



## MEDIA CLIPS – Dec. 19, 2018

### **Opportunity will knock for 3 key Rockies in '19 Roster turnover will give McMahon, Tapia, Estevez chances to step up Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Dec. 18th, 2018**

DENVER -- The Rockies' news and non-news of last week's Winter Meetings sparked an idea -- to log on to BrainyQuote, where you enter a word and come away with inspiration.

So, let's enter "opportunity" and see how what pops up relates to three lower-service-time players -- infielder Ryan McMahon, outfielder Raimel Tapia and right-handed relief pitcher Carlos Estevez.

Mainstay second baseman DJ LeMahieu, right fielder Carlos Gonzalez and righty pitcher Adam Ottavino are free agents. But the Rockies' only planned major acquisition is one offensive player. The leaves plenty of opportunity for players like McMahon, Tapia and Estevez -- all of whom have displayed positive attributes but also have areas in need of improvement -- to make their mark in 2019.

So here are wise BrainyQuote words, applied to each:

"Everything negative -- pressure, challenges -- is an opportunity for me to rise."

-- Basketball superstar Kobe Bryant

The left-handed-hitting McMahon, who turned 24 on Friday, made the team out of Spring Training in 2018 after playing in 17 games in 2017, but he struggled with the double challenge of sporadic at-bats and a lack of familiarity with opposing pitchers. He had a .180 average through April 30, before the first of two options to Triple-A Albuquerque.

But McMahon learned.

Specifically, compare the body positioning and bat angle in the two pictures -- from a strikeout on June 14 against the Phillies' Vince Velasquez, when McMahon dropped the barrel behind his back, which led to a startling inability to catch up to fastballs, and from his three-run walk-off homer against the Dodgers' JT Chargois on Aug. 11.

McMahon side by side swinging

The Rockies actually zeroed in on the flaw on June 20, the day McMahon homered off the Mets' Robert Gsellman in an 10-8 victory, and the team sent him down the next day to correct it.

According to Statcast™, before the All-Star break, on pitches 94 mph or faster, McMahon went 4-for-20 (.200) with a .300 slugging percentage. After the break, McMahon hit .370 (10-for-27) with a .593 slugging percentage on such offerings.

So while McMahon has improvement to do with his contact rate, he showed he could catch up to a Major League fastball and hit it solidly when he did connect.

Not only that, but McMahon's athletic ability has the Rockies believing he can step in for LeMahieu. He played primarily first base and made just eight starts at second, but the first play in the GIF below demonstrates quick, natural reaction, and the second is a reasonable imitation of LeMahieu, a three-time Gold Glove Award winner.

McMahon defense

If McMahon doesn't step forward, there are options. Right-handed-hitting Garrett Hampson showed ability in his brief big league time last year, and he could play a platoon role or more, while the Rockies' top prospect as ranked by MLB Pipeline, Brendan Rodgers, could be ready soon.

"Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently."

-- Auto magnate Henry Ford.

Call this a second big chance for Tapia, 24.

After at times solid work, mostly off the bench, in 92 games in 2016 and '17 (.283/.322/.394), Tapia had a chance at a regular job last spring. The idea to move Blackmon from first to third in the batting order was predicated on Tapia winning leadoff duty. But Tapia's .242/.284/.355 slash line in Spring Training landed him in Albuquerque, as the Rockies re-signed Gonzalez.

Tapia turned in solid work at Albuquerque (.302/.352/.495), but he never fully gained a footing in the Majors, mainly because he struggled when asked for fundamental at-bats off the bench.

Tapia's pinch-hit grand slam on July 20 keyed an 11-10 victory at Arizona, but he went 0-for-his-next-7. His last at-bat in a close game came in the ninth inning of a 2-0 victory at Arizona. After Hampson doubled, Tapia's vain attempts to bunt him to third led to a four-pitch strikeout.

Tapia bad at bat

But the Rockies can benefit from the speed Tapia displays below -- when he dramatically scored from third on a seventh-inning foul pop toward the Astros' dugout on July 25, and when his liner into the left-center gap resulted in a triple against the Phillies on Sept. 26.

Tapia speed

Should the Rockies find a bat for first base, right-handed-hitting Ian Desmond can move to the outfield to join lefty hitters Blackmon and David Dahl. However, Tapia's left-handed bat could earn him playing time.

Desmond hit .280 against left-handed pitching but just .216 against righties last season. Additionally, Tapia could help the Rockies drop Blackmon in the order and to a corner outfield spot with Tapia playing center.

With Tapia out of Minor League options, meaning he'd have to be exposed to waivers to be sent down, it's a year for him to establish himself.

"Do you know what my favorite part of the game is? The opportunity to play."

-- Football Hall of Famer Mike Singletary

Estevez, 25, didn't get much chance to play last year. He suffered an oblique injury while bending over to pick up a baseball during Spring Training. During his Minor League rehab at Albuquerque, he was sitting in the dugout between innings and hurt an elbow ligament while pushing into the bench to stand up.

Estevez has at times been a real threat. He was closer as a rookie for part of 2016 and was used down the stretch in '17. But his command and control can come and go. However, as he demonstrated when he struck out the Giants' Hunter Pence with the bases loaded in a tight Rockies win on Sept. 5, 2017 -- with no pitch slower than 98.7 mph -- he can be a weapon.

Estevez strikeout

That type of pitching could mean he could step into a greater role, the way organization product Scott Oberg did in 2018. Estevez is currently pitching in the Dominican Winter League.

**Rosenthal: Voting for new names on a Hall of Fame ballot that finally has room to breathe**  
**Ken Rosenthal | TheAthletic.com | Dec. 18, 2018**

Phew, I finally can breathe.

The past five years, I've felt almost suffocated filling out my Hall of Fame ballot, voting for the maximum 10 players and gasping as I tried to squeeze in a few more.

This year, I'm cool with 10. And while I strongly considered a number of other candidates, each was borderline enough to justify excluding, at least for the moment.

Yes, the ballot finally is clearing — the voting members of the Baseball Writers Association of America elected 16 players from 2014 to '18, the largest total ever of a five-year period. You know what else helps? The Era Committees are again playing the role for which they were intended, providing fresh consideration for players the writers had overlooked.

That's not to say I agree with the Today's Game Era Committee's recent election of Harold Baines, whom I covered in Baltimore and greatly admired yet never thought was a Hall of Famer. But the committees —when functioning properly — should regularly induct players, acting as a safety net for those who are arguably deserving but fail to gain the necessary 75 percent of the vote in their 10 years on the ballot.

From 2012 to '16, the committees did not function properly, electing only one player — and that player, Deacon White, was from the 1800s. Baines, on the other hand, was one of four committee selections the past two years, joining Lee Smith, Alan Trammell and Jack Morris.

I voted regularly for Smith and Trammell before my ballot got too crowded. I never voted for Morris and Baines, but I'm not going to quibble with Morris reaching Cooperstown and I'm not all that upset about Baines making it, either. We're talking about a Hall of Fame vote, not a presidential election. The induction of Baines will cause neither the republic nor the sport to crumble.

That said, the concern over the lowering of standards is fair. The clamoring for candidates with resumés similar to Baines' or better is inevitable. The voting will never be perfect — the BBWAA will make mistakes, and so will the committees. But

the outcry over Baines' selection, complete with charges of cronyism due to the presence on the 16-person panel of two unabashed Baines supporters (his former owner with the White Sox, Jerry Reinsdorf, and former manager with the White Sox and Athletics, Tony La Russa) might give future committees pause when they assess candidates of questionable merit.

And yet, all debate is healthy, all conversation worthwhile. Fans will say, "I know a Hall of Famer when I see one." Or they will ask, "Why is support for Player X changing? His statistics are the same as when he retired." Understandable sentiments, but the process isn't that simple. Comparative analysis is a must for those of us who view the ballot as a special responsibility. And yes, a voter's perspective can change over time.

Bert Blyleven and Tim Lincecum are examples of players who benefited from the rise of sabermetrics, which gave voters new insight into their careers. Larry Walker, who is getting my vote for the first time in his ninth year on the ballot, is another whose candidacy is enhanced by the improvements not just in the ways we quantify hitting, but also baserunning and fielding.

My previous omission of Walker largely was due to the stuffed ballot, but I also was concerned that he averaged only 128 games in his 14 full seasons (his performance outside of Coors Field was not as much of a detriment, in my view; Walker had a .890 road OPS in his nine full seasons with the Rockies.)

Still, as Jay Jaffe wrote on Fangraphs, "In less playing time, Larry Walker created more value with his bat than several first-ballot Hall of Famers routinely lauded for their major milestones." Factor in Walker's defense and baserunning, and his 72.7 career Wins Above Replacement ranks 11th among right fielders, ahead of 15 out of the 25 enshrined. WAR is an estimate, an imperfect measure. But the metric offers a greater appreciation of all-around greatness, and bolsters Walker's case for Cooperstown.

I voted for every member of the Hall's class of 2018 — Vladimir Guerrero, Trevor Hoffman, Chipper Jones and Jim Thome — and their inductions created four openings on my ballot. My six holdovers are Barry Bonds, Roger Clemens, Edgar Martinez, Mike Mussina, Curt Schilling and Billy Wagner (here is why I vote for Bonds and Clemens; the others I also have explained in previous columns.) My four additions are Walker, newcomers Mariano Rivera and Roy Halladay, and Fred McGriff, who received my vote from 2010 to '13 before I ran out of room on my ballot.

Rivera, the greatest closer of all time, requires no explanation.

Halladay was a unicorn, a workhorse and master craftsman in an era of big offense and increasing restrictions on starting pitchers, achieving my usual prerequisite — 10-year dominance — even though two of those seasons were shortened by shoulder trouble and a fractured left fibula.

McGriff, entering his final year on the ballot, finished seven homers short of 500, had a higher career OPS-plus than Eddie Murray and a .917 OPS in 218 career postseason plate appearances. Why exactly has he maxed out at 23.9 percent? Because his personality was too modest?

My 10th spot came down to Wagner or Scott Rolen, and I stuck with Wagner because of his advantages over the Hall of Famer Hoffman in ERA (2.31 to 2.87) and strikeouts per nine (11.9 to 9.4), albeit in 186 1/3 fewer innings, almost three seasons' worth for the one-inning closers of his generation.

Rolen is worthy due to his offensive and defensive excellence at third base, the position that is most underrepresented in the Hall (Chipper Jones was just the 17th Hall of Famer whose primary position was third). But this is only Rolen's second year on the ballot, and I imagine I will vote for him eventually.

My guess is that Rivera and Edgar Martinez are locks, and that Halladay and Mussina also might be inducted. Derek Jeter is the only sure-thing newcomer on the next two ballots, creating plenty of room for other players I failed to include this year, most notably Jeff Kent (dubious defense); Omar Vizquel (dubious offense) and Todd Helton (same career OPS-plus as borderline Hall of Famers Orlando Cepeda and Billy Williams . . . and non Hall-of-Famer Danny Tartabull!).

Perhaps I will vote for one or more of those players in the future, perhaps not. But at least I can be confident my ballot will be clear enough to give every viable candidate full consideration. And at least I can be confident the Era Committees will elect Hall of Famers the BBWAA misses, even if they are not always the ones I want.

**Colorado Rockies: What numbers tell us about recent first basemen**  
**Kevin Henry | RoxPile.com | Dec. 19, 2018**

Yet again this offseason, it appears that the Colorado Rockies are searching for an answer to their offensive issues at first base.

When Ian Desmond was signed to a five-year, \$70 million deal in the winter before the 2017 campaign, it was believed the Colorado Rockies had found their first baseman for the foreseeable future. Despite Desmond never playing the position before inking that contract, it was believed he could not only learn the position defensively but also be a solid offensive performer for the team throughout the lifetime of his contract.

However, that has hardly been the case.

Desmond's struggles at the plate once again have the Rockies contemplating this offseason how they can bring offense to a position that has struggled mightily since Justin Morneau won the league's batting title in 2014 with a .319 average.

In an offseason where Todd Helton first appears on the Baseball Hall of Fame ballot, the Rockies are still looking for the player who can be a serviceable replacement for him at first base.

Certainly there have been flashes at the position since Helton retired in 2013. Morneau's batting title in 2014. The first half put together by Mark Reynolds in 2017. Even Desmond's 22 homers and 20 stolen bases last season can be spun positively (if you don't look at his other stats that went along with those numbers).

Despite some of Desmond's numbers last season, the facts remain that the Rockies are once again being rumored to be looking for a free agent to play first base this season. Why? Partly because, as a position last season, Colorado's first basemen (Desmond, Ryan McMahon and Pat Valaika, all of whom drew starts at the position in 2018, along with Drew Butera and Matt Holliday, who wrapped up games at the spot) put together a slash line of .232/.314/.405.

Let's look back to see how that compares to the last year of Helton at first base (2013, when he started 104 games at the spot). As a note, Jordan Pacheco started 39 games at first base while Michael Cuddyer started 13. The trio put together a



slash line of .255/.309/.394. Interestingly, only the batting average was higher that season than what 2018's crew put together.

In Morneau's batting championship season of 2014, with him starting 126 games, Colorado's first basemen pieced together a slash line of .308/.353/.503.

The next season, with injuries limiting Morneau to just 42 starts at first base, Ben Paulsen had the team lead with 60 starts at a position which was a carousel of players including Reynolds, Gerardo Parra, Stephen Cardullo and Wilin Rosario. The group combined for a .279/.321/.445 slash.

In 2016, Reynolds paced the Rockies at first base with 102 starts and was joined by Paulsen, Cardullo, Daniel Descalso, Jordan Patterson and Ryan Raburn. Together, they posted a .264/.332/.412 slash. It's also interesting to note that only Cardullo is still with the organization (and he isn't a member of the current 40-man roster), highlighting the turnover in talent there has been with the club even as recently as two years ago.

The next season, with Reynolds leading the way with 132 starts (thanks in part to a broken hand suffered by Desmond in spring training), Colorado first basemen (also including Desmond, McMahon, Parra, Valaika and Cristhian Adames) recorded a .267/.345/.439 slash line.

To recap by year, with the leader in starts in parentheses...

2013 (Helton) — .255/.309/.394

2014 (Morneau) — .308/.353/.503

2015 (Paulsen) — .279/.321/.445

2016 (Reynolds) — .264/.332/.412

2017 (Reynolds) — .267/.345/.439

2018 (Desmond) — .232/.314/.405

The numbers highlight not only the struggles of last season, but also the revolving door that the position has seen since Helton's retirement.

Unless the Rockies go with McMahon in a dominant role this season and don't sign a short-term replacement at first base, Colorado likely won't find the long-term solution at the position again in 2018. So the bigger question becomes this: When will the franchise find stability at first base?

## Could the Colorado Rockies still land Edwin Encarnacion in a trade? Kevin Henry | RoxPile.com | Dec. 18, 2018

Our friends at SodoMojo.com (covering the Seattle Mariners) think that a Seattle trade that would send Edwin Encarnacion to the Colorado Rockies still might happen this winter.

In this article, our colleagues in the Pacific Northwest looked at some of the recent trade chips the Mariners have obtained and if they will still be with the team when Seattle joins the Colorado Rockies and other squads for spring training in Arizona this February. Their prediction is that Seattle will trade Edwin Encarnacion to the Rockies in exchange for a similar type of haul as the Mariners received when they sent Carlos Santana to the Cleveland Indians in exchange for Encarnacion.

What is that return? A top 80 pick in the upcoming draft and some salary relief from Santana's contract. If the Mariners were to send Encarnacion to Colorado, don't be surprised if a prospect such as Grant Lavigne or another young, highly-rated player would be included in addition to the draft pick and Colorado eating a good deal of the \$20 million salary the 35-year-old is due for the 2019 season.

Why would Seattle do this? After an offseason that has seen the Mariners send James Paxton, Jean Segura, Robinson Cano, Edwin Diaz and others out of the Emerald City, does it make sense to hold on to Encarnacion and his salary for one season?

From the Colorado side, would it make sense for a player who played just 23 games at first base last season and would be needed to be in the field much more than that in 2019, thanks to the lack of a designated hitter in the National League? Encarnacion hasn't been in the NL since 2009 while very much fitting into the DH role with Toronto and Cleveland.

That is the bad news when it comes to a potential fit for Encarnacion in Denver. The good news, of course, is his offensive prowess. His 70 home runs and 214 RBI, as well as .848 OPS and 122 OPS+, during his two years in Cleveland are salivating for Rockies fans hoping Colorado adds another offensive weapon into the lineup this offseason.

Don't forget that Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich said after the Santana-Encarnacion trade that he was still planning to add a "big bat" to the lineup. Could that bat still come from Seattle? Knowing the propensity of Seattle general manager Jerry Dipoto to make trades, anything is possible.