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## MEDIA CLIPS – Jan. 22, 2019

### **How will Walker, Helton fare in HOF voting?**

*Mo, Edgar, Doc right on track for election; Moose sits on the bubble*

**Matt Kelly | MLB.com | Jan. 21, 2019**

The Hot Stove has dominated conversation this winter, but believe it or not, it's almost Hall of Fame time.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame will announce the results of the Baseball Writers' Association of America ballot today, live on MLB Network and **simulcast on MLB.com** (coverage begins at 3 p.m. ET, with the announcement shortly after 6 p.m.), and the baseball world will find out who will join Veterans Committee selections Harold Baines and Lee Smith in the Class of 2019. This year's class figures to follow suit with the last five elections that featured at least two BBWAA inductees, further clearing the ballot "logjam" that has characterized the most recent voting cycles.

It seems that more and more BBWAA voters are making their ballots public with each passing year, and so while we don't know this year's results for certain, the 200-plus ballots aggregated by tracker Ryan Thibodaux (@NotMrTibbs) can help us make educated guesses (as a reminder, players need to be named on at least 75 percent of ballots to gain election). Scanning those **public ballots**, here are the storylines emerging from this year's Hall vote.

### **Mo still has a chance at perfection**

Ken Griffey Jr. came oh-so-close to being the first unanimous Hall of Fame electee when he garnered a record 99.3 percent of the BBWAA vote in 2016, but longtime Yankees closer Mariano Rivera could claim that honor -- or at least break Griffey's record. Rivera's name had appeared on all public ballots compiled by Thibodaux as of Monday, for some obvious reasons: He was an essential part of five World Series championship teams in the Bronx, owns the all-time saves

record and also the best league-adjusted **ERA+**(205, where 100 represents the league average) in history by a wide margin.

But there's a reason why legends like Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron and Willie Mays (and countless others) were *not* voted in unanimously; getting roughly 400 people to agree on anything is nearly impossible. At least one voter will likely omit Rivera for a variety of factors, including his role as a reliever, a strategic decision to give his vote to another candidate more in need or to simply hold the line that no player should go in with a perfect vote. That won't take anything away from Rivera, who was destined for Cooperstown the moment he stepped off the mound for the last time in 2013.

There was some uncertainty whether the late Roy Halladay would also be a first-ballot choice, but the longtime ace now seems like a lock with his current percentage hovering around 94 percent.

### **This could be the year for Edgar and Moose**

The past 10 players who have received between 70-74 percent of a BBWAA vote gained election the very next year, and Edgar Martinez looks like he'll be No. 11. The Mariners legend, who earned 70.4 percent of last year's vote, has already gained a net 17 ballots from returning voters. He now looks like a sure bet with more than 90 percent of the public ballots going his way.

Mike Mussina has also gained a net 17 votes from 2018, when he improved his chances significantly by earning 63.5 percent. The former Orioles and Yankees stalwart needs to maintain that pace, as Thibodaux estimates Mussina will need to land on roughly 70 percent of the unknown ballots. That would give the Hall a four-player BBWAA class for just the fifth time ever, but it would be the third such class within the last five years.

### **Two ballot mainstays are changing the conversation**

Larry Walker entered the BBWAA ballot in 2011 as Coors Field's first major test case in Hall of Fame voting, and now the conversation around Walker seems to be changing in his penultimate year of consideration. Many voters are recognizing Walker's **excellent numbers** away from Denver's mile-high altitude (along with his performances in Montreal and St. Louis), and that's helped him surge in the polls. The popular right fielder has already gained 37 net votes -- more than any other returning candidate -- from 2018, when he finished at just 34.1 percent. Walker stands to enjoy the same final-year push as Martinez and Mussina in 2020 if he can remain somewhere near his current 67-percent pace on public ballots.

His case will likely have a lot of bearing on fellow Rockies great Todd Helton, who's currently hovering around 20 percent in his ballot debut.

Slugging first baseman Fred McGriff is trending at roughly 36 percent and won't get into the Hall this year, but he should get serious consideration in his first Veterans Committee cycle (the "Today's Game" era electorate in 2022) thanks to a significant bump. McGriff has gained a net 32 ballots in his 10th and final year of eligibility as voters have begun to recognize his **consistency and clutch postseason performances** at the precipice of baseball's "Steroid Era."

### **The debate continues**

Speaking of that high-octane era, the Hall conversation wouldn't be complete without mention of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens. Their numbers would be unassailable if there weren't questions as to how they attained them, and that complicated question has split the electorate ever since the pair landed on the ballot in 2013. Bonds and Clemens are currently trending right near the 75-percent threshold, but the pair has gained just three votes apiece from 2018, when they finished at 56.4 percent and 57.3 percent, respectively. They'll need much more than that, since private voters have historically left Bonds and Clemens *off* their ballots. More ballot stagnation would mean the superstars' candidacies could truly come down to the wire if they don't gain election before their final year of eligibility in 2022.

Curt Schilling is another player who could already be in the Hall if not for off-field considerations, but his 13 net votes gained give him an outside chance of election as soon as this year. Schilling, like Bonds and Clemens, has until 2022 to get over the hump.

### **These stars are on the bubble**

Former Yankees great Andy Pettitte started and won more postseason games than any pitcher in history, but nevertheless he's in some danger of being a one-and-done candidate. Pettitte has been named on 6.8 percent of public ballots to this point, and needs to stay above 5 percent to remain on the ballot. Ten-time Gold Glove Award winner Andruw Jones is also in jeopardy, having received roughly 9 percent of the vote so far. Fellow first-timers Lance Berkman, Roy Oswalt and Michael Young will all need significant help to stick around for 2020.

There are a handful of interesting cases in the middle of the pack. Manny Ramirez has gained just four points over his 22-percent total in 2018, and he needs to build significant momentum moving forward. Another pair of 500-homer hitters in Gary Sheffield and Sammy Sosa remain stagnant between 10 and 15 percent, and second baseman Jeff Kent and closer Billy Wagner remain stuck under 20 percent. Defensive stalwarts Scott Rolen and Omar Vizquel have gained a net 15 and 14 votes, respectively, with eight years of BBWAA consideration left.

**Inbox: Do Rox need big move for WS push?**

*Beat reporter Thomas Harding answers fans' questions*

**Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Jan. 18, 2019**

**Why are the Rockies so reluctant to trade prospects, particularly at positions where they have a surplus, during this contention window? At some point you have to make bold, all-in moves to be a true championship contender, right?**

**-- @DWilsonsports**

It's tough to make a blanket statement, since a trade like that is based on timing, not simply the desire to be "bold."

The Royals made the **Johnny Cueto** deal at the 2015 non-waiver Trade Deadline, and the Astros made a deal for **Justin Verlander** at the 2017 Deadline.

The Rockies did fill needs at the 2017 Deadline for relief pitching (**Pat Neshek**) and catching (**Jonathan Lucroy**), and shored up a leaky bullpen at last season's Deadline (**Seunghwan Oh**). The moves didn't result in a World Series, but helped lead to postseason appearances.

Need has to line up with player. For example, last season, the player teams thought would bring home a championship was **Manny Machado**. While a title didn't happen for the Dodgers -- who have a high enough payroll to acquire a veteran if the farm system doesn't have an answer -- was Machado really in play for the Rockies? **Nolan Arenado** mans third base and **Trevor Story** plays shortstop.

And, yes, the Rockies are reluctant to deal young players, mainly because they use them. Theoretically, had those deals been made in recent years, they would not have **David Dahl**, who is expected to be part of the 2019 lineup. And while they've had relative health with starting pitching in recent years, they need to be protected in case of injuries.

The projected 2019 Rockies lineup has homegrown players at four of the eight positions, with three others having legitimate hopes as starters. In other words, those players are more necessities than surpluses. It's difficult to lose several of those players for one piece before a season starts.

Right now, the big name on the trade market is Marlins catcher **J.T. Realmuto**, but getting him would mean giving up young, club-controlled players, like Story and Dahl. And the Rockies would rather have **Kyle Freeland** and **German Marquez** throwing to someone else than Realmuto catching a staff without either of them.

The Deadline may or may not be different. If a team is clearly in the postseason chase and the answer is out there, like it was for the Royals and the Astros, then the Rockies' willingness to make that move will be tested.

**1. Do you see the Rockies making a move at catcher or do you think they stand pat? 2. Do the lack of moves signal a long term contract in the works for Nolan?**

-- @Parsons\_T13

The answers are connected. As for catching, I've laid out the Realmuto situation, and the Rockies never put themselves in play for **Yasmani Grandal**, who cost the Brewers \$18.25 million for one season, plus their third-highest pick in the 2019 MLB Draft.

The Rockies will be spending at least \$24 million for the arbitration-eligible Arenado this year, and the hope of a multi-year deal meant even if they fancied Grandal they were not going to tie up funds in multiple years to outbid the Brewers.

**Are the Rockies going to make a move to strengthen the rotation? A Shelby Miller-type signing would be perfect for the Rox and the player.**

-- @dannysterano

The Rockies have tried using down-on-their-luck pitchers, with mixed results at best. They've now built the best rotation in their history from within. That said, if an ace-level pitcher in his prime became available at the Deadline, that would be worth considering.

**What's Bryan Shaw's status? His control was nonexistent and he paid dearly last year. Any tweaks coming for 2019?**

-- @bobdewy

I talked to bullpen coach Darren Holmes and detailed the plights of Shaw (4-6, 5.93 ERA, 61 games) and **Jake McGee** (2-4, 6.49, 61 games) **for my article Thursday**. Holmes is big on Shaw as a competitor.

"He's a little geeky, a little quirky," Holmes said. "But I love him because that guy wants the ball. He never shied away from going into a ballgame."

## Hampson among MLB's Top 10 2B prospects

Mike Rosenbaum | MLB.com | Jan. 20, 2019

MLB Pipeline ended last week with a look at our **Top 10 first-base prospects** for 2019, a group teeming with future sluggers, some on the cusp of the Major Leagues.

Our new list of the Top 10 second basemen has even more players nearly ready for the big leagues, as well as some familiar names, with Keston Hiura and **Luis Urias** headlining the five holdovers from **last year's list**.

Urias, **Garrett Hampson** and **Brandon Lowe** all reached the Majors in 2018, and they all seemed poised to make a greater impact in the upcoming season. They also account for half of the six total players on the list who are expected to arrive in the Majors in '19 -- a group that could grow even deeper should a few others surpass projections.

### Top 10 Prospects by Position

[RHP - Breakdown | List](#)

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Additionally, many second basemen who made our Top 10 list in previous years have gone on to have successful careers. Among MLB Pipeline's Top 10 lists for position players dating back to 2011, second basemen have been the third-most valuable group with 308.0 **Wins Above Replacement**, trailing only outfielders (496.7) and shortstops (569.5).

### The Top 10 (ETA)

1. Keston Hiura, Brewers (2019)



2. Luis Urias, Padres (2019)
3. Nick Madrigal, White Sox (2020)
4. Vidal Brujan, Rays (2020)
5. Garrett Hampson, Rockies (2019)
6. **Jeter Downs**, Dodgers (2021)
7. Brandon Lowe, Rays (2019)
8. Cavan Biggio, Blue Jays (2019)
9. Jahmai Jones, Angels (2020)
10. **Isan Diaz**, Marlins (2019)

**Complete list »**

## **Top tools**

### **Best Hitter: Hiura, Urias (70)**

Hiura led NCAA Division I hitters with a .442 average as a UC Irvine junior and was widely considered by scouts as the top pure hitter in the 2017 Draft. After posting a .371 average in his pro debut, Hiura reached Double-A in his first full season, hitting .293 across two levels, and then raked in the Arizona Fall League en route to **circuit MVP honors**. Urias won the California League batting title (.330) and **MVP award** as a 19-year-old in 2016 and owns a .306 career average in 467 Minor League games.

### **Best Power: Hiura (60)**

Hiura recorded 52 extra-base hits including 13 home runs in his first full season, and he's poised to tap into even more of his plus raw power as he gains experience and refines his approach. He projects to hit for power to all fields, too, thanks to a preternatural feel for barreling the baseball with a short, impactful right-handed swing that consistently produces loud contact.

### **Fastest Runner: Brujan (70)**

Brujan's 112 runs scored and 55 steals were the first- and second-highest totals in the Minors, respectively, in 2018. That he hits for average, reaches base at a high clip and doesn't strike out much provides Brujan with ample opportunities to wreak havoc on pitchers and defenses with his wheels.

### **Best Arm: Urias, Brujan, Downs (55)**

The keystone doesn't require the type of arm strength needed for the left side of the infield, so it shouldn't be a surprise that no player on this list has a true plus arm. That said, Urias, Brujan and Downs all have seen time at shortstop in their respective careers because they have above-average arms.

### **Best Defender: Madrigal, Hampson (60)**

Madrigal could be deployed by the White Sox as a shortstop because he has the hands and actions for the position, but his average arm makes him a better long-term fit at second base, where he could be a Gold Glove Award winner. The same goes for the speedy, slick-fielding Hampson, who has seen time at both middle-infield spots.

### **Superlatives**

#### **Highest Ceiling: Hiura**

Hiura's ability to hit for both average and power makes him one of the more exciting offensive prospects in the Minors, and with just one full season under his belt, he's only begun to scratch the surface of his potential. He's a future middle-of-the-lineup run producer and could be the best second baseman in baseball during his prime.

#### **Highest Floor: Madrigal**

The White Sox made Madrigal the No. 4 pick in last year's Draft because there's very little doubt that he'll be an everyday player in the Majors. In addition to his aforementioned defense, Madrigal also was one of the better hitters in his class, with an approach and contact skills that will have him hitting atop a lineup for years to come.

#### **Rookie of the Year Candidate: Urias**

Urias made his big league debut last August and showed he could do a little bit of everything over parts of 12 games before a hamstring injury prematurely ended his season. Assuming he makes the Opening Day roster, he could have an early advantage in the National League ROY race based on his ability to hit near the top of an order and make everyday contributions on both sides of the ball.

#### **Highest Riser: Downs**

Signed by the Reds for \$1,822,500 after they selected him with the No. 32 overall pick in the 2017 Draft, Downs posted 13 homers and 37 steals in his first full pro season as a 19-year-old in the Class A Midwest League. That power-speed

combo caught the attention of the Dodgers, and they acquired him in December as part of a package for **Yasiel Puig, Matt Kemp, Alex Wood** and **Kyle Farmer**.

#### **Humblest Beginning: Urias**

Urias was a 16-year-old playing in the Mexican League when the Padres purchased his rights for \$100,000 from Mexico City in December 2013. He's quickly proved a bargain for the club, excelling as a younger player at every stop in his career en route to the Major Leagues. He's one of two players on the list who wasn't taken in a Draft.

#### **Most to Prove: Jones**

The Angels' second-round pick from 2015 reached Double-A as a 20-year-old last season, but, overall, he hit just .239 across two levels. A shift from the outfield to second base likely played a part in that, and he'll need to make further defensive improvements to remain at the position. Jones does, however, have at least average tools across the board, including plus speed, and he'll carry momentum from a solid Arizona Fall League campaign into 2019.

#### **Keep An Eye On: Kevin Kramer, Pirates**

A revamped swing and an emphasis on hitting the ball in the air enabled Kramer to tap into his power last season, as he connected on a career-high 15 home runs and finished second in the Triple-A International League in both average (.311) and doubles (35) before making his big league debut in September.

## Ottavino gone, but leaves parting gift for duo

*McGee, Shaw on track for bounce-back 2019 after following righty reliever to Driveline in Washington*

Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Jan. 20, 2019

DENVER -- The Rockies don't have time to lament the loss of righty reliever **Adam Ottavino**, who sources say **signed Thursday with the Yankees** for three years and \$27 million. They're busy trying to make sure last year's investments -- same years and dollars -- in lefty **Jake McGee** and righty **Bryan Shaw** pay dividends.

Last year, Shaw finished 4-6 with a 5.93 ERA in 61 appearances, and McGee was 2-4, 6.49 in 61 games. One reason the pair's struggles didn't mortally injure the Rockies' postseason hopes was the performance of Ottavino, who struck out 112 in 77 2/3 innings.

Interestingly, on his way out the Rockies' door, Ottavino may have left Shaw and McGee a road map to effectiveness. After his own struggles in 2017 (2-3, 5.06 ERA), Ottavino recalibrated his mechanics and pitch design at Driveline Baseball in Kent, Wash., last winter.

By the end of 2018, which ended with neither Shaw nor McGee on the Rockies' postseason roster, the duo was turning its attention to improvement. Maybe they can pull an Ottavino-style turnaround.

"It is what it is for 2018, but let's honestly self-evaluate, put our guard down and figure out together how this is going to get better for the future," Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich said. "We certainly still believe in those guys. But they have a job to do."

Rockies bullpen coach Darren Holmes said conversations with Ottavino led to a trip to Driveline -- for Holmes, McGee, Shaw and righty **Chad Bettis** -- shortly after Colorado was swept by the Brewers in the National League Division Series.

Holmes not only pitched 13 seasons in the Majors but at one point worked as a biomechanics specialist with baseball players and Olympic athletes. Holmes signed on for the Driveline trip based on his background and Ottavino's endorsement.

"He knows if something is good or if it's 'eyewash' -- they're trying to make money off you," Holmes said.

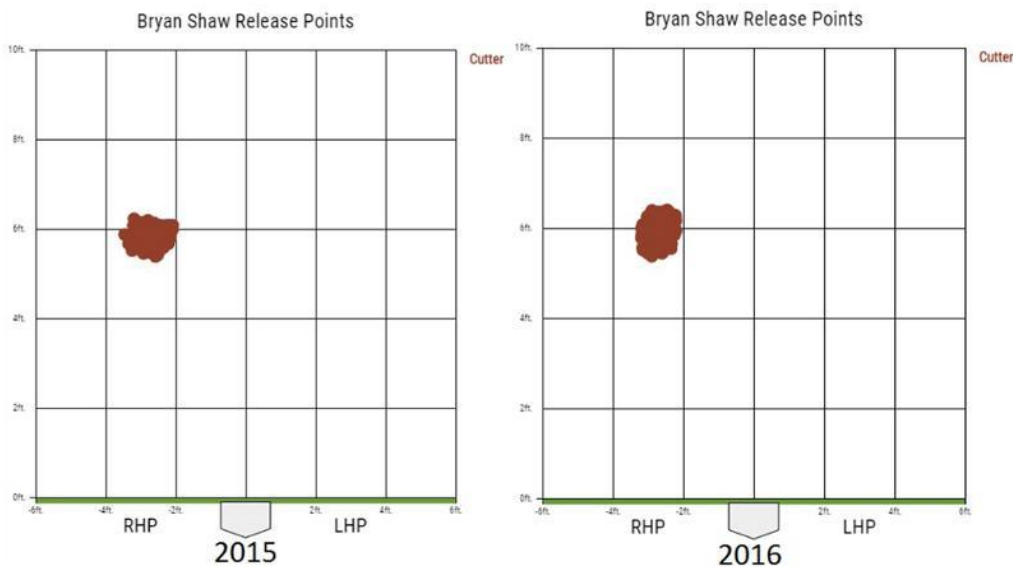
When McGee, 32, joined the Rockies before the 2016 season, Holmes taught him how to throw a curveball. But McGee still relied on a fastball he has thrown 90 percent of the time over his nine-year Major League career -- and 742 of his 841 pitches last year, according to **Statcast™**.

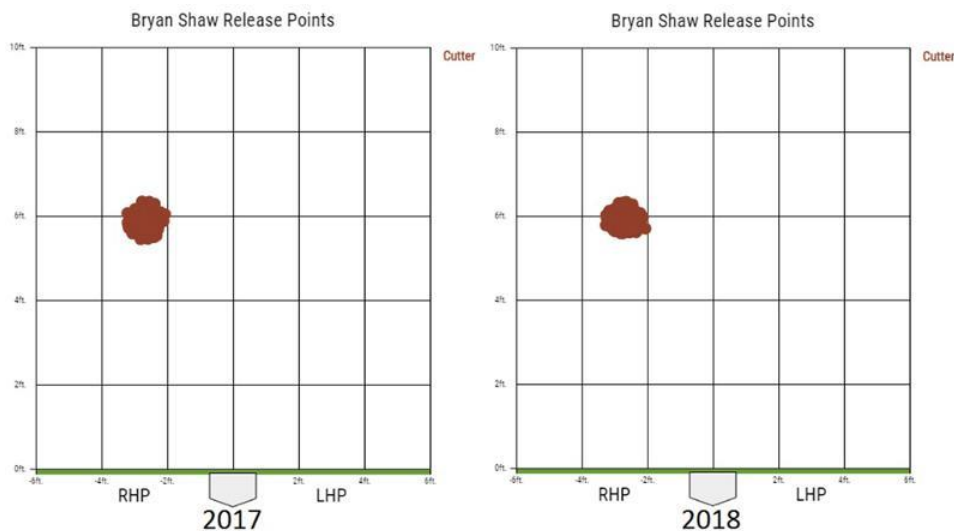
However, knee and back injuries in recent years have led to McGee's average fastball velocity dropping from 95.5 mph in 2015 to 93.7 last season. Low early velocity was a warning sign in '18 when, in 24 of his 61 appearances, his average first-batter velocity didn't eclipse 93 mph.

Holmes said an improved slider will make the hitter account for it, which could help enhance a fastball even when velocity is down. Holmes recalled a June 28 matchup against the Giants' **Brandon Crawford**, when McGee threw four consecutive bouncing sliders and attracted three futile swings.

"His fastball is going to be better, because he has now incorporated an 82-83 mph slider to go along with a 95-97 mph fastball," Holmes said.

Shaw, 31, had a difficult time making his adjustments during the season because there was no ah-ha moment. The Rockies overlaid video of Shaw's cutter from 2014 to last season and found no difference, and Statcast™ shows little to no change in his release points each year from '15-'18.





The biomechanical measurements, however, provided more information, not only on mechanics but offseason workouts. Holmes also said Shaw could be better after a year pitching in the unique Coors Field atmosphere.

"Whether Shaw will admit this or not -- we have talked about it -- I do think coming into Coors Field, things are a little bit different," Holmes said. "I think he came in probably thinking he had to spin his cutter a little bit more than what he actually did. I think that got him in a funk where he couldn't get the feel."

Holmes said both are on the right path -- one blazed by Ottavino.

"What made it comfortable for all those guys to go there was Otto went there the year before, came back and had a phenomenal year," Holmes said.

## Lavigne, Nevin among Top 10 1B prospects

Jim Callis | MLB.com | Jan. 17, 2019

First basemen don't usually draw a lot of acclaim as prospects, in large part because they tend to be less well-rounded players than those at other positions. When MLB Pipeline releases its new Top 100 next week, Minor League home run leader Peter Alonso will be the only first baseman who's not a two-way performer on the list.

However, there has been a resurgence in first-base prospects in the last couple of years. The **2017 Draft** featured five first basemen in the top 35 picks, and four of them -- Brendan McKay (Rays), Nick Pratto (Royals), Evan White (Mariners) and Brent Rooker (Twins) -- rank among the **10 best** in the Minors at this moment.

Last June, Triston Casas (Red Sox) and Grant Lavigne (Rockies) went before the second round and quickly claimed spots on our first base Top 10. Another Rockies farmhand, Tyler Nevin, boosted his stock by leading the Arizona Fall League in all three slash categories (.426/.535/.593).

### Top 10 Prospects by Position

[RHP - Breakdown | List](#)

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While first base may not be loaded with five-tool prospects, the position possesses more depth than it typically does.

### The Top 10 (ETA)

1. Peter Alonso, Mets (2019)

2. Evan White, Mariners (2020)
3. Nathaniel Lowe, Rays (2019)
4. Brendan McKay, Rays (2020)
5. Brent Rooker, Twins (2019)
6. Nick Pratto, Royals (2021)
7. Triston Casas, Red Sox (2022)
8. Grant Lavigne, Rockies (2022)
9. Tyler Nevin, Rockies (2020)
10. Matt Thaiss, Angels (2019)

**Complete list »**

## **Top Tools**

### **Best Hitter: White, Lowe, McKay, Pratto, Lavigne, Nevin, Thaiss (55)**

Lowe always had good plate discipline, but he broke out in 2018 by driving more balls in the air and tightening his strike zone further. He batted .330 and ranked fifth in the Minors with a .985 OPS. Nevin opened eyes in the AFL with his pure hitting ability and mastery of the strike zone, while organization mate Lavigne did the same in his pro debut by batting .350 and topping the Rookie-level Pioneer League with a .477 on-base percentage.

### **Best Power: Alonso, Rooker, Casas (60)**

Alonso led the Minors with 36 homers during the regular season and the **Arizona Fall League** with six more, not including a shot off a **103-mph Nate Pearson fastball** during the Fall Stars Game. His bat speed and strength produce tremendous exit velocities and translate his impressive raw power into game production.

### **Fastest Runner: White (60)**

White has a highly unusual profile for a first baseman, as he bats right-handed and throws lefty, his hitting ability stands out more than his power and he's as athletic as it gets at the position. He's a plus runner, though his quickness is more apparent in the field than on the bases.

### **Best Arm: McKay, Pratto, Casas (60)**

Both McKay and Casas had low-90s fastballs when they pitched as amateurs, and McKay continues to deal that kind of



heat as he tries to make it as a two-way player. Pratto also was a two-way star as an amateur, throwing in the upper 80s and helping the U.S. national 18-and-under team win a pair of gold medals at international events.

### **Best Defender: White (70)**

White's defense gets the same rave reviews that **Cody Bellinger's** did when the Dodgers slugger was rising through the Minors. It's easy to envision him winning Gold Gloves in the big leagues, but he also has the quickness and solid arm strength to fit anywhere in the outfield if needed.

### **Superlatives**

#### **Highest Ceiling: Pratto**

Pratto has the best chance to be a plus hitter for both average and power, and he also has Gold Glove potential at first base. After a slow start in his first full pro season, he batted .322/.394/.518 in the second half in the low Class A South Atlantic League and helped Lexington win the championship.

#### **Highest Floor: White**

White is a safe bet to hit thanks to his advanced approach and ability to barrel the ball, and he's beginning to unlock the power potential in his 6-foot-3, 205-pound frame. He's also an outstanding defender and has the versatility to play all three outfield spots.

#### **Rookie of the Year Candidate: Alonso**

The Mets have crowded their infield by trading for **Robinson Cano** and **J.D. Davis** and signing **Jed Lowrie**, and they have plenty of candidates to play first base. None of them can match Alonso's power, however, and he has little to prove in the Minors except for upgrading his defense.

#### **Highest Riser: Lowe**

Lowe hit just seven homers in his first full pro season and ranked 13th on MLB Pipeline's **Rays Top 30 Prospects** list a year ago. After making adjustments to his swing, he slammed 27 homers during his coming-out party in 2018 and should push for a big league role with Tampa Bay, which lacks a surefire starter at first base or DH.

#### **Humblest Beginning: Lowe**

When the Rays signed Lowe for \$100,000 as a 13th-rounder out of Mississippi State in 2016, it was seen as a favor to his

younger brother Josh, whom they selected 13th overall in the first round of the same Draft. Two years later, Nathaniel had surpassed him as a prospect.

### **Most To Prove: McKay**

Trying to make it as both a hitter and a pitcher is a difficult task. The No. 4 overall pick in the 2017 Draft, McKay lived up to his reputation as being more advanced on the mound by logging a 2.41 ERA with a 103/14 K/BB ratio in 78 1/3 innings on the mound in his first full pro season. He batted just .214/.368/.359, however, and he'll have to up his production if he wants to continue pulling double duty.

### **Keep An Eye On: Luken Baker, Cardinals**

Another two-way star, Baker could have gone in the top two rounds of the 2015 Draft as a pitcher out of high school if he hadn't been set on attending Texas Christian. He gave up pitching after his freshman season but has tremendous strength and leverage in his 6-foot-4, 265-pound frame, giving him huge power upside that led the Cardinals to draft him in the second round last June.

## **First Spring Training workout dates for all clubs**

**Matt Kelly | MLB.com | Jan. 20, 2019**

Major League Baseball has revealed the first Spring Training workout dates for pitchers and catchers and those for the full squads for all 30 clubs. MLB also announced game times for all Cactus and Grapefruit League action in February and March.

The A's, fresh off their surprise run to the 2018 American League Wild Card Game, will be the first club to have its pitchers and catchers report. They'll do so on Monday, Feb. 11, followed by the Indians and Mariners on Feb. 12 and the remainder of MLB clubs in the days following. Oakland and Seattle will travel to Tokyo to stage two exhibition games each against Japanese teams on March 17-18, followed by the first two games of the 2019 regular season on March 20-21 at Tokyo Dome.

### **• Complete Spring Training schedule**

Oakland and Seattle will hold their first full-squad workouts on Saturday, Feb. 16, in Arizona, with the rest of MLB following suit in the days after. The Braves will be the last club to hold its first full-squad workout, doing so on Thursday, Feb. 21. The A's and Mariners open Cactus League action with a matchup on Feb. 21, and the Rays and Phillies open up Grapefruit League action the following day. The Red Sox and Tigers will play exhibition games against college teams on Feb. 22.

Here are first-workout dates for pitchers and catchers and full squads for each team:

### **AMERICAN LEAGUE**

Angels: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Astros: Feb. 14/Feb. 18

Athletics: Feb. 11/Feb. 16

Blue Jays: Feb. 14/Feb. 18

Indians: Feb. 12/Feb. 18

Mariners: Feb. 12/Feb. 16

Orioles: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Rangers: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Rays: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Red Sox: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Royals: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Tigers: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Twins: Feb. 14/Feb. 18

White Sox: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Yankees: Feb. 14/Feb. 19

## **NATIONAL LEAGUE**

Braves: Feb. 16/Feb. 21

Brewers: Feb. 14/Feb. 19

Cardinals: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Cubs: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Diamondbacks: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Dodgers: Feb. 13/Feb. 19

Giants: Feb. 14/Feb. 19

Marlins: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Mets: Feb. 14/Feb. 18

Nationals: Feb. 14/Feb. 19

Padres: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Phillies: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Pirates: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Reds: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

Rockies: Feb. 13/Feb. 18

## **First Spring Training workout dates for all clubs**

**Jim Callis, Jonathan Mayo and Mike Rosennaum | MLB.com | Jan. 20, 2019**

MLB Pipeline recently unveiled its annual **All-Defense Team**, but there were only so many spots to fill. It made us realize there were so many outstanding defenders across all 30 organizations.

Evaluating defense is still very much subjective, with metrics measuring fielding still imperfect. Still, each system has glove work that stands out more than others, and we considered many to present one best defender from each organization.

### **NL West**

#### **D-backs: Geraldo Perdomo, SS, No. 21**

Perdomo's United States debut in 2018 was solid all-around, and he even earned a promotion from the Arizona Rookie League to the Pioneer League in the process. Tall and rangy, the teenager has shown the tools to stay at shortstop long term with outstanding range, actions and hands to go with a strong arm.

#### **Rockies: Yonathan Daza, OF, No. 18**

Thanks to his plus speed and fine instincts, Daza covers a lot of ground in center field, and he possesses a plus-plus arm that stands out at his position. He's also a career .310 hitter who won the Class A Advanced California League batting title in 2017 with a .341 mark.

#### **Dodgers: Will Smith, C, No. 5**

An outstanding athlete for a catcher, Smith has already shown that he's capable of playing third base and filling in at second. He has very soft hands and impressive agility, making him a fine receiver and framer, and he has a solid arm that plays better than that because of his fast footwork.

#### **Padres: Buddy Reed, OF, No. 13**

A member of MLB Pipeline's All-Defense Team, Reed's 70-grade speed and long, gliding strides allow him to cover huge swaths of territory in center field -- and he showcased that with his catch in last year's SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game. Reed also has a strong arm and recorded 12 outfield assists in 2018, surpassing his combined total from his first two seasons.

**Giants: Joey Bart, C, No. 1 (MLB No. 23)**

The No. 2 overall pick in the 2018 Draft, Bart draws more attention with his bat, but his work behind the plate is impressive as well. He has improved markedly since high school, when scouts wondered if he could stay at catcher, enhancing his agility and receiving and improving the accuracy of his strong arm.

## **Trade rumors of Nolan Arenado to Yankees from Rockies are unfounded**

*All-star third baseman is entering final year of contract*

**Patrick Saunders | Denver Post | Jan. 22, 2019**

Nolan Arenado's future is likely to remain a hot topic well into the 2019 season, but suggestions that a trade might be brewing between the Rockies and Yankees to ship the all-star third baseman to New York are unfounded.

Multiple Major-league sources close to the situation characterized the trade whispers as "far fetched."

On Friday, a report from SYN.tv suggested that the Yankees and Rockies might have already engaged in trade talks:

"... People briefed on the Yankees thinking say that GM Brian Cashman — who did not respond to a request for comment — has internally discussed the possibility of trying to trade for Arenado either now or during the season. One source said that the teams have likely talked already, but neither Cashman nor Rockies GM Jeff Bridich have confirmed this."

Arenado, 28, is entering the final year of his contract with Colorado. The Rockies and Arenado have yet to agree to a one-year deal for the 2019 season, meaning that salary arbitration next month remains a possibility. Arenado is seeking \$30 million but the Rockies countered with a \$24 million offer.

The third baseman, who would be the top prize in the free-agent class of 2020, made \$17.75 million last season.

**Saunders: Rockies better hope Bryan Shaw, Jake McGee rebound with Adam Ottavino gone**  
*Scott Oberg's emergence could fill a hole in bullpen*

**Patrick Saunders | Denver Post | Jan. 18, 2019**

Big-league relievers can be a fickle bunch. Hence, signing them to big-money contracts is risky business.

Consider the case of right-hander Adam Ottavino, the former Rockies set-up man who on Thursday agreed to a three-year, \$27 million deal with the Yankees. At this time a year ago, Ottavino looked like he was on the path to nowhere. He was coming off a 2017 season in which he went 2-3 with a 5.06 ERA, a 1.631 WHIP and a maddening 6.6 walks per nine innings.

But last winter, Ottavino examined his game and then rebuilt himself as a pitcher. The result was the best season of his career. He posted a 2.43 ERA and struck out 112 batters over 77  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings. The 112 strikeouts were fourth-most among big-league relievers and set a franchise record for a Rockies reliever. Now he's a rich man.

The irony is that last winter, the Rockies, looking to shore up the worst bullpen in the majors, gave right-hander Bryan Shaw and lefty Jake McGee three-year, \$27 million contracts. They also gave closer Wade Davis a three-year, \$52 million deal. Davis produced, setting a franchise record with 43 saves as the Rockies made the playoffs.

Shaw and McGee, however, were busts. In 61 games, McGee's ERA was a shockingly high 6.49. Shaw, known as a reliable workhorse in five seasons in Cleveland, had a 5.93 ERA in 61 games. The Rockies kept both pitchers off their postseason roster.

If the duo doesn't rebound in 2019, the Rockies could be in deep trouble, especially with Ottavino gone. The saving grace could be the emergence of right-hander Scott Oberg, who was scored upon just four times in his final 34 games, going 6-1 with a 1.85 ERA and 40 strikeouts vs. just five walks in that stretch.

Still, Ottavino's departure hurts. The Rockies kept in touch with him during the offseason but never offered him a contract. I texted Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich and asked him why the Rockies didn't pursue Ottavino. He didn't answer that question, saying only, "Except for July 19 to July 21 of 2019 (when the Rockies play the Yankees in the Bronx), we wish Adam nothing but the best. He gave us everything he had when he was here."



So I can only surmise that there was simply not enough money to go around. Having spent \$106 million on the bullpen last year, the Rockies weren't going to invest big bucks there again. What's more, star third baseman Nolan Arenado's future in Colorado could be dependent on offering him the biggest contract in franchise history.

Actually, the fact that the Rockies didn't pursue Ottavino, or another big-time reliever, is not a surprise.

"I don't see us doing anything to the degree as I chose to do last year at this time," Bridich said at the winter meetings in December. "We need last year's decisions to pitch better than they did in 2018. It's not a lack of talent or a sudden inability to perform well. But they need to do a better job."

Included in the must-improve group is left-hander Chris Rusin, who also displayed a reliever's fickle nature, regressing from a 2.65 ERA over 60 games in 2017 to a 6.09 ERA in 49 games in 2018.

"The bottom line (with the bullpen) is that if Bryan and Jake and Chris pitch to their abilities, we are most likely a very different sort of a bullpen (in 2018)," Bridich said. "Adam did a wonderful job in helping to keep our pen together and getting us into the playoffs. In a lot of ways, he helped to carry us through some significant struggles of some of his teammates. The other guys are veterans and pros, and they need to do a better job."

**Adam Ottavino to Yankees: Ex-Rockies reliever agrees to 3-year, \$27M deal with New York**  
*Ottavino, 33, posted a 2.43 ERA and struck out 112 batters over 77 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings last season*

**Patrick Saunders | Denver Post | Jan. 17, 2019**

Adam Ottavino is going home.

The former Rockies setup man, who baffles batters with his nasty array of sliders, agreed to a three-year, \$27 million deal to join the New York Yankees bullpen Thursday.

Ottavino, who was born and raised in Brooklyn and lives in Manhattan, was considered one of the best right-handed relievers on the free-agent market. ESPN's Jeff Passan first reported the details of Ottavino's deal. The contract is contingent on Ottavino passing a physical.

**Adam Ottavino's deal with the New York Yankees is for three years and \$27 million, league sources tell ESPN.**

**— Jeff Passan (@JeffPassan) January 17, 2019**

The Rockies touched base with Ottavino during the offseason but never offered him a contract.

Ottavino, 33, is coming off the best season of his career. He posted a 2.43 ERA and struck out 112 batters over 77 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings for an average of 13 strikeouts per nine innings. The 112 strikeouts were fourth-most among big-league relievers and set a franchise record for a Rockies reliever. He throws a mid-90s fastball and a devastating slider that can make right-handed hitters look helpless. Last season, Ottavino held right-handed hitters to a .120 average at Coors Field.

Ottavino became the third former Rockies player to sign with the Yankees this offseason, joining shortstop Troy Tulowitzki and infielder DJ LeMahieu, who on Monday signed a two-year, \$24 million contract.

The addition of Ottavino beefs up an already stout Yankees bullpen that includes closer Aroldis Chapman, setup man Dellin Betances and late-inning reliever Zach Britton, who agreed to a three-year, \$39 million deal earlier this offseason.

Last winter, the Rockies spent \$106 million in an attempt to upgrade their bullpen, giving three-year, \$27 million contracts to left-hander Jake McGee (6.49 ERA) and right-hander Bryan Shaw (5.93), both of whom had disappointing seasons and

were left off the team's postseason roster. Colorado also signed closer Wade Davis to a three-year, \$52 million deal and he responded with a National League-best 43 saves, but a 4.13 ERA.

Ottavino, who missed most of his 2015 season because of Tommy John surgery, had a disastrous 2017 season when he walked nearly seven batters per nine innings and was left off the Rockies' wild-card playoff roster. He retooled his delivery last winter in his own baseball gym, a vacant commercial space in a strip mall in Harlem. His homemade setup included a store-bought pitching mound, a strip of artificial turf, netting and cameras to record his pitching motion.

Ottavino is 17-20 with 17 saves, a 3.68 ERA and 464 strikeouts over 413 innings in his career.

## **Kiszla: Trade Nolan Arenado? Here's a plan to keep him in a Rockies uniform through 2022.**

**Mark Kiszla | Denver Post | Jan. 16, 2019**

The \$30 million baseball player isn't dead. But he can kill a major-league team's best chance to win the World Series.

If third baseman Nolan Arenado and the Rockies can't agree on the basic economic principles of building a championship team, all talk of a long-term contract is a waste of everyone's oxygen. Let's file for an amicable divorce and find out the talent haul Arenado could bring Colorado in trade.

Deadlines bring clarity, and as the machinations of arbitration force Arenado and the Rockies to get serious about money, let's set aside sentiment and ego. This is a baseball math problem.

If the best player in franchise history doesn't share a vision with general manager Jeff Bridich for how the Rockies can rock October, it's best for both parties to get on with the business of trading Arenado.

Trade Arenado? That's not the outcome anyone wants here, whether you hang on every pitch at Coors Field or are too busy drinking beer on the party deck to know the score.

But to remain in a Rockies uniform, Arenado will have to sacrifice money. Not in the name of a hometown discount, a ploy that would insult his intelligence and skill.

So let's call it a championship discount. If Arenado wants to chance to win a ring in Colorado, it's going to cost him. And truth be told? The Yankees, Red Sox or Dodgers would also be foolish to give Arenado a long-term deal on the lunacy side of \$300 million.

While it would be easy for me to shout "pay the man!" I honestly believe a 10-year, \$300 million deal would be counter-productive to the Rockies and Arenado winning a championship during the next decade. Let another team make that mistake.

Don't get me wrong. I love Arenado. He brings a gold glove to work every day and has finished among the top five in voting for most valuable player honors in three consecutive seasons. Every penny is hard earned.

But let the job hunts of Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, the two most prominent free agents of the moment, be a lesson to Arenado and Rockies fans alike. Teams seem willing to commit long term for a star hitter in his prime, because it's unlikely that bat will be worth all those bucks well into his 30s.

While Arenado has reasonably made the argument he values the chance to play in October every year more than playing his entire career in Rockies pinstripes, the most aggressive suitors for Harper and Machado have been the Philadelphia Phillies and Chicago White Sox. Would those two franchises give either Machado or Harper a substantively better chance to play in the World Series than the opportunity Arenado has now with Colorado?

I don't pretend to understand as much about baseball or economics as Bridich, who played catcher and graduated from Harvard. (I drank cheap beer and listened to the Ramones at the University of Missouri, for those of you keeping score at home.) But even a knucklehead like me knows:

There are seven major-league players scheduled to earn a base salary in excess of \$30 million in 2019. It's an exclusive club. No bums allowed. All are working on Hall of Fame resumes.

Their names? Stephen Strasburg, Mike Trout, Zack Greinke, Clayton Kershaw, David Price, Max Scherzer and Miguel Cabrera. Among this magnificent seven, they've combined to play 81 seasons in the big leagues and earn 45 invitations to the All-Star Game. Not bad, eh?

But know how many World Series rings these seven, filthy-rich stars have earned in those cumulative 81 seasons? Two. Price was the starting pitcher when Boston clinched the championship in 2018. Cabrera won his ring way back in 2003, as a rookie outfielder earning \$165,000 for the Florida Marlins.

Whether he stays in Denver or moves on as free agent in 2020, Arenado would be wise to settle for less than top dollar if the ring's really his thing.

Tom Brady gets paid less than Matthew Stafford, but which quarterback leads a more fulfilling football life? The greatest threat to Golden State's dynasty is not any NBA rival, but the desire of their core of stars to seek top dollar in the future. After Houston rewarded Jose Altuve's career year in 2017 with a new \$151 million contract, the Astros failed to repeat as champs, eliminated by Boston and outfielder Mookie Betts, who was paid a \$10.5 million salary last season as the American League's most valuable player.

So what should the Rockies and Arenado do?

Here's the first question to ask: Does Arenado really believe he can compete for a championship playing alongside young Colorado starting pitchers German Marquez and Kyle Freeland? That's his call. But if he wants to give it a shot, I would suggest the Rockies make Arenado the most handsomely paid player in the majors, with an average salary of \$35 million. The sacrifice required by Arenado? The Rockies' obligation is limited to a four-year contract, worth \$140 million, which would carry him through the 2022 season and his 31st birthday.

Deal? Or no deal?

## **Hall of Fame: Mariano Rivera, Colorado's Roy Halladay locks for induction**

*Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens looking to overcome steroid stigma*

**Patrick Saunders | Denver Post | Jan. 21, 2019**

Yankees closer Mariano Rivera is a sure thing and Denver native Roy Halladay is a lock. After that, things get interesting, controversial, and for fans of former Rockies right fielder Larry Walker, hopeful.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame unveils its Class of 2019 on Tuesday and the most intriguing aspect of the announcement is not whether Rivera will become the first player unanimously elected to Cooperstown. Rather, it's whether slugger Barry Bonds and overpowering right-hander Roger Clemens, two stars long suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs during baseball's dark steroid era, will continue gaining support.

The duo will likely come up short of the 75 percent of the votes needed from members of the Baseball Writers Association of America (BBWAA), but in their seventh year of eligibility, they're gaining steam. According to the Hall of Fame Vote Tracker, Clemens is on pace to garner 71 percent this year, with Bonds headed toward 70.5 percent. In his first year of eligibility, Bonds, baseball's all-time home run leader, garnered just 36.2 percent, but that number rose to 56.4 last year. Clemens, a seven-time Cy Young Award winner, opened with 37.6 percent and rose to 57.3 last year. If neither man makes it, they will have three more chances.

Halladay, who died in a Florida plane crash in November 2017 at age 40, is on the ballot for the first time. The graduate of Arvada West High School would become just the second Colorado native inducted into Cooperstown, joining Rich "Goose" Gossage, who was enshrined in 2008 in his ninth year on the ballot.

Halladay is on pace to get 92.6 percent of the vote. The right-hander has glittering credentials. His devastating cut fastball dominated hitters in both the National and American leagues and he had a career record of 203-105 and a 3.38 ERA.

He tossed a perfect game for Philadelphia against Miami on May 29, 2010, and then threw a no-hitter later that season on Oct. 6 against Cincinnati in the first game of the National League Division Series at Citizens Bank Park.

Halladay's no-hitter was only the second in postseason baseball, after Don Larsen threw a perfect game in the 1956 World Series for the New York Yankees. Over a 10-year period, Halladay was one of the most dominant pitchers in baseball, winning two Cy Young awards, posting a 2.97 ERA and being selected to eight all-star teams.

Walker, in his ninth year on the ballot, is projected to get 65.4 percent of the vote, making it possible that he could clear 75 percent in his final try next year. He's clearly gaining momentum. In 2015, halfway through his candidacy, Walker received just 11.8 percent of the vote.

Former Rockies first baseman Todd Helton, who played in Colorado for 17 years and is the only Rockies player to have his number retired, is on the ballot for the first time. He's projected to get 18 percent. Walker, by comparison, garnered 20.3 percent in his first year of eligibility in 2011.

In addition to Rivera and Halladay, it appears that slugger Edgar Martinez (90.3 percent), and right-handed starter Mike Mussina (81.2) will be members of the class of 2019. Right-hander Curt Schilling, who retired after the 2007 season after helping the Red Sox beat the Rockies in the World Series, is inching closer to possible induction, tracking at 70.5 percent. He hasn't gotten more than 52.3 percent support in his first six years on the ballot.



## Baseball Hall of Fame: Community ballot selects 4, including Larry Walker

Eric Garcia McKinley | Purple Row | Jan. 22, 2019

**A few hours from now**, we'll know who will be included in the 2019 Baseball Hall of Fame class. It looks like it will be either three or four players — **Mariano Rivera** for sure, **Roy Halladay** and Edgar Martínez likely, and **Mike Mussina** maybe. Last month, we published our annual community ballot. Like the official one, the Purple Row community gave four players the 75% minimum for election. They just weren't the same four. Here are the players selected on our community ballot:

Larry Walker (94.2%)

**Todd Helton** (86%)

Roy Halladay (83%)

Mariano Rivera (83%)

Not bad! This year, the election comes from 171 ballots cast. It's down from last year, but this year we required a Google sign in to reduce duplicate ballots and instill a little more voter accountability. That worked, even though there was still that one vote for **Darren Oliver**.

As far as Martínez, who should get in this year, he received 65.5% of the vote, which is far short. Mussina, who may get in this year but who is still well on his way if he doesn't, only received 49.5%. That sat behind Roger Clemens (53.8%) and Barry Bonds (53.2%).

Overall the vote turned out pretty well. We voted like partisans should while also giving the nod to two other deserving players. It was a huge improvement over the last time we did this, when Walker fell short with just 66.4% of the vote.

So, nice job, Purple Row. Let's hope the people with real ballots are listening.

## Colorado Rockies prospect rankings: No. 16, Josh Fuentes

*Fuentes went from undrafted free agent to real life prospect*

Jeff Aberle | Purple Row | Jan. 22, 2019

### 16. Josh Fuentes (363 points, 27 ballots)

Becoming an undrafted free agent in baseball means that a lot of people emphatically believe you don't have what it takes for professional baseball. Every team has had their crack at you over 50 rounds, the longest draft in professional sports, and they all said no. Many would take a hint and hang up their spikes, but not **Josh Fuentes**.

**Mid-season Ranking:** NR

**High Ballot:** 6

**Mode Ballot:** 25

**Future Value:** 35+, AAAA corner infielder

**Contract Status:** 2014 Amateur Free Agent, 40 Man Roster, three options remaining

**MLB ETA:** 2019

Signed for \$10 thousand out of NAIA member Missouri Baptist in 2014, most deemed the opportunity the **Rockies** gave Fuentes a nod to his famous cousin, Nolan Arenado. And maybe it even was – we don't know that for sure. What we do know is that Fuentes took that opportunity from the Rockies, whatever the providence, and made himself into the type of prospect who wins the Pacific Coast League MVP award and who earns a precious 40 man roster slot.

For more on his rise to prospect-dom, please **check out this profile of Fuentes** (including quotes from the man himself) by Jose Romero of La Vida Baseball.

The third baseman (he's also seen plenty of action at first) took advantage of a dearth of corner infield prospects at short season A Tri-City in 2014 enough to be penciled in as a regular for Low A Asheville after the 2015 season's first month. There he produced a league average batting line against age appropriate competition, which was enough to make him an Opening Day starter for Asheville in 2016 but hardly distinguished him as a prospect.

From that point on though, Fuentes destroyed minor league pitching to a degree that made him hard to ignore. He began 2016 by hitting .398/.442/.677 with 18 extra base hits in 108 plate appearances (216 wRC+) with Asheville before a May promotion to High A Modesto. In a pitcher's park within a hitter's league, Fuentes hit .278/.342/.450 with 28 extra base hits in 325 plate appearances for a 113 wRC+. That was enough for the Rockies to move Fuentes up to Double-A in 2017, where in 450 plate appearances with Hartford the righty slugger again proved he could handle the stick with a .307/.352/.517 line with 15 HRs among his 50 extra base hits (137 wRC+). It wasn't enough for the Rockies to protect Fuentes from the Rule 5 draft, but fortunately he went un-selected.

Entering the 2018 season, Fuentes still wasn't on national prospect radars and hadn't gotten much traction in PuRP voting. Assigned to Triple-A, Fuentes was a shining light for an Albuquerque team that enjoys one of the best offensive environments in an offense-friendly Pacific Coast League. Over 586 plate appearances with Albuquerque, Fuentes accumulated 65 extra base hits including 14 homers en route to the aforementioned PCL MVP award. While a normal prospect in that situation might have received a major league cup of coffee, Fuentes found himself blocked by his cousin, so he'll have to be satisfied with the trophy and a place in the prestigious Arizona Fall League. Against other top prospects, Fuentes held his own in the AFL with a .301/.356/.482 triple slash in 90 plate appearances, sealing the deal on earning a 40 man roster slot.

Though the positive offensive context helped, his .327/.354/.517 line in Albuquerque still represented a 124 wRC+ performance. To get there, Fuentes was the same type of hitter he's been at almost every minor league level: low walk rate (3.6% in 2018) combined with a medium strikeout rate (17.6% in 2018). He benefited from his home park, but not markedly so, while producing similar splits against lefties and righties. Most impressively, Fuentes **ranked 11th in minor league baseball** in line drive/fly ball success, with 26.8% of those batted balls going for hits — a likely indicator of big league batting success.

Here's some video of Fuentes in the AFL courtesy of 2080 Baseball:

Here's the **2080 Baseball report on Fuentes** accompanying the above video by Adam McInturff:

Fuentes looks the part of a pro corner player, a physical 6-foot-2 and 215-pound frame strong enough to hit for power but able to stay at 3B. He hits from a deep crouch with a big leg-kick trigger to start the swing, getting all his lower-half into a quick stroke that has power to the pullside. He yanks most of his contact, and while it isn't a pretty swing, Fuentes has

solid bat control and finds a way to make it work. For a player that looks strong enough to hit for power, his peripherals (low walk/low strikeout guy) don't fit the standard mold. His game approach is oriented more towards making contact than driving the ball, looking to put it in play and rely on feel for the barrel. He could live to be more patient, but I saw plenty of awareness at the plate and an understanding how to get to his pitch.

Defensively, Fuentes moved between the infield corners in my week-long look watching Salt River. He looked fine at the hot corner, showing soft hands and the footwork to make routine plays. There's a chance he's a 55-grade defender at first base, though the overall versatility should help a R/R profile without tons of game power get into the lineup.

...

He has worked himself into the player he is today, showing significant improvement each of the last two years I've seen him. He's ready to hit in the big leagues, safely profiling as a useful role player who can move between corner positions. If he winds up hitting enough to be an everyday third baseman someday, don't be surprised: Fuentes is the type of guy that has been proving people wrong for a long time.

Fuentes is currently ranked 17th in the system by **MLB.com**:

Fuentes' strength is his ability to make repeated hard contact, which helped him make a run at league batting titles in each of the last two years and top the PCL in runs (93), hits (180), doubles (39), extra-base hits (65) and total bases (285). Most of his power currently comes in the form of doubles but he might develop into a 20-homer threat if he added some loft to his right-handed stroke. He doesn't strike out much, yet he puts the bat on the ball so easily that he rarely draws walks.

Fuentes lacks quickness but has a strong arm and covers enough ground to serve as an average defender at third base. He has soft hands that also work well at first base, where he has seen action throughout his pro career. Though it remains to be seen if and where he'll break into the Rockies' crowded infield, he doesn't have much left to accomplish in the Minors.

The 25-year old's top tool is a 55 arm, complemented by 50 field and 50 hit grades. Despite the 45 game power and 40 run tool, that's a potentially valuable player who could man both corners. Combine that with his production at the highest

levels and Fuentes is clearly a player in Colorado's immediate future plans. It's hard to see him making the Opening Day roster, but it seems likely that Fuentes will be making contributions to the 2019 Rockies.

I've been cautious in ranking Fuentes highly throughout his climb up the minor league ladder, joining most of the PuRPs electorate, but that caution isn't justifiable anymore given the 40 man roster slot and 2018 production. I rated Fuentes 23rd on my personal list with a 35+ Future Value as a potential MLB contributor, but I'm hoping that ranking looks silly low by the mid-season list.

## A letter to Rockies fans, from a Yankees fan

*The Yankees are signing all the former Rockies players, so a Yankees fan makes an appeal to come together*

**Eric Garcia McKinley | Purple Row | Jan. 22, 2019**

The **New York Yankees** are exhibiting a fetish for former **Rockies** players as of late. That raises some compelling questions for Rockies fans. Is it worth it to pay more attention to the Yankees to see how our guys are doing now? Should we take that step to make, even if temporarily, the Yankees “our AL team” for the season?

Well, our friends at our sister site **Pinstripe Alley** think we should throw our lot behind the Evil Empire. Tyler Norton makes the case below, citing even more reasons than just common middle infielders.

★ ★ ★

Dear Rockies Fans,

Hello, friends!

You may have noticed that over the last few weeks that the Yankees have gone about their offseason business by stockpiling former Rockies players. It started small. First it was a flier on Troy Tulowitzki, who will fill-in at shortstop while **Didi Gregorius** recovers from Tommy John surgery. Then came **DJ LeMahieu** on a two-year deal. Finally, **Adam Ottavino** joined one of the most fearsome bullpens in baseball history. We promise to take good care of them.

This trio now adds to a long, shared history between the Yankees and Rockies. I’m serious! **Matt Holliday** spent a good portion of the 2017 season as the Yankees designated hitter, where he mentored Aaron Judge. Tommy Kahnle bounced from New York to Colorado then back to New York again — with a short pause in Chicago along the way. **Jason Giambi** played the role of hulking slugger for both teams. And **Jeff Francis**! Did you know Jeff Francis pitched 1.2 innings with the 2014 Yankees? That 100% happened.

We have more than players in common, too, you know. Both of our teams play in high-offense environments. Coors Field is a batter’s haven thanks to the altitude. Yankee Stadium, on the other hand, has the short porch in right field. It’s a great place to play if your team hits home runs.

Speaking of home runs, the Yankees love them. They hit so many in 2018 that it set the MLB record! We love dingers, and you have Dinger. You would feel right at home tuning into a Yankees game.

We even have a common enemy in the **Boston Red Sox**! The Rockies fought valiantly against them in the 2007 **World Series**. The Yankees, meanwhile, have been bitter rivals with them for roughly 100 years. We can talk about how much they irk us.

I know it may not be easy to pick the Yankees for your AL team. I totally get it. At the very least, we could have an understanding to vote for each other's players for the All-Star Game? You know how MLB loves to pair up AL-NL clubs for the Final Vote marketing. Our teams are natural partners now.

I do recommend giving the Yankees a try this year. You can see your most talented player ever, your former batting champion, and your best reliever on the same team again. It should be fun! ~~If not, we can try again next year after the Yankees land Nolan Arenado.~~ *(Editor's note: Struck through due to extremely offensive content.)*

Best Regards,

Your Friends at Pinstripe Alley

## Should the Rockies go all in for 2019?

*Or, would you rather the Rockies pursue “sustained success”?*

**Renee Dechert | Purple Row | Jan. 21, 2019**

Question: Would you rather the **Rockies** be very good — playoff-level good — for an extended stretch, or would you rather put all your resources on one big season, knowing that when the season was over, it might be awhile before the Rockies were competitive again?

On Friday, NBC Sports’ **Craig Calcaterra** tweet-stormed **this question**: “Do fans really want ‘sustained success’ . . . ?” (I recommend reading entire the thread.) As examples, he cites the 1990s **Braves** and the current **Dodgers**, teams that won a lot but with fleeting championship success. (The Braves won 14 consecutive division titles but just one **World Series** during the shortened 1995 season.) In contrast, he cites the 2015 **Royals** and 2016 **Cubs**, teams that went all in and won a World Series, spending money and prospects when the moment was right. (The 2018 **Red Sox** provide another example.) These are the teams fans remember, not the ones that were very good but not quite good enough. Calcaterra acknowledges there’s no “right” answer, but he does add this:

### **Craig Calcaterra**

*No one talks about how they were so satisfied with five 90-win seasons in a seven year stretch, capped off with an NLCS loss. As a Braves fan, I have spent way more time defending those teams against detractors than gloating about them to others. Not that I didn't enjoy them.*

### **Craig Calcaterra**

*I think the “sustained success” thing is just another front office talking point that fans have uncritically accepted. Sure, it's desirable, but it's not the only way to achieve success. Going for it and saying you're going for it is another way too, yes?*

The ways in which teams justify spending less money is a topic for another day, but consider for a moment the Rockies and the notion of sustained success.



This is obviously their model — look at the ways in which they protect prospects. The most notable prospects the Rockies have traded in recent years are Forrest Wall and Kevin Padlo. MLB.com's **Thomas Harding** makes this especially clear in a recent question-and-answer article, "**Do the Rox Need Big Move for a WS Push?**" Here's the passage that stood out, especially after Calcaterra's argument:

*And, yes, the Rockies are reluctant to deal young players, mainly because they use them. Theoretically, had those deals been made in recent years, they would not have **David Dahl**, who is expected to be part of the 2019 lineup. And while they've had relative health with starting pitching in recent years, they need to be protected in case of injuries.*

*The projected 2019 Rockies lineup has homegrown players at four of the eight positions, with three others having legitimate hopes as starters. In other words, those players are more necessities than surpluses. It's difficult to lose several of those players for one piece before a season starts.*

This strikes me as the Rockies' definition of "sustained success," built on young players and what **Jeff Bridich** has termed "**responsible growth**." Harding points out that in filling positions, "[n]eed has to line up with player," which suggests that if a given Rockies team is good enough to be contenders, only then will the front office look to fill gaps and make the team more competitive (e.g, **Jonathan Lucroy**, **Pat Neshek**, and **Seung-hwan Oh**). But this is a reactive strategy, as opposed to going all in. (It also probably has the added benefit of ensuring "sustained attendance" since fans are more likely to pay to see a contending team than a tanking one.)

(By the way, it's not an issue of money. As **Maury Brown has reported**, in 2018 MLB saw a record 10.3 billion in revenues. Moreover, **David Roth points out**, "Your favorite baseball team can afford any free agent it wants." Presumably, that includes the Rockies.)

But here we are: It's the last guaranteed year with **Nolan Arenado**, and the starting pitching rotation is the best in Rockies history. The Rockies are in a perfect position to spend money and prospects to complement a strong club, and yet they have (apparently) decided to take their chances with the outfield and hope **Ian Desmond** is going to find his swing in center field while **Daniel Murphy** brings the missing offense and becomes an effective first baseman. That sounds like "fiscally responsible sustained success."

I was a bit surprised to find that I was #TeamAllIn. Usually, I'm big on keeping my pantry full, saving what I can, and planning for tomorrow. But not this time.

Wouldn't it be amazing for the Rockies to be absolutely ripped contenders from the opening game of the season, even if it meant wandering in the baseball wilderness for a few years? By all appearances, this year the NL West will be very winnable. Granted, going all in doesn't guarantee a World Series series win — it just adds a little to the odds. But I'd argue it would be easier to live with having lost out on a championship knowing the Rockies went all rather than settling for sustained success. It's time to put all our purple chips on 2019 and win.

What do you think?

## Larry Walker's unlikely path to Hall of Fame election has turned possible

*The perfect storm that has kept Walker out of the Hall of Fame may now lead to an unprecedented election*

Eric Garcia McKinley | Purple Row | Jan. 21, 2019

Larry Walker will be a Hall of Famer. I'm not just hopeful about that, but convinced of it. He has the credentials, compares favorably to right fielders already in the Hall, and a growing cadre of writers are coming to terms with the fact that baseball in Denver is a real thing. Up until recently, I've also been convinced that Walker's only path to enshrinement will be through the Today's Game Era ballot — even more so after it lowered the bar by electing **Harold Baines**, who had a fine career but who few seriously considered a viable candidate.

There's a reason I was convinced of that. In order for Walker to get voted in by the BBWAA, it would require **an unprecedented jump of votes**. Walker received 34.1% of the vote in his eighth year on the ballot, which was a nice jump from the 21.9% of the vote he got in his seventh year. The problem, however, is that he just doesn't have enough time left. "Since 1966," **Jay Jaffe writes**, "the lowest percentage any candidate has received in year eight while still being elected by the Writers is Bert Blyleven." Blyleven had 40.8% of the vote in his eighth year on the ballot. The major caveat, however, is that Blyleven had the advantage of 15 tries, and he got elected in year 14. Walker only gets 10 tries.

But something unprecedented may be underway. As of this writing, according to Ryan Thibodeaux's Hall of Fame tracker, Walker has appeared on 65.2% of the 199 public ballots released so far — that's 48.8% of known ballots. Walker has gained 42 voters who previously didn't vote for him now have. Just as importantly, Walker hasn't lost any support, as nobody who has previously voted for him publicly has decided against it. The only other player to gain as many votes as Walker is Fred McGriff, who has gained 42 in his final year on the ballot. Although even McGriff has lost two voters, making a net gain of 40.

This movement is extremely promising, and it's cause to think about the factors that led to Walker's predicament in the first place. Walker debuted on the ballot in 2011 with 20.3% of the vote, which is a respectable margin. He had a slight increase to 22.9% in his second year of eligibility. The third year, however, was the turning point for Walker, and it had nothing to do with him. That year, **Barry Bonds** and **Roger Clemens** debuted on the Hall of Fame ballot. That year, the increase of overall BBWAA sanctimony was inversely correlated with vote collection, and nobody got in.

The 2013 shutout led to a substantial glut, especially in the following years when a collection of all-time greats entered the ballot around the same time: **Greg Maddux**, **Randy Johnson**, Pedro Martínez, **Tom Glavine**, **Frank Thomas**, and **Ken Griffey Jr.** At the same time, guys like **Craig Biggio**, **Jeff Bagwell**, and **Mike Piazza**, who wouldn't have to wait so long under normal circumstances, also debuted. Because voters continue to be limited to 10 votes per ballot, it took some time for ballots to be able to breathe again. This could benefit Walker in a way we haven't seen before.

This year, I'd expect three players elected: **Mariano Rivera**, Edgar Martínez, and Roy Halladay. Next year, there's only one first-timer who's sure to be elected, Derek Jeter. This unprecedented clearing of an atypically full ballot could help Walker quite a bit. The perfect storm that has suppressed his vote could be turning into a perfect storm for him to make that historic leap in voting.

Walker's not getting in this year, but the percentage of the votes he gets should tell us whether or not he even has a shot in 2020. Let's use **Tim Lincecum**'s candidacy as a touchpoint, as he, like Walker, only received 10 votes on the ballot. According to Jaffe, Lincecum made the greatest jump from third to last year on the ballot to election, 55% to 86%. If Walker gets elected, he'll shatter that mark by going from 34% to breaking the 75% threshold. It's perhaps more useful to look at Lincecum's ninth and tenth years on the ballot. From Lincecum's penultimate to final year on the ballot, he went from 69.8 of the vote to 86% of the vote. Walker, of course, doesn't need 86% of the vote, he just needs 75%.

If Lincecum was able to gain 17 percentage points in his final year on the ballot, Walker may be able to as well. If Walker has any chance of being elected by the writers in his tenth year of eligibility, he'll need to pull in at least 60% of the vote this year. Given that he has just over 65% of the vote from public ballots so far, that mark is within reach.

For Walker hopefuls, that's the magic number to look for when final tallies are announced tomorrow. If he gets 60%, Walker may make his way to Cooperstown by way of vote in an unprecedented final charge.

## Colorado Rockies prospect rankings: No. 17, Ben Bowden

*Bowden poised to (finally) break into the majors*

Jeff Aberle | Purple Row | Jan. 21, 2019

### 17. Ben Bowden (334 points, 29 ballots)

Ben Bowden's destiny was to be the first player from the 2016 draft to hit the big leagues. Supporting that assumption was that the lefty pitcher, selected in the second round of the 2016 draft and given an above slot \$1.6 million signing bonus, was assigned directly to Low-A Asheville after the draft. There he threw out of the bullpen exclusively, another marker of a fast mover through the system. Unfortunately, a bulging disc in Bowden's back got in the way of destiny and kept him from throwing a professional pitch in 2017, allowing 2016 third rounder (and fellow PuRP) **Garrett Hampson** to grab the honor of first MLB debut from the draft class.

**Mid-season Rank:** 19

**High Ballot:** 13

**Mode Ballot:** 16

**Future Value:** 40, middle reliever

**Contract Status:** 2016 2nd Round, Not Rule 5 Eligible, three options remaining

**MLB ETA:** 2020

When he was drafted, there was an open question of whether Bowden would be a starter or reliever (he served in both roles for Vanderbilt). After the back injury, Bowden's 2018 usage pointed definitively to reliever as the chosen role by the **Rockies**. Assigned back to Asheville to begin the year, Bowden quickly proved he could miss bats, striking out 25 (14.7/9) while walking 5 in 15  $\frac{1}{3}$ innings in the South Atlantic League. Bowden posted a 3.52 ERA, but his 2.26 xFIP and .429 BABIP indicate he was unlucky to even allow that much damage.

The Rockies saw enough to promote Bowden in mid-May to the hitter's haven of Lancaster where the 6'4" pitcher faced age-appropriate competition. In 34 appearances with Lancaster, Bowden was again a high strikeout pitcher, punching out

53 in 36  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings (13 K/9) while walking 15 and posting a 4.17 ERA (3.40 xFIP). Between the two levels, Bowden struck out 78 in 52 innings for an outstanding 13.5 K/9 rate against a 3.5 BB/9 rate. It is worth noting that Bowden's less stellar ERA numbers were inflated by an elevated 16% HR/FB rate, which is most likely tied to the homer-friendly parks he pitched in but is something to watch with Bowden going forward.

Here's some video on Bowden from Spring 2017 courtesy of FanGraphs:

Bowden is **presently ranked 15th** in the system by **MLB.com**:

Bowden operates with a 92-95 mph fastball that peaks at 97 and features late life and steep downhill plane. He has full trust in his changeup, which tumbles and shows flashes of becoming a plus pitch. His breaking ball is a slurvy hybrid but does have some power and could become a solid slider.

With three pitches, control and a durable frame, Bowden is equipped to start and got a brief look in the rotation from the Commodores before they decided he was more valuable in the bullpen. The Rockies also value him more as a reliever who still could rush to the Majors despite losing what would have been his first full pro season. There's a good chance that he'll become a setup man, with closer a possibility if he refines his slider and command.

Baseball Prospectus **recently ranked Bowden 13th** in the system (comments are in concert with PuRP 23 Robert Tyler, who ranked 14th on their list):

Both have fast-track potential if they show well [in AA]. Tyler was gassed at the end of the season, while Bowden held up better and flashed a slightly higher-end ceiling. Tyler throws a bit harder and Bowden offers a quality pitch mix from the left side. Neither looks like a budding relief ace but they could both wind up as valuable bullpen contributors.

Bowden's major league-caliber tool is his low- to mid-90s fastball (60 grade) from the left-hand side. Importantly, Bowden is not a one-trick pony, boasting two average or better secondary pitches (including a 55 changeup) to go with 50 control. It's an advanced mix that has Bowden on the fast track to the big leagues, where he could become a high leverage reliever.

As a 2016 draftee, Bowden is yet another prospect who the Rockies will need to add to the 40 man roster to offer Rule 5 draft protection at the end of 2019, and he's a highly likely selection if left unprotected. I think it's likely the 24-year old will begin the year in Double-A with an outside chance to factor into the September big league bullpen, though that would

require an opportunity and a strong performance by Bowden. More likely, Bowden is fighting it out with Reid Humphreys, **Justin Lawrence**, **Jesus Tinoco**, Robert Tyler, Tommy Doyle, and the incumbents for a spot in the 2020 bullpen. For the record, among the prospects listed above I'd rank only **Tinoco** ahead of Bowden.

I value Bowden's ability to miss bats, get batters out from both the left and the right side as a southpaw, and handle more than an inning if necessary. The combination of pedigree, production, and scouting reports led me to rank him 14th on my personal ballot with a 40 Future Value designation as a likely middle reliever or better.

## **Colorado Rockies prospect rankings: No. 18, Reid Humphreys**

*Humphreys has claimed a spot as a legitimate relief prospect*

**Jeff Aberle | Purple Row | Jan. 21, 2019**

### **18. Reid Humphreys (329 points, 26 ballots)**

When the **Rockies** drafted Reid Humphreys out of Mississippi State in the 7th round of the 2016 draft, he had thrown just 22  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings for the school. Instead, Humphreys had been a power-hitting position player for the Bulldogs after undergoing Tommy John surgery in high school. The Rockies believed in Humphreys as a pitcher though, and, after an adjustment period as he got used to being back on the mound, the righty reliever has proved this to be a wise investment by Colorado.

**Mid-season Ranking:** NR

**High Ballot:** 7

**Mode Ballot:** 14, 23

**Future Value:** 40, middle reliever

**Contract Status:** 2016 7th Round, not Rule 5 Eligible, three options remaining

**MLB ETA:** 2020

After a brief cameo in Grand Junction in 2016 (he didn't play until August), Humphreys was assigned to Low A Asheville in 2017. In his first full pitching season in several years, against age appropriate competition, Humphreys proved up to the task with a 2.56 ERA (2.85 FIP) and 0.83 WHIP in 45  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, striking out 47 while walking just 6 and recording 13 saves.

The Rockies assigned Humphreys to Lancaster (arguably the most extreme hitter's environment in the minors) for 2018 and again the 6'1" hurler proved he belonged. In 34  $\frac{1}{3}$  frames, Humphreys struck out 51 (13.4 K/9) while walking 13 (3.4 BB/9) en route to 22 saves and a 1.83 ERA (2.39 FIP) with a 1.02 WHIP and .179 batting average against.

In their **write-up on Humphreys**, **MLB.com** noted the following fun fact about him:

[Humphreys] went more than three months without surrendering an extra-base hit, an almost unfathomable accomplishment for a pitcher toiling in Lancaster and the California League.



Humphreys was dominant enough in Lancaster to convince the Rockies to promote him up to Double-A in late July, where he was used sparingly in the season's final month. Notably, it was Humphreys and not fellow PuRP Justin Lawrence (who received a 40 man roster slot this offseason) that served as closer for Lancaster and who was promoted to Hartford. With Hartford, Humphreys allowed 2 earned runs in 5  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings on 3 hits with 7 walks and 7 strikeouts, posting 4 saves in the process. Though the high walk numbers are troubling, it was encouraging to see that Humphreys was still able to miss bats at the higher level (and it's a small sample size).

There's a dearth of video available on Humphreys, but here's a snippet from his college days courtesy of the Prospect Pipeline:

Humphreys is **currently ranked 14th** in the system by **MLB.com**:

Humphreys has more pitches than a typical reliever. He can overpower hitters with his fastball, which has zoomed from 92-95 mph in college to 95-99 in pro ball, and his cutter, which resides in the low 90s. He also has a true slider in the low 80s and will throw an occasional changeup.

While Humphreys' control has regressed a bit in 2018, he has limited damage by rarely missing up in the strike zone. ... If he can throw a few more strikes, he might be a closer.

Highlighting the above evaluation is a 65 grade on the fastball with an additional 60 grade on the cutter, plus acceptable 50 (slider) and 45 (changeup) grades to pair with 50 control. That's a promising relief profile for the Rockies, a player development success story who joins the ranks of many such relief prospects who are banging down the door toward contributing to the big league pen as soon as late this year, but more likely 2020.

Humphreys is yet another player who will need Rule 5 protection at the end of 2019 (including many of the players ranking just below him on the PuRPs list) and he represents just the type of prospect most likely to be selected in that process. I suspect Colorado will start the 24-year old in Hartford with a mid-season elevation to Albuquerque likely and a late season 40-man spot and call-up to the Rockies in case of emergency possible. I like the mix of pedigree, stuff, and production from Humphreys and ranked him 18th on my personal ballot with a 40 Future Value designation as a middle relief prospect with upside to be a late innings pitcher.

## **Colorado Rockies prospect rankings: No. 20, Rico Garcia**

Garcia has come out of nowhere (and also Hawaii) to emerge as a pitching prospect

**Jeff Aberle | Purple Row | Jan. 21, 2019**

### **20. Rico Garcia (314 points, 29 ballots)**

In a figurative sense, Rico Garcia came out of nowhere (he had received zero PuRPs votes before the midseason 2018 list) to leap into prospect status in 2018, representing one of the best surprises of the year for a system that needed it. Literally though, Garcia came out of Hawaii Pacific as a 30th round pick in 2016 (for more on Garcia's story as well as his arsenal and quotes from the man himself, please check out this **May 2018 Purple Row feature by contributor oneforthreewithawalk**)

**Mid-season Ranking:** HM

**High Ballot:** 11

**Mode Ballot:** 20

**Future Value:** 35+, back-end starter/long man

**Contract Status:** 2016 30th Round, not Rule 5 Eligible, three options remaining

**MLB ETA:** 2020

The 5'11" righty starter was assigned immediately to Boise, where he failed to distinguish himself in the pitcher-friendly Northwest League despite a 8.9 K/9 rate and 3.85 FIP. The **Rockies** held Garcia back from full-season ball in 2017, having him repeat in Boise for eight good starts before a late July promotion to Low A Asheville. Against hitters who were on average about a year younger, Garcia's 28 innings in the South Atlantic League saw him post a 2.57 ERA as well as 9.6 K/9 and 2.3 BB/9 rates. This was good enough for the Rockies to assign Garcia to High A for his first full season campaign. He responded with arguably the most impressive pitching season the system saw in 2018.

As has been mentioned before in this series and elsewhere, Colorado's Lancaster affiliate in the High A California League just might be the most hitter-friendly venue in all of minor league baseball with its combination of warm weather, altitude,

and winds gusting toward the outfield. In that environment, maintaining an ERA below 4.00 is an excellent outcome. Garcia rose to the challenge (aided by the fact he was about 0.8 years older than average) in Lancaster with 100 innings over 16 appearances where his 3.42 ERA was among the best we've seen from a Lancaster starting pitcher in some time. Supporting those results were 9.1 K/9 and 2.0 BB/9 rates, leading to strong underlying 4.02 FIP and 3.69 xFIP numbers. Garcia was indeed damaged by that home park, where he posted a 6.11 ERA compared to a 1.95 mark on the road, but he was fortunate to only have 6 appearances at home vs. 10 on the road.

If that were all Garcia had done in 2018 that would have been a very successful season, but Garcia was promoted to Double-A in early July, where he proved himself at a more neutral pitching environment, albeit at a higher level where he was on average about 0.4 years younger than league average. In 67 innings with Hartford, Garcia posted an outstanding 2.28 ERA with a 1.10 WHIP. His peripherals were a bit worse at the level (8.2 K/9, 2.7 BB/9 rates) but were still strong, though his 4.14 FIP indicates that Garcia was a little lucky to get the results he did with Hartford. In total, Garcia threw 167 professional innings across two levels in 2018, in which he had a 2.96 ERA, 1.17 WHIP, and 8.7 K/9 rate. Those are the kinds of numbers that get you noticed as a player to incorporate into future plans.

There's not much video out there on Garcia, but here's a snippet from Wilson Karaman of Baseball Prospectus from April 2018:

In their **recently released Rockies top 10 prospects list**, Baseball Prospectus didn't list Garcia among the top tier but he did merit an honorable mention as number 15 on the list:

There is minimal projection left for Garcia, but he's effectively filling up the zone with three averageish offerings. The fastball sits low-90s (although he has flashed higher at times) and features some sink and run from his high-three-quarters slot. His slider is pinned around 80. While it lacks consistent shape, the best are solid-average with late, tight bite. The changeup is on the fringier side of average and is a clear third pitch. Garcia is a shorter, overaged righty, but the present stuff is good enough for a backend starter or swing projection, with a middle relief fallback if he finds more velo in shorter bursts.

Thanks to his big 2018, Garcia **made it onto Colorado's top 30** from **MLB.com** at #21:

His fastball sat around 90 mph when Garcia turned pro and since has climbed to a steady 92-94 with a high of 97. He uses both a four-seamer at the higher end of his velocity range and a two-seamer with cutting action in the low 90s. His curveball has depth and gives him a second solid pitch, and he shows the ability to land it for strikes or bury it in the dirt.

Garcia's changeup has flashes of effectiveness but needs more consistency to help him deal with left-handers. He challenges hitters, works ahead in the count and uses a high three-quarters arm slot to overcome his height and provide downward angle. He has held up well as a starter but he might be more effective as a middle reliever whose stuff would kick up a notch in shorter stints.

The evaluation gives Garcia a 55 grade on his fastball and curveball with 50 grades on his changeup and control.

Eric Longenhagen of FanGraphs didn't rank Garcia in his May 2018 evaluation of the system, but he did provide **a writeup of Garcia in August:**

I've seen **Rico Garcia** sit 93-96 and touch 97 early in outings and then dip into the 90-94 range late. The baseball appears from behind Garcia's head, which seems to disorient hitters, and Garcia's vertical arm slot creates tough-to-square flat plane up in the zone. He'll flash an above-average changeup and slider and shows an ability to manipulate the fastball to sink and cut at various times. I've considered him an elder middle-relief prospect, still an excellent outcome for a 30th rounder, but Garcia now has a 155:37 strikeout-to-walk ratio across High- and Double-A in 157 innings and is at least causing re-evaluation of how we have him projected.

Despite the disagreement between the three evaluations about the identity of Garcia's secondary pitch (it's a curveball, not a slider), the middle relief tag was consistent. The 25-year old has done quite well to go from a 30th round pick with a \$1,000 signing bonus to a player who will be in strong contention for a 40 man roster slot after 2019, but the work is far from over.

Whether he starts back in Hartford or in Albuquerque in 2019, Garcia will join a crowd of pitching prospects fighting for those scarce slots. If things go well and the Rockies do intend to protect Garcia, he could even be a late 2019 call-up to the big club, though a 2020 debut is much more likely. The lack of pedigree was overcome by pure performance for me on my personal list, though I was more conservative than most of the electorate as I ranked Garcia 28th with a 35+ future value as a potential back-end starter or middle reliever.

## Colorado Rockies: Four big questions and bold predictions

Kevin Henry | Rox Pile | Jan. 21, 2019

Like so many of you, I have been counting down the days until the Colorado Rockies once again take the field. Pitchers and catchers reporting and spring training getting underway sounds especially good on chilly days such as these in Denver.

But when the **Colorado Rockies** gather at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick in Scottsdale, there will still be plenty of questions to answer as **Bud Black** welcomes his team back into the fold.

We talked about one of the biggest questions facing Colorado the other day **in this article**. That rather large question mark is this: Who will replace **Adam Ottavino** in the Rockies bullpen? A pitcher who was so dominant on so many occasions last season will certainly be missed in late innings and clutch situations in 2019.

Sure, there are players who can step up to fill Ottavino's role ... but will they? That is the question that is nagging so many Colorado fans right now and one of the biggest reasons why there was so much angst when the deal with the New York Yankees was reported.

Of course, we don't have a crystal ball to know the answer to that question ... or some of the other burning questions entering the latter stages of the offseason. However, today, we're going to take our best guesses. With that in mind, let's take a look at some of those questions and make some bold predictions.

### ***Who will replace DJ LeMahieu at second base?***

Speaking of departures to the Bronx, Colorado's former All-Star second baseman (LeMahieu) is joining Ottavino with the Yankees. The hole left behind by LeMahieu will have to be filled, both in the lineup and in the field.

Let's not forget that the Rockies are not only losing an All-Star defender but also a former batting champion and one of the most familiar faces at the top of the lineup. Whether he was batting second or leadoff, there are plenty of moments in his career where LeMahieu made an impact for the Rockies.

You will hear some talk about **Brendan Rodgers** and his chances of starting at second base when the 2019 season opens in Miami. Don't believe them. We talked about the reasons for that **in this article** as well as when he might be joining the Rockies in 2019.

With that in mind, it boils down to **Garrett Hampson** and **Ryan McMahon** to step in at second base. Certainly, there will be times when the newly signed **Daniel Murphy** could be playing there, but Colorado seems intent to give Hampson and McMahon the opportunity to compete for the starting nod.

Both also bring versatility to the Rockies, with Hampson able to move into the outfield if necessary and McMahon with plenty of experience everywhere in the infield outside of shortstop. Both will also likely be on the Opening Day 25-man roster, another nod to the big roles they will play in 2019.

**Bold prediction:** Hampson will earn the starting nod but McMahon will see plenty of time at first and second in what will be a mix-and-match right side of the infield with Murphy and **Ian Desmond** also in play.

#### ***Who will be the odd man out of the Colorado rotation?***

**Kyle Freeland. German Marquez. Tyler Anderson. Jon Gray. Chad Bettis. Antonio Senzatela.** Entering spring training, those are the six names who will compete for a spot in the Colorado rotation this season. With the Rockies not employing a six-man rotation, someone will find himself in the bullpen.

The first four names on the list are very likely exactly how the rotation will lay out to start the campaign. If Anderson shows in spring training what he showed at the end of last season, he could easily be the third starter with Gray taking a role as the fourth starter as he works to prove himself again after a rough 2018. Meanwhile, Freeland and Marquez can build on what they did in 2018 and form an impressive 1-2 punch, with Freeland likely earning the Opening Day start in Miami.

So that leaves Bettis and Senzatela to battle for the fifth and final spot. There has been plenty written about how Bettis is **likely the odd man out of the rotation**. However, let's remember back to last season when Bettis started so strongly (3-1 with 2.43 ERA in six April starts). Could he show enough in spring training to once again grab the fifth spot?

Our prediction is yes, with Senzatela starting the season in the bullpen. Will it remain that way? It's unlikely. Colorado has, for the most part, avoided the injury bug in its rotation over the last couple of seasons. Having that happen for a third campaign is unlikely. Luckily, the depth is there for the Rockies if and when something were to occur.

**Bold prediction:** The season starts with a Freeland-Marquez-Anderson-Gray-Bettis rotation but won't look that way by the time Memorial Day rolls around.

### ***Who will be the comeback player of the year for the Rockies in 2019?***

Despite making the postseason again last year, there were plenty of players who didn't live up to expectations for Colorado. Ian Desmond, **Bryan Shaw**, **Jake McGee**, **Chris Rusin**, **Tony Wolters**, **Tom Murphy** and Jon Gray are just some of the names who struggled last season.

That is a wide-ranging list of players ... and isn't even a complete list if you really want to stretch it out and say that **Charlie Blackmon** didn't match previous years' numbers and **Nolan Arenado** struggled after injuring his shoulder.

So who is the player most likely to rebound from last season's poor performance? I'm putting my bet on Shaw. Yes, the only man to challenge Desmond in terms of boos endured at Coors Field last season will have a better season in 2019.

I know what you're thinking. It can't get much worse for Shaw, right? Signing a three-year deal and then not even making the postseason roster after losing your manager's confidence isn't exactly the way to endear yourself to the fan base in your debut season. However, there are too many signs from his days with the Cleveland Indians to think he won't be able to turn his pitching around in 2019.

**Bold prediction:** With an offseason to work on what didn't go right in 2018, Shaw will become Bud Black's seventh-inning guy this season ... and succeed in the role. **Seunghwan Oh** and **Scott Oberg** will see action in the eighth to set up closer **Wade Davis**.

### ***Who will be the breakout player of the year for the Rockies in 2019?***

In a season where Colorado has plenty of young options to plug into the lineup and give meaningful innings to (by the way, isn't that nice to hear, Rockies fans?), there are some solid candidates to explode on the scene for Colorado in 2019. The list includes **David Dahl**, Ryan McMahon, Garrett Hampson, **Raimel Tapia** and even Tom Murphy.

Dahl has already shown what he can do when healthy. He's one of the few players mentioned above who received time in the lineup on a fairly consistent basis last season.

This year, that chance not only goes to Dahl, but also McMahon and Hampson for sure as they battle for time in the infield (as discussed earlier). While I predicted Hampson will win the Opening Day nod at second base, I'm also predicting that it's McMahon who will shine the brightest among the next generation of Rockies in 2019.

We all remember what McMahon did on a **pair of magical nights against the Los Angeles Dodgers** at Coors Field last season. This season, with more at-bats, McMahon will put together even more moments to remember for the Rockies faithful.

**Bold prediction:** After a slow start, McMahon catches fire at the plate in May and finishes the first half of the season hitting over .300 while nearly topping his previous career high in plate appearances.



## Colorado Rockies Quick Hits: Machado over Arenado, prospects, more

Kevin Henry | Rox Pile | Jan. 21, 2019

As another week kicks off (and we all hopefully take a moment to reflect upon the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.), let's take a look at some of the news and notes surrounding the Colorado Rockies and the National League West.

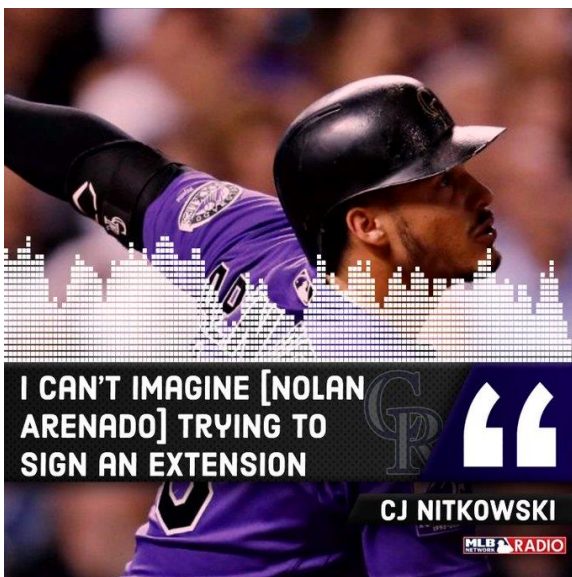
Plenty of **Colorado Rockies** fans were up in arms a few days ago over a report that suggested the New York Yankees were targeting **Nolan Arenado** in a trade. We put out **an article on what that trade might look like** while **Patrick Saunders of *The Denver Post* reported** that there was much more smoke than fire to the report.

However, that hasn't stopped some of the New York media for continuing to bang the drum over the possibility of getting Arenado to play third base in the Bronx. And some of those media members aren't very happy about it because that means the Yankees would be choosing Arenado over **Manny Machado**.

**This article gives eight reasons** why Machado is a better fit for the Yankees. And, you guessed it, one of them is Coors Field. Shocker, huh?

Let's just say we disagree on the point that Machado would be better to have in the lineup than Arenado. What's your take? Let us know in the comments below.

By the way, did you hear this thought about Nolan and signing an extension over the weekend?



## MLB Network Radio on SiriusXM

Have the #Rockies already lost Nolan Arenado to free agency next winter? @CJNitkowski believes it is a strong possibility.

Speaking of Arenado, his cousin, **Josh Fuentes**, is one of 50 Rockies prospects listed in **this in-depth and informative piece** by our friend Michael Parnell at Prospects1500.com. It's well worth a read. Check out the next wave of Rockies players (including top prospect Brendan Rodgers) coming through the minors on when and if they might see Major League action.

Also, the Boise Hawks, the short-season Class A affiliate of the Rockies, **has announced their coaching staff** for the 2019 campaign.

While the Rockies might not be connected to any free agents at the moment, there is plenty of news surrounding Colorado's division rival in Los Angeles. It is being reported that the Dodgers are **looking at a trade** with the Pittsburgh Pirates for **Starling Marte**. It's already been a busy offseason in Los Angeles and it looks like the Dodgers may still be looking to upgrade their roster.

Will Colorado do anything else this offseason to bolster its chances at winning its first-ever NL West title? We will keep you updated here.

## The non-fact-based state of free agency and the Colorado Rockies

Noah Yingling | Rox Pile | Jan. 21, 2019

**This weekend, two players (one with the Colorado Rockies' 2018 Wild Card opponent and one with a Rockies divisional rival) opined on the state of the free agent market. As you may expect, both players took a predictable stance that is pro-player. That doesn't mean that their stance is based on fact.**

Fellow third basemen **Kris Bryant** of the Chicago Cubs and **Evan Longoria** of the San Francisco Giants both made comments on the free agent market, which has been slow for much of the offseason.

"It's really weird. Two of the best players in the game, and they have very little interest in them, from just what I hear. It's not good. It's something that will have to change. I know a lot of the other players are pretty upset about it."

"There's a lot of teams out there that have the money to spend, but they're not doing it," Bryant said. "It's very confusing to me. If I was an owner, president or GM, I'd love to have **Bryce Harper** or **Manny Machado** on my team."

"You work for that moment in your career," Bryant said. "You feel like every team should want you. For them to not have that, it could be disheartening for them. ...It's not about the greed. They've put in the work to warrant contracts that are worthy of it."

Evan Longoria posted this on Instagram:

As with any player or person in general, they can have their opinion...but it doesn't mean that their opinions are based in fact.

The simple fact of the matter is that both Bryant and Longoria are wrong...or at least ignorant of how free markets work in baseball.

## Colorado Rockies: Who will step up to fill Adam Ottavino's shoes?

Kevin Henry | Rox Pile | Jan. 21, 2019

There is no question that Adam Ottavino's departure will leave a large hole in the Colorado Rockies bullpen. There is also no question that someone (or more than just one pitcher) will need to step up for the Rockies trying to fill the shoes of the man who should have earned an All-Star Game invitation last season.

A number of names could be that person for the **Colorado Rockies**, ranging from Scott Oberg or Seunghwan Oh (the best bets) to Bryan Shaw or Jake McGee (the best candidates for a potential rebound season) to Yency Almonte, Harrison Musgrave and/or D.J. Johnson (young guys who could fill the role).

It could even be someone like a Jeff Hoffman, who put together an impressive highlight clip on social media that shows some solid velocity and pitch placement.



**X2 Athletics@X2Athletics**

**@hoff\_23 training PR 98.9 . I'd say he's ready. Can't wait to see how this year unfolds!**

There are plenty of people who could step up and fill the role ... but will someone actually do it? That's the biggest bet that general manager Jeff Bridich and the Rockies are making this offseason ... and Bridich has admitted as much to making the bet **in comments he made** to Rox Pile and other media members at the Winter Meetings in Las Vegas.

This is one of the two biggest bets the team is seemingly making heading into 2019, with the other being that Daniel Murphy and younger players will be able to jumpstart what was a stagnant Rockies offense at times last season.

The Rockies winning this bet could be one of the differences between making or missing their third consecutive postseason. Other National League teams have improved this offseason while Colorado seems content to see if its youth movement is ready for the spotlight.

Back to the bullpen, Oberg and Oh joined Ottavino to form a solid O-themed back end of the relief corps to get the game to Wade Davis last season. Shaw and McGee struggled in the first year of new three-year contracts. Musgrave showed some flash, as did Almonte and Johnson.

Solving this question of Ottavino's replacement is actually one of the biggest things that Rockies fans should be watching in spring training. It's also one of the issues to watch very early in the season. Ottavino's shoes could well be filled by the "hot hand" at the moment, which could make for some stressful moments in the time between Colorado's solid rotation and their record-setting closer being on the mound.

## **Colorado Rockies: What a Nolan Arenado trade to the Yankees could look like**

**Noah Yingling | Rox Pile | Jan. 21, 2019**

SNY's Andy Martino reported yesterday that we shouldn't sleep on the Yankees on acquiring Nolan Arenado from the Colorado Rockies so, today, we'll look at what the Yankees could offer the Colorado Rockies in a trade.

Before you get all worked up, it's a very distinct possibility that the **Colorado Rockies** will not be able to resign **Nolan Arenado**. He'll demand well over \$30 million per season (he's already asking for \$30 million in arbitration for 2019) and at least a seven-year contract, likely putting him in the \$250 million + territory. With a slew of bad free agent signings (and extensions) put out by Jeff Bridich and company the past few offseasons, the Rockies will likely not be able to afford it.

At least in my opinion, they would not be doing their due diligence if they didn't at least explore the trade market for him (and all their players, in general, as, for me at least, there is no such thing as an untouchable player). After all, they'd at least get something more if they traded him now compared to let him go in free agency, where they'd get a low first or high second round draft pick after extending him a qualifying offer (which he would not accept as it would be a pay cut and only for one season).

So, without further ado, let's look at what a deal with the Yankees could look like.

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Here are some other major league/major league ready options that the Rockies could look into acquiring.

### **Gleyber Torres**

He was excellent at second base and shortstop for the Yankees in his rookie season last year. In 123 games, he was an All-Star and came in third in AL Rookie of the Year voting. He hit .271/.340/.480 with 24 home runs, 77 RBI, and an OPS+ of 118.

As a prospect, he was consistently in the top 50 prospects, with the highest ranking coming from Baseball Prospectus last season, as he was ranked as **their 3rd best prospect**. For the Rockies, he would play second base and he would probably hit at the top of the lineup or hit 6th or 7th.

### **Greg Bird**

He has been injured the past few seasons and when he has played, he hasn't been that good (176 games in parts of three seasons (he completely missed the 2016 season) with a .214/.302/.434 slash line).

However, he could be a change of scenery candidate.

His offensive numbers should be better in Denver and plus, he is from Colorado as he graduated from Grandview High School in Aurora, which is about 25 miles away from Coors Field.

### **Clint Frazier**

Frazier has been a highly ranked outfield prospect when in the Indians and Yankees system (as high as the 13th best prospect, according to Baseball America) who has had some injury issues in the past three seasons (he hasn't played more than 119 games in the past three seasons).

With the Yankees acquisition of **Giancarlo Stanton**, they already have a crowded outfield with him, **Aaron Judge**, **Brett Gardner**, and **Aaron Hicks**. As a result, he doesn't have a clear spot in either the Yankees outfield or major league roster. The Rockies would have five years of control on him (if they immediately put him in the majors).

They could put him in the outfield with **David Dahl** and Charlie Blackmon. As a result, **Ian Desmond** would be on the bench or sent to another team in another trade. That team could even be the Yankees, as he could help them at shortstop while **Didi Gregorius** is out and **Troy Tulowitzki** is recovering from injuries in Spring Training, as he often has been throughout his career and he could also help at first base, considering that the Yankees don't have a clear cut first baseman.

If they think that he's not completely ready for the major leagues yet, they could send him to Triple-A Albuquerque for a few weeks or months until he is ready but he should be ready by mid-2019 at the latest.

On the prospect front, the Yankees have three of MLB.com top 100 prospects. Two of them are right handed pitchers and their top prospect is an outfielder. Their top prospect, outfielder **Estevan Florial**, and their third best prospect according to MLB.com, **Albert Abreu**, are each in the lower levels of the minor leagues.

But if the Rockies were to want somebody who is close to being major league ready and a top prospect, they should look to **Jonathan Loaisiga**. He even made nine appearances at the major league level last season.

According to MLB.com on a scouting scale (from 20 to 80), Loaisiga is a three pitch pitcher with a 65 fastball, a curveball of 55, and a changeup of 55. His control is a 55 as well. His fastball is consistently in the mid-90s but can top out at 98. He also has a "clean delivery that he repeats well, allowing him to work the bottom of the strike zone and be stingy with walks. His stuff and control give him a ceiling of a mid-rotation starter, though his size and health history are concerns," according to MLB.com.

He is ranked as MLB.com's 66th best prospect and if acquired, he would become the Rockies second best prospect, behind only **Brendan Rodgers**.



## **Blake Street Ball TV: Bud Black's impact on the Colorado Rockies**

**Luke Mullins | Rox Pile | Jan. 19, 2019**

The Colorado Rockies have made the postseason in both of the first two years since Bud Black was hired as the club's manager, marking the first time in franchise history that the team has made consecutive playoff appearances.

While the **Colorado Rockies** made a quick exit from the playoffs both seasons (losing the National League Wild Card Game in 2017 and being swept by the Milwaukee Brewers in the NL Division series in 2018), that does not discount the fact that they are playing better baseball right now than they ever have before.

And a lot of the credit for that goes to the man at the helm, **Bud Black**. The Rockies' turnaround in recent years isn't the product of Black's leadership alone. The Rockies have a very talented roster built with the intention of winning it all.

But it is not as if Bud Black lucked out and arrived at just the right time. The timing of his arrival and the team's recent success is not just a mere coincidence.

Black is not just the man who fills out the lineup card. He, like the players on the field, is one of the integral pieces put in place to help the team succeed. And two-thirds of the way through his contract, he has done just that.

With one year left to go (unless the Rockies extend his contract), Black enters 2019 with a chance to make it deep into the postseason and cement his tenure in the franchise annals as leading the greatest stretch Rockies baseball has ever seen.

The crew at **Blake Street Ball** recently discussed Black's third-place finish in the voting for NL Manager of the Year and the impact Black has had on the team:

While it would be great to finally see Black snag that first-place trophy for Manager of the Year, I think it's safe to say that he's entering 2019 with his eyes on a different trophy.

## **Are the Rockies getting steamrolled this winter? Or is something else at play?**

**Nick Groke | The Athletic | Jan. 22, 2019**

Cold, wet snow hung on Nolan Arenado inside Coors Field last October in the minutes after a brief sweep from the playoffs, but the chill was still to come. The Rockies fizzled in the postseason for one reason more than any other and Arenado knew it, Charlie Blackmon knew, Bud Black and Jeff Bridich knew, even Opera Man must have known.

“There are plenty of signs we need to get better as a hitting team,” Arenado said. “There’s no question about that.”

The Rockies scored just two total runs in a three-game drubbing to the Brewers in a National League division series, the first for Colorado since 2009. The showing was consistent with a two-year stretch of puny team offense, a shortcoming hidden by the best starting pitching rotation in the club’s history. Those empty at-bats finally became their downfall.

“The way it ended is sour,” Arenado said. “We couldn’t get anything going at the worst time.”

So Bridich, Colorado’s general manager, set out to bolster his ailing offense, saying in early November that he would focus on adding bats. First base and outfield became primary targets to find new swings. Big names appeared on the Rockies’ radar. Hopes ran high.

Nearly three months later, and three weeks before the start of spring training, Bridich and the Rockies have added just one major-league player, veteran second baseman Daniel Murphy, who will move to first base. Colorado signed the 33-year-old to a two-year, \$24 million free-agent contract in December.

And that’s it. Meanwhile, veterans Carlos Gonzalez and Gerardo Parra left for free agency (although they remain unsigned and could potentially return, as Gonzalez did last season) and second baseman DJ LeMahieu and reliever Adam Ottavino signed with the Yankees.

“This roster, this team, is probably not going to look the same in two or three months as it does now,” Bridich said in November. Everyone assumed he meant a roster turnover, not a mass exodus.

Adding to the idleness, the Rockies are still fiddling with bringing back the players they can control. More than 10 days after failing to agree on an arbitration contract with Arenado, their most potent offensive player, a \$6 million gap remains between them. The team offered him \$24 million for next season and he countered by asking for \$30 million. And they nearly did the same with shortstop Trevor Story, finally agreeing to his contract after the arbitration deadline two weeks ago.

The Rockies' offseason has turned into an empty freezer more than a hot stove. Are they getting shut out by other teams in the race for winter roster building blocks? Or is something else going on?

When Bridich said he might target first basemen and outfielders in looking for hitting help, it was an honest assessment of need. Over the past two seasons, the Rockies have found very little threat from three of their four corner positions, traditionally offensive spots. At first base, the Rockies rank last in the majors, by far, with a -2.2 WAR and 78 wRC+ (where 100 is average), according to Fangraphs. In left field, they rank second-to-last, at -1.0 WAR and 79 wRC+. In right field, they rank 26th by WAR at 1.2 and 27th by wRC+ at 85.

Only Arenado has produced consistently from a corner, with the third-best WAR at 11.3 among third baseman.

So Bridich, understandably, talked to the Phillies about a trade for first baseman Carlos Santana before the first baseman was dealt to the Mariners, then to Cleveland, in December. Bridich asked the Diamondbacks if they were interested in a trade for Paul Goldschmidt before Arizona told its division rival to buzz off. Edwin Encarnación seemed to be on the table as a possibility for the Rockies until he landed with Seattle. Justin Smoak's name floated around the idea mill for a spell. None of it came to pass.

Instead, the Rockies added Murphy, whose arrival in Colorado completes a neat circle. Colorado signed him for two years and \$24 million a month before LeMahieu signed a nearly identical, two-year, \$24 million deal with the Yankees. The swap from LeMahieu to Murphy had very little to do with price or prospects or positions. The Rockies' most major-league ready prospect available at first or second is Ryan McMahon, who can play both positions. And while Murphy will move to first base, LeMahieu could have done the same. The Yankees want him as a utility infielder.

The difference was in their offense. Murphy has a career 117 wRC+ compared to LeMahieu's 90 wRC+. LeMahieu, with his three Gold Gloves, is clearly a better defender, but the Rockies determined they can live with that loss.

"Consistent run production," Bridich said at the Winter Meetings when asked how he values offense. "As we saw in the playoffs, the latest parts of our season, the ability to score in the toughest of situations (dropped off)."

That bump, from LeMahieu to Murphy, is the sum total of the Rockies' offensive upgrade through the third week of January.

Are the Rockies missing on free agents? Or are they avoiding them? They seem to be hamstrung for money, from deals both past and future.

Take, for comparison, Ian Desmond and Andrew McCutchen. The Rockies will move Desmond to the outfield this season after he never settled in comfortably at first base in the first two years of his five-year, \$70 million contract. McCutchen in December signed a three-year, \$50 million contract with the Phillies. They are essentially the same age, Desmond 33 and McCutchen 32. Desmond in two years with the Rockies has a 78 OPS+ (100 is league average). McCutchen in his past two seasons finished with a 123 and 118 OPS+.

If the Rockies had signed Desmond to his deal this year, it would be the second-biggest contract of the offseason, behind only pitcher Patrick Corbin's six-year, \$140 million deal with the Nationals.

Add, as another comparison, Ottavino's deal with the Yankees at three years and \$27 million. It is nearly the identical deal the Rockies gave to relievers Jake McGee and Bryan Shaw last year. Colorado couldn't afford to pay Ottavino because they already awarded that contract, twice.

The Yankees twice took advantage of the Rockies' lack of foresight. Before Ottavino, according to *The Athletic's* Ken Rosenthal, the Yankees judged LeMahieu as the second-best free-agent infielder overall, behind only Manny Machado, and undervalued. Colorado's loss was New York's gain.

The Rockies' opening-day payroll of about \$137 million last season, according to Baseball Prospectus, was a club record in their 26-year history, about \$10 million more than 2017 and \$25 million more than 2016. As they sit now, the Rockies carry a player payroll of about \$145 million, according to Baseball Prospectus, or \$150 million by an estimate from RosterResource.com.

"Our payroll has grown a lot over the last five years," Bridich said at the Winter Meetings. "And we will plan on responsible growth. We are not in a holding pattern and we are not drawing back on our payroll. We believe we can continue to grow responsibly."

Which brings the Rockies back to Arenado. The all-star third baseman last signed a new contract in 2016, when Colorado gave him a two-year, \$29.5 million contract into arbitration. In hindsight, he might have been underpaid, choosing instead the guarantee of two years at the expense of overall money. So it seems fair for him to ask for an arbitration-record \$30 million, even if the Rockies' counteroffer at \$24 million also was a record.

If they can't agree on a compromise, the case would move to an arbitration trial next month. But this only covers the 2019 season. The Rockies want Arenado long-term. And if they're quibbling over \$6 million now, and the club already decided

they couldn't afford Ottavino and LeMahieu, even at team-friendly values, how will they cover a long-term deal for Arenado that will almost surely top \$200 million?

Money is not the only issue. Arenado has made it clear he is interested in playing for a team that annually competes for the playoffs.

"I'm tired of coming to the ballpark and losing," Arenado said in June. "I'm not saying I go home questioning, like, 'I don't like this place.' I love it here. But yeah, I want to win. And the more we lose, the more I — if you lose all the time, nobody wants to be there."

If the Rockies are pinching pennies at the expense of keeping up with the Dodgers now in a play to save and sign Arenado later they risk freezing themselves out of everything.

## How the Colorado Rockies bullpen stacks up without Ottavino

Drew Creasman | BSN Denver | Jan. 18, 2019

This time a year ago, the debate surrounding the Colorado Rockies was whether or not their attempt to spend big money on veteran relievers was the right way to spend the offseason and if it would come back to bite them.

In the short term, at least, those who believed the latter were proven more prescient.

For most of the 2018 campaign, the bullpen failed to live up to the “superpen” moniker that some (guilty) believed it could achieve.

Newly acquired cutter-specialist Bryan Shaw struggled most mightily and most often to the tune of a 5.93 ERA, putting up by far the worst season of his career (-1.1 WAR). A re-signed Jake McGee didn't lag too far behind in terms of disappointment (-0.8 WAR) after a remarkable 2017.

As these pitchers' saw their struggles mount rather than regress, and with Carlos Estevez unable to back up his promising end to 2017 by missing all of 2018 because of injury, it was unclear how Colorado would ever get their 'pen to stabilize, let alone reach its true potential.

But it did stabilize and was able to do so, in my estimation, because of four events.

The first is that Adam Ottavino became an All-Star level pitcher – voters be damned – which meant that despite the aforementioned chaos, if the Rockies could take a lead into the final two innings then they were capable of slamming the door shut behind Otto and Wade Davis, who set a new franchise record for Saves.

That paired quite nicely with the second major factor...

The starting rotation really began to click and pitch deeper into games as the season progressed. This gave Bud Black and Jeff Bridich some time to address the issue and allowed for the team to stay afloat.

That led to the last two stabilizers, whereupon which we can point to specific moments in time.

On June 27, the Rockies recalled Scott Oberg after some struggles and an injury had him stuck in Triple-A. **He bounced back with a vengeance**, eventually taking over late-inning roles and even securing the save in the Wild Card game in Chicago, striking out the side in the 13th. **The contrast between the overall bullpen numbers before and after the moment of Oberg's return** were stark.

Then, almost a month later, Colorado swung one of the quietest deadline trades in recent memory, **acquiring Seunghwan Oh from the Toronto Blue Jays for a pair of prospects**. Oh pitched 21.1 mostly high-leverage innings down the stretch, posting a 2.53 ERA with a 10.13 K/9 rate and a 2.95 BB/9 rate while tallying eight holds and a save. For the season, he pitched to a 2.63 ERA over 68.1 innings and the Rockies will have him back this season.

So, with Thursday's news that Ottavino will be joining the New York Yankees in 2019, can Colorado absorb the loss or do they need to unlock another series of fortunate events?

Let's take a look at best and worst case scenarios.

#### **WORST-CASE SCENARIO**

There is no way around the fact that the Rockies are losing their best reliever from an already reeling bullpen a year ago; the glue that arguably kept the whole thing from disintegrating like a Marvel character after a Thanos snap.

There is almost no chance the Rockies get a single season anywhere near as good as Ottavino's 2018 which makes recreating his value in the aggregate an uphill battle.

In a worst-case scenario that doesn't feature any injuries, Oberg is unable to maintain his momentum or his few months of dominance becomes a flash in the pan and Oh reverts back to the 4.10 ERA pitcher he was his second year in St. Louis, which is why the Cardinal declined to keep him around.

Naturally, a Murphy's Law season for the bullpen would exclude any kind of rebound for veterans Shaw, McGee, Mike Dunn, or Chris Rusin.

Furthermore, the Rox would have to roll snake eyes on a multitude of young and talented, but largely unproven, pitchers.

But perhaps the biggest way that 'pen struggles could hurt the 2019 Rockies is if the club is forced into converting a few starters and then ends up needing those players in the rotation for a myriad of potential reasons.

Then there are any number of injury possibilities that could test and stretch the depth before it is ready to be tested or stretched.

The most devastating would be losing Wade Davis for any length of time with Oh the only other player with significant experience closing.

If this unit doesn't come together early, there could be a kind of domino effect on the roster... but again this is a worst-case scenario.

### **BEST-CASE SCENARIO**

Of course, a best-case scenario would see the inverse of everything we just talked about. The vets would bounce back to their career numbers, Oh and Oberg would slide naturally into set-up roles, and perhaps a return of 2017 Rusin, which we saw glimpses of late in 2018, would be all they need.

It's also not unfathomable to think Davis, despite his historic season, could improve upon his 4.13 ERA.

Where all that moves from just a tolerable absorption of what they've lost into something far more intriguing is with a group of three young pitchers who could be in line for Oberg-like breakouts: Carlos Estevez, Yency Almonte, Harrison Musgrave.

It may have been way back in the Walt Weiss Era but Estevez has already been a stabilizing force for the Rockies bullpen once before. The 26-year-old fireballer has seen some extreme highs and lows since then. After recording 11 saves in 2016, the league began to adjust quicker than he could and he fell apart, as did the team, in a key stretch that year, falling to a 5.24 season ERA.

After getting knocked around a bit at the beginning of 2017, Estevez spent a few months in the minors working on his mechanics then stormed back to the bigs for a pivotal part of the run into the postseason, He eventually earned the trust of the notoriously stingy Bud Black, becoming the go-to guy against the likes of eventual MVP Giancarlo Stanton in some of the biggest games the club had played in a decade.

To his absolute devastation, he lost all of 2018 with injuries but he is still young enough and clearly talented enough that he could follow in Oberg's footsteps.



While both of those players have faced trials and tribulations at the MLB level, Yency Almonte is a bit newer... but a bit more polished.

Working his way through the Rockies system as a starter, Almonte found himself locked out of a rotation job but employing an arsenal that fit well in the bullpen. So, he converted out of necessity and while his innings were limited, the early results were good.

Over 14.2 innings late in the season, he posted a 1.84 ERA while striking out 8.59/9 and walking 2.45/9. His plus changeup to go along with the fastball/slider combo and velocity that can tick up to 97 or 98 mph could make him a revelation in 2019 if he continues to progress after a compelling first taste of MLB.

Harrison Musgrave showed such poise and ability that he was taken on the postseason roster a year ago and showed well for himself. The lefty ate up 44.2 innings for Colorado with a 4.63 ERA which was impressive considering how often he was asked to pitch multiple innings against big leaguers he was seeing for the first time.

Another starter displaced by the Rockies depth in that area, Musgrave could similarly improve behind his added experience and comfortability with a new position.

In addition to all this high-ceiling potential, the Rockies have a group of high-floor options in Chad Bettis, DJ Johnson, and (possibly) Sam Howard or Justin Lawrence.

And that's all before you consider converting another starter or think about whether or not you can get away with using Antonio Senzatela as a swing man again.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

As is almost always the case, some middle-case scenario will most likely occur. But the Rockies are far from being a team with no options.

Its incredible to think that this time last year, the values of Ottavino and Shaw were the exact opposite of what they are now and that is a steadfast reminder of the ever-volatile nature of bullpens. After all, there is no guarantee that the former is better in 2019 than the latter especially considering for most of their careers it has been the other way around.

And that's very much to the point.

The possible outcomes where the bullpen is actually better than a year ago are almost equal to those in which they are worse.

What does seem likely, though, is that they will have a less extreme season. The veterans who need to rebound will be given a chance to do so, but if they struggle again, you can combine those outcomes with the ones from 2018 and make a much easier case for a quicker hook from the roster in favor of a younger player.

The odds seem against Shaw and McGee being as bad or worse, but the odds are also against each of these players staying healthy and every one of the young guys taking a clear step forward.

As it stands, though, the Rockies have 13 bullpen arms with MLB experience and success under their belts. None of them are as good as Adam Ottavino just was.

But unless everything that can go wrong does, the extra innings from Oh and a full-season of the new Oberg combined with even the most moderate rebounds from vets and progress from youngsters will lead to a more productive bullpen overall.

And if Oh, who is the most likely to step directly into Ottavino's spot, proves nothing else, it's that you can always go get another one in a trade.

## **Adam Ottavino signs with New York Yankees**

**Justin Michael | Mile High Sports | Jan. 17, 2019**

Adam Ottavino played a crucial role in Colorado's 2018 success, but the 33-year old reliever will return home on a three-year \$27 million deal with the New York Yankees per Jeff Passan.

A native of New York, Ottavino's deal with the Yankees is not very surprising, considering Ottavino returned to the Bronx to train in the off season on multiple occasions and the team has had interest in him for months.

In seven seasons with the Rockies, Ottavino was the definition of consistency with a 3.41 ERA in 390.2 innings pitched. In 2018, Ottavino was particularly impressive, finishing the season with a 2.43 ERA in 77.2 innings pitched. Ottavino also racked up the strikeouts with a career-high 112 on the year.

Ottavino joins former Rockies teammate D.J. LeMahieu, who also signed with the Yankees earlier this month.