, and that playing time comes at the expense of other Rockies. What I would say is not to worry too much. Gonzalez now occupies a spot in a nine-man lineup, but I see this more as helping the depth. There's value in having moving pieces.

One of the more difficult things for any team to do is to balance shorter-term needs against longer-term development. If a team is trying to stay in the race, it might make decisions that work somewhat against potential long-term contributors. To get more specific, the Rockies just made the playoffs last season — briefly — and they should be in the hunt again in 2018. Probably not for the division, but there are two wild-card spots, and those are wide open. Eight months from now, **Charlie Blackmon** and **DJ LeMahieu** will be free agents. The Rockies want to win 85-90 games, and they can't just think about maximizing young-player reps.

Gonzalez, admittedly, is a bounceback candidate. He's not an obvious star anymore. He's coming off his worst career full season, and it happened at 31, which is anything but promising. The optimistic spin is that Gonzalez traced his problems to a lack of rest, **which he dealt with in later August**. From that point forward, he hit as well as ever, benefiting from a greater amount of sleep. A counterargument would be that the first four and a half months still happened, and Gonzalez had apparently had insomnia before. It didn't tank his game. From the sounds of things, it got worse because of the pressure he was putting on himself to perform. Gonzalez could slump again. The sleep explanation might be too convenient.

It would be great, though, if it were true. We all know how much better seven hours feel than four. And a number of baseball teams are encouraging better sleep habits, suggesting they believe in the benefits. I don't think the general benefit of sleep is under dispute. And even if you believe Gonzalez's down season was about something else, he *did* finish strong — he did finish looking like his old self — and he was one of just nine hitters to at least twice reach **115 miles per hour on a batted ball**. Gonzalez showed he can still hit the ball hard. On a seven-figure, one-year deal, Gonzalez comes with little risk. This is the contract he was going to get.

Gonzalez will presumably start in right field. He's neither a good nor a bad defender. He doesn't hit lefties. Still, he'll be the regular. In center, Blackmon should play every day. It gets interesting in left, and at first base. This is where there's still room. Mostly, this is why I don't think anyone's blocked.

You might see **Ian Desmond** in left, and **Ryan McMahon** at first. You might see **Gerardo Parra** and McMahon. You might see Parra and Desmond. Parra and Desmond are under expensive contract; McMahon is a prospect with limited service. Maybe that means McMahon doesn't get a fair shot. But ultimately, the Rockies do want to win as often as possible this season, and that means, in the bigger picture, performance should drive playing time. Think about the performances here.

McMahon is completely unproven. And to bring back up the prospects from earlier, Tapia, Dahl, and Tauchman have short records. In Dahl's case, he's coming off what was more or less a lost season. All of these players still might be able to help right away. Desmond just posted a wRC+ of 69. He's 32 years old. Parra, over the past four seasons, has been almost exactly replacement-level, and he's coming off a wRC+ of 90. He's nearly 31 years old.

Maybe, because of the salary commitments, Desmond and Parra start with a leg up. But they won't get much of a leash, not anymore, not now that they are where they are, with younger players close. I can't see Desmond being flat-out dropped, given the length of his deal, but the Rockies won't play him much if he doesn't rebound. And Parra could be DFA'd with little hesitation, since he's in his own deal's last year. Before Gonzalez re-signed, the Rockies might've been in position to start all of McMahon, Desmond, and Parra. Gonzalez takes away one position, but there's so much uncertainty with so many players, and by May or June, performance should allow the players to sort themselves out.

Having Gonzalez relieves some of the pressure on the outfield. At first base, the Rockies now need one of McMahon or Desmond to hit. In left field, the Rockies now need one of Parra, Tapia, Dahl, or Tauchman to hit. Or to play well, anyway,

including defense. And you can add Desmond to that group, too, if McMahon holds his own as a rookie. Almost no matter who's playing in left field, that guy won't play every day, because he'll need rest. Over in right, Gonzalez will also get days off, probably against tougher lefties. There are going to be at-bats even in the outfield to go around, and I haven't even mentioned the possibility that Gonzalez again comes out struggling. That would free up only more playing time, even though I acknowledge it could be difficult for the Rockies and Gonzalez to have that conversation, given what he's meant to the team over the years. Things can get tricky when established franchise stars underperform. The Rockies will cross that bridge if they get there.

Mostly, though, this should help more than it hurts. As the younger players are concerned, Parra probably won't be much of a playing-time obstacle. Both Desmond and Gonzalez need to prove they're better than they were last summer. Dahl could probably stand to open in Triple-A, given how his 2017 went. You might even say the same of Tapia, given his big-league 72 wRC+. Tauchman can float around, and since he's 27, he's already not on the traditional path. Perhaps, for the season's first few weeks, the Rockies have one regular lineup. But it doesn't have to be the same lineup they use in July, or September. Talent rises, and with Gonzalez, the Rockies have increased their talent level. Any and all obstacles here are surmountable.

After the year, Blackmon will be a free agent. Gonzalez will be a free agent. Parra will be a free agent. The Rockies are going to have more than enough outfield playing time to go around. They should have options to pick up that playing time then. The only way this particular season ends up too crowded is if too many players are good, or too many players are bad. Otherwise, the Rockies will simply sort themselves out, in whichever ways make the most sense.

Carlos Gonzalez, Rockies finalize \$5M, 1-year contract
PAT GRAHAM, AP Sports Writer \ Gazette
March 12, 2018

The Colorado Rockies added another charismatic leader to their 2018 clubhouse.

They certainly didn't have to look very far.

Colorado finalized a \$5 million, one-year contract with three-time All-Star Carlos Gonzalez, the longtime Rockies outfielder who has always been popular with his teammates in part because he rarely loses his sense of humor or perspective.

Not even last season, when he was in the midst of a prolonged slump. His agreement announced Monday includes another \$3 million in bonuses based on days on the active roster.

Gonzalez had a \$20 million salary last year in the final season of an \$80 million, seven-year contract and became a free agent after nine seasons with the Rockies. The three-time Gold Glove winner struggled for most of the year as the Rockies returned to the postseason for the first time since 2009. He showed signs of breaking out of his funk down the stretch, hitting six of his 14 homers in September.

His reawakening bat happened to coincide with his ability to get some restful sleep. CarGo struggled with insomnia last summer and the more he slumped on the field — he was hitting .214 in mid-July — the worse his sleeping habits became. The pattern was all-too-familiar each night — get home from a game, think about it, watch movies or TV until around 3 a.m. and fitfully fall asleep only to wake up tired.

Gonzalez said a touch of insomnia is something that's plagued him for years in large part because of all the travel. Last August, he began talking to a sleep specialist, who recommended such things as keeping his room cool and dark, having his phone out of reach and no movies after games to help his slumber. That helped him get a solid seven hours of sleep each night.

This also helped: Tweaking his grip on the bat. The left-hander hit .377 in September.

"It's not like we're re-inventing something or trying to change my swing," Gonzalez explained in the lead-up to the playoffs. "I was trying to stay calm, lower my hands, not over-swing. I was trying to put a good swing to the ball. Stay in the zone."

Gonzalez was a member of the Rockies team that went to the playoffs in 2009. The squad returned to the postseason last season but lost 11-8 at Arizona in the NL wild-card game as Gonzalez went 2 for 5 with an RBI.

The 32-year-old was acquired from Oakland on Nov. 12, 2008, as part of a deal that sent Matt Holliday to the Athletics. Gonzalez could not find a long-term deal in a cool market for free agents and returns to a crowded outfield that includes reigning NL batting champion Charlie Blackmon, good friend Gerardo Parra, Ian Desmond, Raimel Tapia and David Dahl, who missed last season with a rib injury.

Signed by Arizona in 2002, Gonzalez was traded in 2007 to Oakland, where he broke into the big leagues. He's a .288 hitter with 215 homers and 711 RBIs in 1,200 games.

Gonzalez is a magnetic personality in the clubhouse. He's frequently bouncing from one conversation to the next, with manager Bud Black saying last season: "They really enjoy Carlos as a teammate and respect his tenure."

In his time with the Rockies, Gonzalez has five seasons with 25 or more homers, won the 2010 NL batting title with a .336 average and hit for the cycle on July 31, 2010, against the Chicago Cubs.

He's struggled with injuries in recent seasons, missing time in 2017 with a strained right shoulder. He was hobbled in 2014 after hurting his index finger and later undergoing knee surgery.

His 211 homers with Colorado are the fourth-most in team history, trailing only Todd Helton (369), Larry Walker (258) and Vinny Castilla (239). Gonzalez is fourth all-time among Rockies with 245 doubles and fifth in RBIs with 685.

To make room on the roster, the Rockies placed right-hander Rayan Gonzalez on the 60-day disabled list. He is recovering from Tommy John surgery.