



MEDIA CLIPS – Sept. 3, 2018

Rockies ride late-innings trend to victory in SD **Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Sep. 2nd, 2018**

SAN DIEGO -- Ian Desmond's seventh-inning leadoff single Sunday afternoon was tantamount to the alarm going off for the Rockies' offense.

The three-run inning -- which included Chris Iannetta's two-run double, Charlie Blackmon's RBI single and some well-executed baserunning plays -- led to a 7-3 victory over the Padres at Petco Park that put the Rockies alone in second place in the National League West.

The late offensive production fit with a second-half pattern as the Rockies have kept pace with the D-backs and Dodgers. The Dodgers' 3-2 win over Arizona on Sunday put Los Angeles atop the division, a half game ahead of the Rockies. After losing the first two games of the four against the Padres with weak offensive performances, the Rockies earned a split -- and finished the road trip 3-3.

Through July 15, the Rockies didn't do much late in games. Their batting average in the seventh inning and later was .224, with a .289 on-base percentage. But from July 16, when Trevor Story's walk-off homer beat the Mariners, 4-3, through Saturday, the Rockies were hitting .254 and the OBP was elevated to .327.

"It's hard to hold this offense down three or four times in a row -- there's too much talent for the whole lineup to go 0-for-4, not be consistent and not put up runs," Iannetta said. "It's a ton of talent, a lot of good players and a lot of good players who know how to execute."

The production in the final, most important innings is one reason they've been able to win close games, or pull away late. The trait may come in handy as the Rockies prepare for a key 10-game homestand within the division, starting Monday with the Giants, then three starting Friday against the Dodgers and four starting Sept. 16 against the D-backs.

The big seventh also included a key double-steal by Desmond and Gerardo Parra, who drew a walk from losing pitcher Jacob Nix (2-3) behind Desmond's steal of second. Iannetta's double and Blackmon's single -- part of a 3-for-5 performance -- came off reliever Trey Wingenter. David Dahl homered off Miguel Diaz for an insurance run in the eighth.

"Everybody contributed today, and hopefully it'll continue into the next month," said Dahl, whose homer was his eighth this season in on-and-off starter duty.

Unlike some games that have turned out right for the Rockies, there was early execution. Blackmon doubled in the first, moved to third on a DJ LeMahieu grounder and scored on Nolan Arenado's sacrifice fly. Dahl had a sac fly in the sixth and Story doubled in a run with two outs and a 1-2 count.

"These things have to be done on a regular, consistent basis," said Rockies manager Bud Black. "Are we going to do it 100 percent of the time? No. But our percentages this month have to increase, and you win games by doing that.

"Across the board, all teams are playing the same type of game. We have to make sure offensively we're getting guys over, we're getting them in, we're getting outs when given to us on defense. All those things become very critical."

The late offense helped lefty Kyle Freeland (13-7), who labored at times but held the Padres to three runs, on seven hits, in six innings.

"I got behind a ton of hitters, constantly, which didn't help," Freeland said. "They made an adjustment to me from the last time I faced them about a week or so ago, so I did a little adjusting to them in-game, which is tough. But we were able to hold them to [three runs]."

Franmil Reyes' bases-loaded, two-run single in Freeland's 26-pitch first created a 2-1 deficit. But from there Freeland yielded just one run -- in the fourth, when Manuel Margot ended up with a double when first baseman Desmond missed a pop-up while twisting in the sun.

Freeland is 4-0 with a 2.11 ERA since Aug. 6 and the Rockies have won all six of his starts, and his 2.67 ERA since the All-Star break is the lowest second-half mark in club history.

SOUND SMART

Shortstop record: Story entered team history with his fourth-inning RBI double off Nix. It was his 69th extra-base hit, which eclipsed Troy Tulowitzki (2011) for most extra-base hits by a shortstop in club history.

Road warriors: Sunday's was the Rockies' 40th road victory -- one shy of the club's single-season record, set in 2009 and matched last season.

HE SAID IT

"To get through six and to have the offense explode there in the seventh, and throw some runs on and kind of step on their throats, it was really great to see" -- Freeland, on the help he received from the offense

UP NEXT

Has Rockies lefty Tyler Anderson (6-7, 4.79 ERA) corrected the command issues that led to a poor August (0-4, 11.39 ERA, nine homers in five starts)? We'll find out Monday, when he faces the Giants and lefty Madison Bumgarner (5-5, 2.68) at Coors Field at 1:10 p.m MT. It'll be Anderson's first start since Aug. 26.

Rockies leaning on youth down the stretch
Key at-bats could go to Cuevas, Murphy, Valaika in September
Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Sept. 2, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- The Rockies stayed off the waiver wire and are trusting young right-handed hitters -- all of whom have had ups and downs -- to help the roster in September.

Key at-bats could wind up going to outfielder Noel Cuevas, catcher Tom Murphy and infielder Pat Valaika, who were called up when rosters expanded Saturday. While it's a misnomer to say the bench is totally inexperienced, since manager Bud Black's lineup rotation could leave Matt Holliday, Gerardo Parra or (on a few occasions) Carlos Gonzalez at his disposal, the Rockies clearly aren't afraid to call on less-experienced players.

Valaika has the most experience of the group. His 16 pinch-hit RBIs last season were a Major League rookie record (since 1958), although this year he has a .150 batting average with two home runs and four RBIs, and has endured three send-downs to Triple-A Albuquerque. Cuevas (.243, 2 HR, 8 RBIs) and Murphy (.227, 2 HR, 11 RBIs) each have seen part-time duty in the Majors, then have been returned to Albuquerque either because at-bats were few or slumps grew.

But now they will be asked to make a difference in games.

Valaika, 25, had some big moments last season. His pinch-hit grand slam at San Diego last Sept. 16 helped a successful run to the postseason, and his near-miss on a foul ball could have turned last year's 11-8 Wild Card loss to the D-backs. But starting with an oblique injury in Spring Training, Valaika hasn't gained traction this year.

Valaika batted .250 with three home runs in his last 11 games at Albuquerque, and hopes to have corrected his hitting approach.

"Personally, it's been a tough year but I'm still here, and my only goal is to help the team win in any way I can -- I don't care what role it is," said Valaika, valuable because he is the most-trusted shortstop on the roster behind Trevor Story. "In general I need to have better at-bats."

Cuevas, 26, debuted April 22 after a lengthy Minor League apprenticeship and went 7-for-24 (.292) as a pinch-hitter. But he went 1-for-16 with three strikeouts and two walks in his final nine games before being sent down for regular playing time. He hit .330 with seven doubles, three homers and 16 RBIs in his final 28 games at Albuquerque.

"I focused on making sure I had my rhythm back at the plate, and I knew I was going to get the consistent at-bats playing basically every day," Cuevas said. "I focused on my approach and made sure I could feel what I was doing, so I could understand what my body should feel like in order to keep my rhythm."

Murphy, 27, started eight of his final 11 games before being sent down Aug. 6. But he struck out 20 times, and had some difficult games handling pitches -- especially in key situations. However, with Chris Iannetta, Tony Wolters and newly acquired catcher Drew Butera on the squad, it's possible Murphy will be called on in pinch-hitting situations.

"I really tried to put myself in a better position to see the ball better and, hopefully, put together better at-bats," Murphy said. "That's what I wasn't doing here. It was my goal down in Triple-A, and I pressed a little bit [.149, 18 strikeouts in 14 games]."

"Sometimes, visually, I get my eyes too far away from the plate, so I really worked on my posture to make sure I was in position to see the ball consistently."

The challenge for all three -- and, presumably, others who will be called up this week once Minor League seasons are complete -- is to demonstrate that they can be a part of winning team, even if they don't have a huge amount of experience.

"Pressure always comes from inside," Murphy said. "We can either choose to listen to that type of rhetoric, or make our own statement, which is what our team wants us to do."

Pennant race baseball

The rest of the Rockies' schedule brings challenges and opportunities. They'll play 10 of their final 17 regular season games at home, with a pair of home-road exchanges with the Dodgers and D-backs, who entered Sunday tied atop the National League West and a half game ahead of the Rockies.

While much of the final month is within the division, the Rockies finish outside the West -- a seven-game stretch, four against the Phillies and three against the Nationals.

Black said he's not opposed to the unbalanced schedule, which is designed for games within the division toward the end, but says it may be worth looking at a change.

"I haven't thought about it a lot, but I think maybe the balanced schedule might be something to talk about, because of the Wild Card," Black said. "That's something maybe we should discuss as an industry."

Kyle Freeland, Rockies' bats power Colorado past San Diego Padres
Since July 2, the Rockies have won 11 of Freeland's 12 starts
Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Sep. 2, 2018

SAN DIEGO — Pennant-race baseball, with all of its potential for drama, joy and heartache, comes to Coors Field in earnest Monday afternoon.

"It's fun to play meaningful games in September, that's what you want, that's what you work for," Rockies veteran catcher Chris Iannetta said Sunday afternoon after his two-run double in the seventh inning sparked the Rockies to an important 7-3 win over the Padres at Petco Park. "You want to be in a situation where you can go out there and be playing for something this late in the year."

Colorado begins a critical 11-day, 10-game homestand Monday when it opens a three-game series against San Francisco. After a day off on Thursday, the Rockies host the Dodgers for three games, followed by a four-game set vs. the Diamondbacks.

The Rockies (74-62) are in second place in the National League West, a half-game behind the Dodgers (75-62) who beat the Diamondbacks (74-63) 3-2 on a walk-off, two-run double by Matt Kemp Sunday afternoon. The Dodgers have won five consecutive division titles.

Colorado won Sunday's game behind the consistent left arm of starter Kyle Freeland and an offense that finally executed at a high level, breaking out of its recent doldrums. It was the Rockies' 40th road win of the season, leaving them one shy of the franchise record, set in 2009 and 2017. Colorado has nine road games remaining.

"We played winning baseball today, and this was another complete game by our guys," manager Bud Black said. "We feel as though we are a contending team, and we feel as though we can play with anyone in the National League. We'll see how these next few weeks go.

"But this is good stuff. This is where we want to be. We know we are in a dogfight with the Diamondbacks and the Dodgers. Our guys are ready for it. The clubhouse is great and the guys are coming to the clubhouse with energy every day."

Colorado's key three-run seventh inning — highlighted by a double steal by Ian Desmond and Gerardo Parra and capped off by Iannetta's two-run double that skipped off the right-field wall — broke a 3-3 tie. Charlie Blackmon's RBI single scored Iannetta for the third run of the inning.

David Dahl's solo home run off Miguel Diaz to deep right field in the eighth iced the game.

Freeland has certainly had more impressive starts and sharper command this season, but he never let the game spin out of control. That's a trait the Rockies count on every time the left-hander takes the mound.

"I just kept sticking to my strengths, going upside with fastball and (throwing) changeups and sliders mostly," said Freeland, who was charged with three runs on seven hits over six innings. He walked two and whiffed three. "I got behind a ton of hitters, which didn't help, but we were able to hold them off to just three runs.

"I knew early on I didn't have my best stuff, so I had to make adjustments. I was able to do that."

Freeland improved to 13-7 and his 2.96 ERA ranks as one of the best in Colorado history at this point in the season. Since July 2, the Rockies have won 11 of Freeland's 12 starts.

"Today, Kyle didn't have his best fastball command, but I thought he and Chris (Iannetta) did a good job adjusting," Black said. "Kyle bobbed and weaved his way through six innings and gave himself to win this game."

Shortstop Trevor Story, fast becoming a supercharger, smashed a double in the fourth inning for his 69th extra-base hit of the base, setting a franchise record for a shortstop, surpassing the 68 extra-base hits by Troy Tulowitzki in 2011.

Story added an RBI double in the sixth to score DJ LeMahieu, snapping Story's 0-for-16 skid with runners in scoring position. Story now has 39 doubles, tying Neifi Perez (2000) for the most doubles by a Colorado shortstop. Story is batting .293 and his 87 RBIs rank second on the team to Nolan Arenado's 92.

Freeland's Season

Left-hander Kyle Freeland is having one of the best seasons in Rockies history. A snapshot of what he's done:

13-7, 2.96 ERA, the lowest single-season ERA by a starter

19 quality starts tied for fifth-most in franchise history and tied with Jeff Francis (2007) for most by a left-hander

Has gone 4-0 with a 2.11 ERA over past six starts, with Rockies winning all six games

Since July 2, Rockies have won 11 of Freeland's 12 starts and he's gone 6-1 with a 2.50 ERA over that stretch

— Patrick Saunders, The Denver Post

Looking ahead

Colorado Rockies starting pitcher Tyler Anderson ...Andy Cross, The Denver PostColorado Rockies starting pitcher Tyler Anderson (44) pitches against the San Diego Padres in the first inning at Coors Field on Aug. 21, 2018.

Giants LHP Madison Bumgarner (5-5, 2.68) at Rockies LHP Tyler Anderson (6-7, 4.79), 1:10 p.m. Monday; ATTRM, 850 AM

Anderson's in a funk. So much so, he had his start pushed back so he could regain some of his lost command. The left-hander is 0-3 and has allowed 19 runs over his past 11 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings. Home runs have really hurt Anderson, who's given up 27 longballs, second in the National League to Milwaukee's Chase Anderson, who's served up 28. Anderson's last victory came against the Giants at Coors Field on July 4 and it was one of the best games of his career. He pitched a career-high tying eight innings, allowing no runs while striking out nine and walking two.

The Giants are all but out of the playoff hunt, but Bumgarner has put together a strong season. He didn't figure into the decision in San Francisco's 1-0 win over Arizona on Tuesday, but he pitched seven shutout innings with five strikeouts vs. only four hits. — Patrick Saunders, The Denver Post

Tuesday: Giants RHP Dereck Rodriguez (6-2, 2.47) at Rockies German Marquez (11-9, 4.11), 6:40 p.m., ATTRM

Wednesday: Giants LHP Andrew Suarez (6-9, 4.19) at Rockies Antonio Senzatela (4-5, 4.88), 6:40 p.m., ATTRM

Thursday: Off day

The Top 25 at 25: About the bucket lid that turned Trevor Story into an All-Star hitter ...
Nick Groke | TheAthletic.com | Sep. 3, 2018

SAN DIEGO — The bucket lid that turned Trevor Story into an all-star hitter is repurposed from those buckets of baseballs that never need a lid, the kind you see on five-gallon heavy plastic barrels of paint.

When refashioned inside the netting of a batting cage in suburban Dallas, or under the first-base stands at Coors Field, the bucket lid acts more like a frisbee, if it works. Ideally, the lid will soar like a flying saucer. If not, it will crash and clank like a Wright brothers nightmare.

“Sometimes, I’ll throw it and it will go down or straight up,” Story said. “But I want it to have that flight that carries to the back of the net.”

Ted Williams built himself up as a hitter by swinging a rolled-up newspaper in front of a mirror, saying to himself over and over, “My name is Ted Fuckin’ Williams and I’m the greatest hitter in baseball.”

Story found his unique method in the winter weeks of Texas before this season. Tired of too many high fly balls and too few line drives, too many strikeouts and too little contact, the Rockies shortstop needed to train his hands to travel on an ideal bat path for power sluggers.

A bucket lid will fly far if you fling it at the right angle to maximize lift through the air. It is the same angle that produces hard-hit, line-drive home runs. So Story will grab the lid with two hands, similar to his grip on a bat, and swing through an imaginary strike zone and let loose.

“It makes me feel my hand path,” he said. “If I come through how I want, and I release it out front and back up the middle, it will frisbee like a line drive, out and up.”

The idea came from Story’s batting partner, Brandon Sherard, the hitting coach for the French National Team in 2016. The duo have worked together since Story was 15 years old. Now 25, and among the best young professional athletes in Colorado, Story was a National League all-star for the first time, in part because of his top-end defense at a premium position.

And, in large part, because of his home-run power. As a 23-year-old rookie in 2016, Story rocketed into recognition with 27 home runs in 97 games before a left thumb injury wrecked his season.

His second year fell into a bad trend. He hunted homers at the expense of hits and gathered 197 strikeouts, the most in baseball. Not coincidentally, he hit more fly balls and fewer line drives, the product of an uppercut swing.

This is why the bucket came into play. But not just the lid. The entire bucket.

Rockies manager Bud Black implored Story to become a more complete hitter. And by chance, he used a bucket to do the explaining. Black told Story that at-bats can be separated into good buckets and bad buckets and the goal is to fill up the good bucket before the bad bucket.

“There are certain times when you should take your at-bat and try to do damage with whatever you’re feeling,” Story said. “But there are certain times when you have to take a smarter at-bat.”

Against the Cardinals late last month at Coors Field, Story came to bat in the eighth inning of a budding blowout victory. The bases were loaded. And even with his team ahead by eight runs, Story wanted a more measured outcome. A base hit would work. But he struck out on four pitches.

“I’d put that in the bad bucket,” Story said.

The buckets are setting Story straight. He entered Saturday with 26 home runs and 85 RBIs, both second on the club behind Nolan Arenado. He was hitting .289 with an .880 OPS and a well-above average, park-adjusted 120 OPS+. And his strikeout rate was down nearly 9 percent, to 25.7 percent.

On Sunday against the Padres, Story doubled twice, for his 69th and 70th extra-base hits this season, surpassing Troy Tulowitzki to set a Rockies record by a shortstop.

“That’s a pretty damn good hitter,” Black said. “He’s made a great leap from last year to this year. I sense his strikeouts will continue to come down, a little bit. I would like to think the power numbers will sustain themselves over time. If he hits in the middle of the order and he plays regularly, which we think he will, the RBIs will stay very comparable to where they are this year.”

When Story felt his swing escape him this season, on occasion, he returned to the bucket lid, a tool that keeps his head grounded and his hits aloft.

He is continually helped by the bucket lid — better to fling it across a batting cage than to cap his fill of good at-bats.

“Hopefully I can fill up more of the good bucket than the bad bucket,” Story said.

A critical Coors Field homestand awaits, but the Rockies, especially Chris Iannetta, are in the eye of the storm
Nick Groke | TheAthletic.com | Sep 3, 2018

SAN DIEGO — Chris Iannetta rarely takes a deep breath because he never needs one. He is a metronome, a constant force of calm in the face of freak-outs.

His Rockies had just picked apart the Padres for a 7-3 victory here Sunday, turning what felt like a disastrous roadie through Southern California into an even-stein finish, and the Dodgers and Diamondbacks were knocking and dragging each other out about two hours north up the I-5. The heat of a division race amped up in a hurry.

But Iannetta pumped the brakes.

“There are so many things that can happen, good or bad,” he said, before boarding a plane back to Denver for what sets up as the most critical Coors Field homestand since the Rockies’ run to the World Series in 2007.

The Rockies are a half-game back of the Dodgers in the National League West and within one hour on Sunday, three teams changed spots. Colorado moved from third to second, the Dodgers from second to first, and the Diamondbacks from first to third on one wayward Archie Bradley pitch that turned into Matt Kemp’s game-winning double in LA.

The swings atop the NL West are already wild, even with nearly a month to play. And Iannetta will not work himself into a lather.

“Even if you fall and make mistakes, or you go down two or three games, there’s still time to come back,” he said. “And if you go up two or three games, there’s time to lose your lead.”

After dropping the first two games of a four-game series in San Diego, including a disheartening 3-2 loss in 13 innings Thursday and a 7-0 blowout loss Friday, the Rockies seemed to be sinking, the victims of an ice-cold offense that scraped together just eight hits total in two games.

By Sunday, after Iannetta’s two-run double propelled a three-run seventh inning, the Rockies found their stroke.

“It’s hard to hold this offense down for three or four games in a row,” Iannetta said. “There’s too much talent for the whole lineup to go 0-for for a whole series.”

At first, it was an obvious bunt situation for Iannetta in the seventh, with the game tied at 3, two runners on and no outs. The Rockies had slugger Matt Holliday and several lefty hitters on the bench available to pinch-hit for pitcher Kyle Freeland if Iannetta could move over the runners.

But the Rockies forced the issue. Ian Desmond singled to lead off the inning and stole second. Gerardo Parra walked. Desmond saw another opening and stole third, and Parra played heads-up to swipe second and take a double play off the table.

Iannetta took the chance and drove them home himself, and later scored on a Charlie Blackmon single. They were rolling.

“We feel as though we’re a contending team,” Colorado manager Bud Black said. “We feel like we can play with anybody in the National League. And we’ll see how the next few weeks go. We know we’re in a dogfight with the Diamondbacks and Dodgers. We just have to keep doing it.”

Iannetta, though, would prefer to wait before making any proclamations. The 35-year-old catcher, in his 13th season and the first year of a two-year deal in his return to the Rockies, is drawing on experience.

In 2014, Iannetta was the backstop on an Angels team that caught fire in August and September. Behind Mike Trout, they were the hottest-hitting team in the American League and they moved 30 games above .500 at one point. The World Series was in sight.

But in the final week of September, the Angels dropped five of seven games and limped into an AL division series against Kansas City. The Royals promptly swept them from the playoffs.

“You want to keep pace right now. You don’t want to take off and get hot at this point,” Iannetta said. “You want to wait another few more weeks. But you can’t draw it up like that. That’s not what we’re trying to do. But if you could draw it up, that’s what you’d want.”

So the Rockies will bide their time and try to bunker down at elevation in Denver, with the difficult assignment of facing two of the best lefty pitchers in baseball this week: Madison Bumgarner and the Giants on Monday and Clayton Kershaw and the Dodgers on Friday.

They will try to overtake first place, sure, but after qualifying for the playoffs only in the final week last year, their first postseason since 2009, the Rockies learned to be more mature about the emotional rollercoaster.

Iannetta knows this better than most.

"It's fun to play meaningful games in September. That's what you want. You want to be playing for something," he said.

"But it's still early. In here, for us, it's still early."

The Top 25 at 25: Debating the best young professional athletes in Denver
Nick Kosmider | TheAthletic.com | Sep. 3, 2018

When rookies Bradley Chubb, Royce Freeman and Courtland Sutton accounted for the Broncos' first three nonkicking scores during the team's preseason game against the Bears on Aug. 18, it became increasingly clear that a youth movement is firmly underway for Denver's NFL franchise.

But the Broncos aren't the only team in town pinning high hopes on players who are still relatively new to the whole being-allowed-to-legally-drink thing. Everywhere you turn in Denver, athletes who have not exceeded a quarter-century of life experience are growing into players who are giving the city's fan bases reason to invest in optimism stock.

Trevor Story hit a home run in the All-Star Game back in July and is now helping Colorado chase a National League West title behind the 25-and-younger pitching trio of Kyle Freeland, German Marquez and Antonio Senzatela.

Nathan MacKinnon led the Avalanche back to the playoffs while nearly getting his hands on the Hart Trophy.

The Nuggets have one of the best young trios in basketball with Nikola Jokic, Jamal Murray and Gary Harris, a group expected to lead the team to the playoffs this year for the first time since 2013.

And the Rapids will be leaning on a young group of its own, led by Kellyn Acosta, to climb back into contention next season.

With this group of Gen-Y and Gen-Z ballers so prominently in the spotlight in Denver, now is the perfect time to unveil our first Top 25 at 25 list, a countdown of the best young athletes playing for the city's professional sports franchises. It's an idea we borrowed from our friends at The Athletic Detroit, and the formula was pretty simple. After each of our reporters nominated 25-and-younger players from the sport he or she covers, each member of our six-person staff made our own 1-through-25 list of players. There was no mandate on how the list should be created — no rules on promise vs. production, etc. The No. 1 player on each list received 25 points, No. 2 received 24 points and so on.

To complement our first Top 25 at 25 list, we have also included individual pieces that further dissect a particular player on the list or a trend from each pro sports franchise.

So how does your list stack up to ours? Who is too high? Who is too low? Who is missing entirely? Please feel free to engage with us in the comment section of this article.

And with all that out of the way, here's the list:

25. Nikita Zadorov, Avalanche, 23 years old, 20 points

Zadorov last season took another step in his quest to become a consistent top-four defenseman. He played in 77 games and scored a career-best 20 points. The 6-foot-5, 230-pound menace was a first-round pick by the Sabres in 2013 but came to the Avs in the Ryan O'Reilly deal. — Ryan Clark

24. Jack Price, Rapids, 25 years old, 21 points

Price was a product of the Wolverhampton system in England before he moved across the Atlantic to join the Rapids. The midfielder joins Kellyn Acosta and defender Kortne Ford as the core the Rapids believe can get the franchise back into Western Conference contention for years to come. — Ryan Clark

23. Cale Makar, Avalanche, 19 years old, 22 points

Makar will be a sophomore at Massachusetts, but he's the organization's top prospect. And for good reason. He was the fourth player taken in the 2017 draft and gives the Avs another puck-moving defenseman with speed, smooth skating and leadership. Many expect Makar to leave UMass after the 2018-19 season and sign with the Avalanche. — Ryan Clark

22. Tyson Jost, Avalanche, 20 years old, 24 points

Tyson Jost provided solid numbers in his first season with the Avalanche. (Photo by Gary A. Vasquez/USA TODAY Sports)

Selected 10th by the Avs in 2016, Jost spent one season with college power North Dakota before making the jump to the NHL in 2017-18. Jost, who can be used at center or on the wing, finished with 22 points in 65 games during his first full professional season. The expectation is Jost, along with Alexander Kerfoot, can anchor the team's second line for years to come. — Ryan Clark

21. Alexander Kerfoot, Avalanche, 24 years old, 25 points

It is entirely possible Kerfoot could be the smartest athlete under 25, if not the smartest athlete in Denver regardless of age. He played four seasons at Harvard and scored 123 points for the Crimson. Kerfoot was drafted by New Jersey but signed with Colorado as a college free agent. He went straight into the lineup and put up 43 points in 79 games last year to help the Avs reach the playoffs for the first time in three seasons. — Ryan Clark

20. Trey Lyles, Nuggets, 22 years old, 26 points

The 6-10 forward is already entering his fourth NBA season, and if his first year in Denver was any indication, Lyles may just be hitting his stride. Acquired in a draft night trade with the Utah Jazz last summer, Lyles averaged a career-best 9.9 points and 38.1 percent shooting from 3-point range while filling in admirably for the injured Paul Millsap. Denver jettisoned forwards Kenneth Faried, Wilson Chandler and Darrell Arthur this offseason, further cementing the role Lyles will have as a key bench component for a team with playoff expectations this season. — Nick Kosmider

19. Ryan McMahon, Rockies, 23 years old, 33 points

McMahon is still learning how to hit big-league fastballs, but his power never went away. The left-handed slugger hit two game-breaking homers in August, on back-to-back nights, in a critical series victory over the Dodgers at Coors Field. The 2013 second-round pick of the Rockies figures to have an important role in September as Colorado's pursuit of back-to-back playoff appearances — and, perhaps, a first-ever NL West title — goes down to the wire. — Nick Groke

18. Michael Porter Jr., Nuggets, 20 years old, 37 points

Much like his status as last summer's No. 14 overall pick in the NBA draft, Porter's place on this list reflects the uncertainty surrounding his health and the impact it will have on his pro career. The consensus No. 1 player in the 2017 class ultimately played only three college games at Missouri because of a back injury that has since required two surgeries, most recently in July. At 6-10 with a lethal shooting touch, Porter has the type of natural talent that could make him the best player in last year's draft class, the type of presence that could dramatically raise the ceiling for the Nuggets in years to come. But the giant question marks that come with that talent make Porter a wait-and-see prospect. — Nick Kosmider

17. Antonio Senzatela, Rockies, 23 years old, 59 points

The 6-1 right-hander with a sturdy fastball skipped over Triple A entirely before debuting last season as a 22-year-old rookie. His mom, Nidya, died of cancer the summer before, with Antonio by her side. He continues to carry a gold rosary with him when he pitches, a gift from his mom. — Nick Groke

16. David Dahl, Rockies, 24 years old, 61 points

Another wayward injury set him back again this year after a foul ball broke his foot in May. But in his limited time in the majors, Dahl has shown the five-tool potential he had as a first-round pick in 2012. He may be Colorado's starting center fielder next season. As it relates to Colorado's pursuit of the playoffs, Dahl is being counted on to play a key part. — Nick Groke

15. Brendan Rodgers, Rockies, 22 years old, 62 points

Among the top prospects in all of baseball, Rodgers was the No. 3 overall pick out of high school in 2015. He has not slowed since. At every minor-league level, he has flashed the slugging power that so intrigued the Rockies to begin with. His promotion to Triple-A Albuquerque has had some speed bumps — since joining the Isotopes on Aug. 1, through Aug. 26, he was hitting just .220 with no home runs — but Rodgers figures to be a big part of the Rockies' picture sooner than later. — Nick Groke

14. Samuel Girard, Avalanche, 20 years old, 72 points

He was one of several players the Avalanche acquired in the Matt Duchene megadeal last fall. The speedy, puck-moving defenseman showed tremendous signs of promise and progress throughout his rookie year. Girard scored 20 points in 68 games. It was the sixth-highest total among first-year defensemen last season. — Ryan Clark

13. Kellyn Acosta, Rapids, 23 years old, 78 points

Acosta is one of the figures who could be among the newest wave of American soccer talent, a group that could help the United States reach the 2022 World Cup after its disappointing absence in Russia. Acosta spent the early part of his career with his hometown club, FC Dallas, before coming to the Rapids in a late-July trade. Fast and technically gifted, Acosta can play in several roles but will serve as a box-to-box midfielder capable of destroying an opponent's attack and is also capable of creating something for the Rapids offensively. — Ryan Clark

12. Courtland Sutton, Broncos, 22 years old, 79 points

He's built like a power forward (6-3, 218), has the instincts of a safety and the potential to be Demaryius Thomas 2.0 at receiver. The Broncos had a first-round grade on him but landed him in the second round of the 2018 draft, with the hope he could become their No. 1 receiver in the future. He's shown glimpses already with his absurd catch radius and physicality. — Nicki Jhabvala

11. Justin Simmons, Broncos, 24 years old, 86 points

Elevated to a starter in only his second NFL season, Simmons has the versatility, length, IQ and measurables to make him a force in the defensive backfield. He posted a 40-inch vertical at the combine in 2016 and puts it to use regularly on the field (the NFL even made a new rule after his blocked extra point against New Orleans). With his coverage skills and textbook tackling, he figures to see time at both corner and safety this year. — Nicki Jhabvala

10. German Marquez, Rockies, 23 years old, 88 points

Marquez had a 2.89 ERA over seven starts in the second half, through Aug. 26, and he ranks among the NL's top five overall this season on the road in ERA, strikeouts and opponent's batting average. The young Venezuelan dedicated an impressive victory over the defending champion Astros at Houston earlier this month to his mom, Oniela Rojas, who celebrated her birthday back home. — Nick Groke

9. Mikko Rantanen, Avalanche, 21 years old, 99 points

Wingers either have size, skill or speed. Rantanen has all three. The 6-4, 212-pound Finn showed flashes in the AHL when he scored 60 points in 52 games. As a rookie, he scored 38 points in 75 games. Rantanen's sophomore effort resulted in him recording 29 goals to go with 84 points. He has partnered with Gabriel Landeskog and Nathan MacKinnon to give the Avs one of the more promising top lines in the game. — Ryan Clark

8. Jamal Murray, Nuggets, 21 years old, 105 points

If this list were determined simply on mental toughness, it would be easy to argue Murray as deserving of the top spot. There was no better example of his poise in nail-biting moments than a late-season, must-win game for the Nuggets at home against Milwaukee. With Denver trailing by three points and the Bucks inbounding the ball with only seconds left on the clock, Murray appeared out of nowhere to steal the entry pass, alertly fire a 3-pointer, draw contact on the shot (which he barely missed) and knock down all three free throws. The play pushed the game to overtime, where the Nuggets won

to keep alive a playoff quest that fell agonizingly short in Game 82 in Minnesota. Murray will keep improving — he jumped from 9.9 points per game as a rookie to 16.7 per game last season — but his mental makeup is what gives him a chance to be special. — Nick Kosmider

7. Gary Harris, Nuggets, 23 years old, 110 points

Harris won't turn 24 for another two weeks, just 13 days before he begins his fourth NBA training camp, but he is already Denver's wise sage. The 6-4 guard, who created the team's best on-a-loop moment last season with his game-winner against the Thunder, is the team's longest-tenured player now that Wilson Chandler, Kenneth Faried and Darrell Arthur have moved on. After a rookie season that made it fair to wonder whether the former Michigan State star would ever become a viable NBA player, Harris has risen into the discussion of the game's best young shooting guards, an ascension built on constant improvement to all aspects of his game. He's the perfect complement to big man Nikola Jokic, adept at moving without the ball, knocking down 3-point shots and giving Denver defensive versatility. — Nick Kosmider

6. Bradley Chubb, Broncos, 22 years old, 116 points

At 6-4, 269 pounds, Chubb has the size to play on the line and the quickness and smarts to play on the edge, even drop back in coverage. He was widely regarded as the top defender in the draft and, according to some, the top player overall in the class of 2018. If his performance in the preseason is any indication, Chubb has the chance to form a lethal pass-rush duo with Super Bowl 50 MVP Von Miller. — Nicki Jhabvala

5. Gabriel Landeskog, Avalanche, 25 years old, 122 points

From the minute he was selected second in the 2011 NHL draft, the Avs had plans for the Swedish winger. He won the Calder Trophy for the NHL's best rookie and a year later, Landeskog was named the youngest captain in league history, an honor that has since been claimed by Oilers superstar Connor McDavid. With 341 points in 506 games, he's a member of one of the top young lines in the game alongside Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen. — Ryan Clark

4. Kyle Freeland, Rockies, 25 years old, 123 points

In just his second season, Rockies pitcher Kyle Freeland has established himself as one of the top pitchers in baseball. The homegrown lefty lowered his basic ERA to 2.96 at Atlanta at one point in August. It ranked sixth in the National League at the time, better than Zack Greinke, Jon Lester and Jake Arrieta. And by park-adjusted ERA-, he was near third in the NL, right behind Cy Young candidates Max Scherzer and Jake deGrom. A product of Thomas Jefferson High

School in Denver, the eighth overall pick in the 2014 draft has been the face of a Rockies pitching staff that has been the driving force behind this team's playoff pursuit in 2018. — Nick Groke

3. Trevor Story, Rockies, 25 years old, 134 points

An All-Star in just his third season, after a breakout rookie year in 2016 when he was just 23, Story has formed himself into an above-average defender at a premium position, all while becoming a more complete hitter, with home run power and an ability to hit to all fields. — Nick Groke

2. Nikola Jokic, Nuggets, 23 years old, 142 points

Michael Malone wanted all the qualifiers taken out of the equation. Nikola Jokic, the Nuggets' coach said some time late last season, amid of run of triple-doubles from the 6-10 Serbian, isn't one of the best young guys in the NBA. He isn't one of the league's best big man. Jokic is simply one of the best players in basketball. It's hard to argue Malone's case after Jokic, in just his third NBA season, put up a smorgasbord of statistics only a select few of the game's legends have ever recorded at the same time. It's not hard to envision Jokic adding a first All-Star appearance to his résumé this season. — Nick Kosmider

1. Nathan MacKinnon, Avalanche, 23 years old, 150 points

Call him unanimous Nate. The Hart Trophy finalist, who was selected as the city's top young athlete by everyone on our panel, is having one of the strongest starts in NHL history by a player who just turned 23. His 97-point campaign in 2017-18 was better than what Hockey Hall of Fame inductees Mike Bossy, Pat LaFontaine, Mike Modano and Denis Savard did when they were 22. He has more points at 22 than Anze Kopitar, Jonathan Toews and Tyler Seguin. Plus, his 29 game-winning goals were the fourth-most in NHL history by a player before their 23rd birthday. Only Wayne Gretzky, Jeremy Roenick and Jaromir Jagr scored more. — Ryan Clark

Iannetta, Rockies win 7-3 to salvage split with Padres
Associated Press | ESPN.com | Sep. 3, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- Consecutive losses to the last-place Padres had some people wondering what was going on with the Colorado Rockies.

Just as quickly, consecutive wins have the Rockies feeling pretty good about themselves.

"We feel as though we're a contending team," manager Bud Black said after the Rockies beat the last-place Padres 7-3 Sunday to salvage a split of a four-game series. "We feel as though we can play with anybody in the National League. We'll see how these next few weeks go. This is good stuff. This is where we want to be. We know we're in a dogfight with the Diamondbacks and Dodgers. We've just got to keep doing it."

About an hour after the Rockies won, Los Angeles beat Arizona 3-2. The Dodgers have a one-half game lead over Colorado, with the Diamondbacks another half game back in third.

Chris Iannetta hit a go-ahead, two-run double in the seventh inning for the Rockies, who came into the series one-half game behind Arizona before losing the first two games. They snapped San Diego's four-game winning streak on Saturday night and then beat rookie Jacob Nix (2-3) on Sunday.

Colorado, which lost to Arizona in the NL wild-card game last year, won for the third time in seven games.

With the score tied at 3, Nix faltered opening the seventh by allowing a leadoff single to Ian Desmond and walking Gerardo Parra before being lifted for fellow rookie Trey Wingenter. Desmond and Parra pulled off a double steal and Iannetta brought them both in with a double to the base of the fence in center.

The double steal "takes the double play out of order, gives them a base open and they've got to pitch to you," Iannetta said. "He made a mistake over the plate and I was able to get the barrel to it. I was just trying to hit a ball to the outfield and score one, and was able to hit a line drive and score two."

Charlie Blackmon singled with one out to bring in Iannetta.

That made a winner of Kyle Freeland (13-7), who allowed three runs and seven hits in six innings. He struck out three and walked two.

The Rockies return home for a 10-game homestand that starts with three games against San Francisco and finishes with three against the Dodgers and four against Arizona.

"Splitting the series certainly wasn't what we were hoping for but we'll take it," Freeland said.

The seventh inning "was huge," the lefty added. "They were obviously seeing me pretty well and barreling-up balls. To get through six and then have the offense explode there in the seventh inning and throw some runs on them and kind of step on their throats, that was really great to see."

David Dahl homered in the eighth, his eighth.

The double steal was big for the Rockies.

"The Rockies have never historically really run on us," San Diego manager Andy Green said. "They ran all over us this series. It's a bunch of young guys on the mound that have come up not realizing how important that is. We've got to drill that into them that those are free bases, and they turn into runs, and they turn into losses."

Nix allowed five runs and five hits in six-plus innings, struck out four and walked two.

"I take pride in not walking guys. Nothing frustrates me more than walking a guy and having him score," Nix said.

"Especially like if I ever walk a guy and he steals second then I give up a double, it's like, that guy shouldn't have been on base.

"The ball that Story hit, I put that ball right where I wanted. About six inches off the plate, wanted him to chase. He did, got it down the line. Good hitters get hits sometimes."

Freeland got into early trouble when he walked leadoff batter Freddy Galvis and allowed a single to left by rookie Luis Urias. He walked Eric Hosmer with one out and then allowed rookie Franmil Reyes' two-run single to center for a 2-1 lead.

Colorado got a sacrifice fly from Nolan Arenado in the first and a sac fly from Dahl in the fourth, and then tied the game in the sixth when DJ LeMahieu walked with one out and scored on Trevor Story's double to right.

UP NEXT

Rockies: LHP Tyler Anderson (6-7, 4.79) is scheduled to start Monday in the opener of a three-game series against San Francisco. The Giants will counter with LHP Madison Bumgarner (5-5, 2.68).

Padres: RHP Bryan Mitchell (0-3, 7.08) is scheduled to start Monday night in the opener of a two-game series at Arizona, marking his return to the rotation for the first time since early May. He was moved to the bullpen after struggling in his first seven starts and then missed 2 1/2 months with an elbow impingement. Arizona is set to counter with RHP Zack Godley (14-7, 4.42).

Rockies find their offense, split series in San Diego
Drew Creasman | BSNDenver.com | Sep. 3, 2018

It's been a sluggish road trip for the Colorado Rockies but in the final game, they found themselves with a 7-3 victory over the San Diego Padres, earning a four-game series split.

Kyle Freeland was not his typical self but somehow managed a more than respectable final line. He began with a lack of command and struggled to miss bats all day but he battled and refused to give in, scratching out six innings, giving up three runs.

The Rockies took an early lead by manufacturing a run in the top of the first. Charlie Blackmon swung at the very first pitch of the game pulling one to right field for a double. DJ LeMahieu hit a groundball to the right side to move him to third and Nolan Arenado lifted one to right for a sac fly.

The Padres came right back by frustrating Freeland to the utmost extent in the bottom of the first. It started with Freddy Galvis fouling off some tough pitches before eventually drawing an eight-pitch walk. Luis Urias followed by swinging at the first pitch he saw, lining it to left for a single.

Freeland got Hunter Renfroe to pop out on the infield, failing to advance the runners. But he fell behind Eric Hosmer 3-0 before storming back into the at-bat with five straight strikes, the last two of which were fouled off by the cleanup hitter. The ninth pitch of the encounter missed just high, loading the bases with one out.

Again, Freeland got a pop up on the infield, this time from Wil Myers, putting him just one pitch away from escaping the mess. But his next pitch, and first to the MVP of this series for San Diego, Franmil Reyes, was lined into center field, scoring a pair of runs to give the Padres a 2-1 lead.

It was Reyes' fifth hit in the series.

The Rockies evened the score in the fourth. Arenado singled to left with one away and moved to third on a frozen rope double into the gap off the bat of Trevor Story. David Dahl came through with a productive out, giving the Rockies two sac flies for their two runs on another fly ball to right.

But that brief tie was erased in head-scratching fashion in the bottom of the inning. After finally getting Reyes out, Freeland got Manuel Margot to pop up on the infield—after getting squeezed on what should have been a called strike three—but Ian Desmond lost it in the sun, allowing Margot to get all the way to second with a double.

That mistake was immediately compounded by Rockies-killer A.J. Ellis who singled through the right side to plate Margot and give the Padres a 3-3 lead.

Colorado tied it up again in the sixth thanks to a clutch two-out double from Story. Down 1-2 with LeMahieu at third base after walking and moving up on a groundout and wild pitch, Story expanded for a swing on a fastball well outside the zone but he slashed it down the right-field line for an easy two-bagger. David Dahl popped up, stranding him at second.

The Rockies offense finally caught a bit of a rhythm in the top of the seventh beginning with a hard single up the middle from Desmond. He swiped second in front of a Gerardo Parra walk at which time both veterans took off for a double steal without a throw. With that, Desmond now has 17 steals on the season, second most on the club after Story.

Chris Iannetta stepped into the box with an opportunity for yet another sac fly to tie the game up but instead opted to line one over Reyes' head in right field for a two-RBI double. Pinch-hitter Matt Holliday flew out to right but Blackmon came up with his second base hit of the day, a line drive single to right, scoring Iannetta to give the Rockies a 6-3 advantage.

Seunghwan Oh worked a very quick 1-2-3 inning in the bottom of the seventh.

Dahl added an insurance run by absolutely demolishing a fastball for a no-doubt home run onto the walkway beyond the wall in right to make it 7-3, Rockies.

Adam Ottavino came on in his normal role for the eighth inning and walked Eric Hosmer on a pitch well inside the strike zone after getting Renfroe to pop out. He rebounded by striking out Wil Myers and Reyes, both looking.

Scott Oberg worked a clean final frame with a pair of strikeouts to put the game into the win column for Colorado.

They improve to 73-62 and will be a half-game back of whoever emerges victorious in Los Angeles for first place in the NL West.

FINAL STATS:

Kyle Freeland: 6 IP, 7 H, 3 ER, 2 BB, 3 K

Seunghwan Oh: 1 IP, 0 H, 0 ER, 0 BB, 1 K

Adam Ottavino: 1 IP, 0 H, 0 ER, 1 BB, 2 K

Scott Oberg: 1 IP, 0 H, 0 ER, 0 BB, 2 K

Charlie Blackmon: 3-for-5, 1 R, 1 RBI

Trevor Story: 2-for-4, 1 RBI

David Dahl: 1-for-3, 1 R, 2 RBI (HR: 8)

Chris Iannetta: 1-for-3, 1 R, 2 RBI

WHAT'S NEXT:

The Rockies return home to face another divisional opponent in the San Francisco Giants. It will be a tough homecoming with the first game being a second straight afternoon contest and Madison Bumgarner on the hill. The Rockies will hand the rock to the recently-struggling Tyler Anderson. First pitch at 1:10 Mountain Time.

Rockies offense can't be stopped as Colorado wins 7-3 in San Diego
Rich Kurtzman | MileHighSports.com | September 2, 2018

When you're hot, you're hot.

The Colorado Rockies continued their hot hitting Sunday afternoon, beating up Padres starting pitcher Jacob Nix despite a great game by him, winning 7-3 to split the four-game series.

In the first, Nolan Arenado's sacrifice fly sent Charlie Blackmon home for a 1-0 lead that was short-lived.

That's because Kyle Freeland walked Freddy Galvis and then Luis Urias singled and Freeland kept struggling as he walked Eric Hosmer, to load the bases. With two outs, Franmil Reyes singled to score Galvis and Urias for the 2-1 lead.

At that point, both starting pitchers found their respective grooves, disallowing a run in either the third or fourth innings.

Colorado tied the game up at 2-2 in the top of the fourth when David Dahl hit a sacrifice fly to score Arenado, who reached on a single of his own.

But, again, the Padres scored to take back the lead in the bottom half of the inning when Manuel Margot hit a double and was sent home thanks to A.J. Ellis' single to make it 3-2, San Diego.

That was the last run and last lead of the game for the home team, though as Colorado came roaring back to steal the victory.

After DJ LeMahieu walked in the top of the sixth, Trevor Story hit his second double of the game to send him home and tie the contest 3-3.

But the seventh is where things got really interesting. First, Ian Desmond hit a single and Gerardo Parra walked. Manager Bud Black dialed up the double-steal to move both of them over to second and third base, respectively before Chris Iannetta doubled to sent them both home. Iannetta later scored when Blackmon singled and the Rockies led 6-3 at that point.

Freeland worked six innings, giving up seven hits but only the three runs, with two walks and three strikeouts to earn the victory. He improved to 13-7 on the year, leading the team in wins.

And in the eighth, Dahl added an insurance run with a solo home run to push the lead to 7-3, the eventual winning margin.

For the Rockies, the win was crucial. Not only did they split the series with San Diego, Colorado also created a three-way tie for first place in the NL West with both the Arizona Diamondbacks and LA Dodgers. All three teams are currently 74-62 with the two latter teams facing off currently.

Colorado now has 26 games remaining to find a way to win their division for the first time in franchise history.

LeMahieu Is Second to None
Tray Ringolsby | InsidetheSeams.com | Sep. 3, 2018

DJ LeMahieu is more than the answer to a trivia question.

Yes, he and High Pockets Kelly are the tallest second basemen at 6-foot-3, in Major League history to start 100 games in a season at second base. And Kelly did it for only one year -- 1925, when he moved over from first base for the New York Giants when Frankie Frisch was injured.

Kelly was eventually enshrined in the Hall of Fame, as a first baseman.

LeMahieu doesn't figure to have an eventual destiny in Cooperstown, but in his quiet, understated manner, he has been a key part of the Rockies since he was acquired prior to 2012 from the Cubs in the Ian Stewart trade, and began the conversion from shortstop to second base in 2013.

He was back on center stage in Saturday's 4-2 victory at San Diego when he led off the fourth inning with a home run, tying the game at 1-1, and igniting a three-run Rockies rally.

"DJ getting that home run took a little weight off everybody," said Matt Holliday. "Nolan gets the big hit, Trevor got the triple. It got things started."

Everybody, including Holliday.

After LeMahieu homered, Arenado singled and scored on an ensuing double by Trevor Story, who went to third on the throw to the plate, and scored on a Holliday single.

It was LeMahieu's 12th home run of the season, his 10th that either tied the game, gave the Rockies a lead, or was the game-winning run.

POWER WITH AN IMPACT

Date	Opponent	Score	HR	Result	Summary
April 12	@Was	W 5-1	1	GA	Leadoff game
			1	GW	2-run, 6th
March 29	@Ari	L 8-2	1	GA	Leadoff game
April 2	@SD	W 7-4	1		9th inning, Solo
April 15	@Was	W 6-5	1	GA	8th inning, 5-4 lead
June 9	Ari	L 12-7	1	GA	4th inning, 3-run
June 17	@Tex	L 13-12	1	GA	Leadoff game
June 28	@SF	W 9-8	1	GW	2-run, 9th
Aug. 10	LAD	W 5-4	1	GA	2-run, 1st
Aug. 18	@Atl	W 5-3 (10)	1	GW	2-run, 10th
Aug. 19	@Atl	W 4-2	1		Solo, 3rd, 3-1 lead
Monday	@LAA	L 10-7	1	GA	Grand Slam, 8th, 7-5 lead
Saturday	@SD	W 4-2	1	GA	Solo, 4th, game-tying

In his second year as the Rockies manager, Bud Black has seen enough to quickly point out that LeMahieu is more than the stats world understands.

"He has the capability to do those things," said Black. "It is the complete game that certain guys play that helps you win that is sometimes undervalued. We've talked about that with (Ian) Desmond. We've talked about that with DJ. When you win games it's not just about statistics. It's not just about analytics. It's about playing the game the proper way to win, and DJ does that a lot."

The stats don't tell that story, though. His WAR of 2.8 ranks 11th among MLB second basemen, and his offensive WAR is minus-.04, ranks 17th.

NUMBERS CAN LIE

Player	Team	WAR		Player	Team	BatWAR
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Javier Baez	Cubs	4.6		Javier Baez	Cubs	2.4
Ozzie Albies	Braves	4.4		Jose Altuve	Astros	2.2
Jose Altuve	Astros	4.3		Scooter Gennett	Reds	2.2
Joey Wendle	Rays	4.1		Whit Merrifield	Royals	1.8
Whit Merrifield	Royals	3.9		Ben Zobrist	Cubs	1.7
Ben Zobrist	Cubs	3.5		Derek Dietrich	Marlins	0.9
Rougned Odor	Rangers	3.3		Rougned Odor	Rangers	0.9
Dee Gordon	Mariners	3.2		Joey Wendle	Rays	0.7
Scooter Gennett	Reds	3		Ozzie Albies	Braves	0.7
Yolmer Sanchez	White Sox	2.9		Cesar Hernandez	Phillies	0.3
DJ LeMahieu	Rockies	2.8		Ian Kinsler	Red Sox	0.1
				Niko Goodrum	Tigers	0
				Jonathan Schoop	Brewers	-0.2
				Yolmer Sanchez	White Sox	-0.3
				Yoan Moncada	White Sox	-0.3
				Brian Dozier	Dodgers	-0.3
				DJ LeMahieu	Rockies	-0.4

Despite the doubts that were expressed initially about the decision to move LeMahieu to second base because of his size, nobody can knock his defense. He has maintained that shortstop arm strength, and has handled all plays without a problem.

He leads MLB second basemen this season in fielding percentage, assists per game, range factor per nine innings, and range factor per game.

GOOD AS GOLD AT 2B

Player	Team	G	Fld Pct	A/9	RF/9	RF/G
DJ LeMahieu	Rockies	100	.992	3.17	4.85	4.7
Scooter Gennett	Reds	121	.986	2.73	4.79	4.54
Jonathan Schoop	Brewers	102	.972	3.08	4.81	4.44
Rougned Odor	Rangers	103	.985	2.76	4.53	4.33
Whit Merrifield	Royals	92	.988	2.77	4.54	4.32
Ian Kinsler	Red Sox	108	.985	2.64	4.38	4.18
Ozzie Albies	Braves	131	.982	2.61	4.33	4.15
Cesar Hernandez	Phillies	128	.983	2.45	4.08	4.01
Devon Travis	Blue Jays	90	.981	2.72	4.41	4
Brian Dozier	Dodgers	130	.979	2.46	4.03	3.94

In his time with the Rockies, LeMahieu has been a consistent performer, having hit .300 in the last three seasons, winning two Gold Gloves, and making the All-Star team twice. His career average is .299, including .298 in his time in Colorado.

THE LEMAHIEU FILES

Year	G	PA	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OPS	Awards
2011	37	62	60	3	15	2	0	0	4	1	12	.250	.546	
2012	81	247	229	26	68	12	4	2	22	13	42	.297	.742	
2013	109	434	404	39	113	21	3	2	28	19	67	.280	.673	
2014	149	538	494	59	132	15	5	5	42	33	97	.267	.663	GG

Year	G	PA	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OPS	Awards
2015	150	620	564	85	170	21	5	6	61	50	107	.301	.746	AS
2016	146	635	552	104	192	32	8	11	66	66	80	.348	.911	MVP-15
2017	155	682	609	95	189	28	4	8	64	59	90	.310	.783	AS,GG
2018	100	455	418	71	114	27	0	13	47	29	64	.273	.749	
Career	927	3673	3330	482	993	158	29	47	334	270	559	.298	.756	
Rockies	890	3611	3270	479	978	156	29	47	330	269	547	.299	.760	
Cubs	37	62	60	3	15	2	0	0	4	1	12	.250	.546	

The Rockies have a challenge in the off-season. LeMahieu is free-agent eligible. They have two top prospects, who both project as possible second baseman -- Garrett Hampson, who has had brief auditions in the big leagues this year, and the organization's top prospect, Brendan Rodgers.

The decision on LeMahieu is more than the salary LeMahieu will be looking for, but the length of contract.

LEMAHIEU'S ROCKIES PAYDAYS

Year	Age	Tm	Salary	SrvTm		
2014	25	Colorado Rockies	\$501,000	1.128		
2015	26	Colorado Rockies	\$517,500	2.128		
2016	27	Colorado Rockies	\$3,000,000	3.128		
2017	28	Colorado Rockies	\$4,800,000	4.128		
2018	29	Colorado Rockies	\$8,500,000	5.128		