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## MEDIA CLIPS – Jan. 29, 2019

### Story determined to continue growth

Manny Randhawa | MLB.com | Jan. 28, 2019

DENVER -- One of the major questions facing the Rockies in 2019 is: Will the real **Trevor Story** please stand up? Following a historic beginning to his career, featuring six home runs in his first four games, the shortstop put together a strong rookie campaign, albeit cut short by injury. He regressed in his sophomore year, posting an 84 OPS+ and striking out a league-leading 191 times. Story bounced back with a strong second half last season, garnering some National League MVP consideration.

As he enters 2019, Story is on a mission: to make certain the '17 version of himself never returns.

"It's just a different mindset that I took from ['17] and it paid off for me," Story said. "It's kind of almost a reset every day. Not letting things build up on each other, whether it's good or bad. Just move on to the next thing. It's really to have an intent with everything I do."

Things built up in '17, all right. From July 24 to Aug. 22, Story struck out at least once in every game en route to a whopping 44 percent strikeout rate.

Story has learned what works for him by going through those growing pains. That much is evident in his numbers from last season. Where it wasn't evident -- and this goes for the entire Rockies offense -- was in the National League Division Series against the Brewers last October. Colorado's hitters combined to hit .146 in Milwaukee's three-game sweep. Story was 2-for-12 (.167) and struck out in half of his 12 plate appearances.

"I gave myself a couple weeks or whatever to get away from the game when the season was over, and then went back and watched it," Story said. "I watched it once thoroughly, just kind of watching it as a fan, how I watch other games on TV, seeing it with a very analytical eye. And then I just reviewed it, broke it down, and saw what I could have done better, what we could have done better."

Story worked on tweaking his swing after slumping over the first two months of the '18 season, and it began paying dividends immediately. But tweaking his swing has been a yearly activity for Story. The goal now is to be consistent enough to repeat the second half of '18 over an entire season.

"Every single thing in my routine has a lot of intent behind it, and no wasted time," Story said.

"I think that's the biggest thing I repeated the best last year, the thing I would attribute my success to."

Story, 26, wasted no time getting back in the cage this offseason. He took three weeks off before ramping things up again. He has gone from rookie sensation to mediocrity to resurgent slugger. Now, he is more than that, becoming one of the pillars propping up Colorado's hopes of a third consecutive postseason berth in '19.

The most notable pillar is, of course, superstar third baseman **Nolan Arenado**. But Arenado's impending free agency and the Rockies' effort to sign him to an extension before then loom over the club as Spring Training nears.

Should Arenado leave, Story could become the leading candidate to be the face of the franchise, a star shortstop with what will at that time be two years of team control remaining. But that largely hinges on what happens in the season to come. Whatever the future holds, Story is eager to get back into a batter's box.

"It's hard for me to stay away from the game because I love doing it, so I'm always hitting a little earlier than most," Story said.

## **Blackmon open to playing corner-OF spot**

Rockies may move center fielder as they shape 2019 roster

**Daniel Kramer | MLB.com | Jan. 26, 2019**

DENVER -- The Rockies are toying with the idea of some significant positional adjustments for the 2019 season, which could see a throng of players at established positions move around the diamond and outfield.

Perhaps the most prominent change could be moving **Charlie Blackmon** to a corner-outfield spot from center. And in his first public remarks about the topic, Blackmon said he's open to the move.

"We had a discussion about possibly trying different outfield alignments if it meant winning more games for the Rockies, and I was all about winning more games for the Rockies," Blackmon said on Saturday at Coors Field. "I think you will see a little bit of mix and match until we figure out exactly what we like, and then you may continue to see versatility from players as the year goes on."

If Blackmon moves to a corner spot, his replacement in center could be a hybrid of **Ian Desmond** and **David Dahl**, or Dahl in a full-time role. Dahl, the club's 10th overall pick in the 2012 MLB Draft, has primarily been a corner outfielder when healthy the previous two seasons, and he said he's been working at all three positions this offseason.

"My best position coming up through the Minor Leagues obviously was center field, because I played that the most," Dahl said. "But as far as a corner, I think I'm way better in right field. Left field is tougher, I think -- but I can play all three."

Blackmon hasn't logged time at any position other than center field since 2015, when he played 14 games in left and seven in right. He was selected as a multi-positional outfielder in the 2008 MLB Draft, after converting from being a pitcher during his amateur career. And the Rockies' roster construction during his first four big league seasons allowed the club to use him all over before he assumed the full-time center field role in '15.

During his age-31 season in 2018, the first of a \$108 million contract extension that could be worth six years if he elects player options, Blackmon ranked poorly in most advanced defensive metrics.

### **Blackmon's defensive ratings, 2018**

**Defensive Runs Saved:** minus-28 (worst among 57 qualified outfielders, per FanGraphs)

**Ultimate Zone Rating:** minus-12.3 (third-worst)

**Outs Above Average:** minus-8 (tied for eighth-worst)

Those all represent drastic drop-offs for Blackmon compared to his first seven seasons. Blackmon did deal with a lingering left hamstring injury during the second half of 2018, which could have been a contributing factor to his defensive decline.

The outfield gaps at Coors Field are by far the widest in the Majors, and Blackmon has previously outlined that the ball has different behaviors in Denver's thin air. At one point during the '17 season, when he also accumulated an MLB-high 725 plate appearances en route to winning the National League batting title, Blackmon called himself "the tireddest guy in baseball."

The Rockies have constructed their roster to create defensive versatility. Desmond was signed two offseasons ago to play first base, but the club has used him in the outfield for 87 games. **Daniel Murphy**, who signed a two-year, \$24 million deal in December, will play first, but Murphy also has second-base capability as Colorado fills the void left by **DJ LeMahieu**, who signed with the Yankees. **Ryan McMahon** projects to log the most innings at second, and he said on Saturday that he's spent more time working there this offseason. McMahon also can play first and third. **Raimel Tapia**, who will challenge for playing time, also has the speed and range to play any outfield position.

"I don't think there's one set lineup," Blackmon said. "I think that's a big strength of our team."

**Inbox: Will Rockies add more offense for 2019?**  
Beat reporter Thomas Harding answers fans' questions

Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Jan. 25, 2019

**The GM promised to add some offensive bats this off-season and all he's gotten was Murphy. Does he have anything else planned?**

These are dreamy winter days. A team makes a bunch of signings and trades. The new guys come to town, awkwardly put the new team's jersey atop a shirt and tie and talk about championships that hopefully will come. Besides the **Daniel Murphy** signing, however, the 2019 Rockies will look a lot like the 2018 version, minus some free-agent departures.

In fairness, Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich said he wanted to improve the offense, but he never actually said he was seeking multiple everyday players -- just run production. But he also said that a key will be players improving on their 2018 numbers.

Outfielder **David Dahl** is among the players asked to step up. He has provided run production during two stretches. Last September, he helped propel the Rockies into the postseason with nine home runs and 27 RBIs in September.

Looking at the current projected lineup, improved offense could boil down to a simple question -- will Dahl and Murphy, a three-time All-Star, provide more than second baseman **DJ LeMahieu**, who signed with the Yankees, and right fielder **Carlos Gonzalez**, who is a free agent after an up-and-down season? Also, the Rockies will need production from the younger players at second base (more on that later).

Many fans have called for an offensive upgrade at catcher, but the Rockies ultimately decided not to spend the salary (plus a high MLB Draft pick) that the Brewers used for **Yasmani Grandal**, and Colorado has balked at the trade price for Marlins star catcher **J.T. Realmuto**.

**Is the #Rockies inactivity in the free agent market (sans Daniel Murphy) a wait-and-see approach before an attempt at a deal with Nolan Arenado, buyer's remorse for Shaw, McGee, and Desmond, a combination of both ... or something else?**

Not only will Arenado make at least \$24 million in 2019 in his final season of arbitration, but the Rockies' stated goal has been to sign him to a multi-year contract -- and the Rockies are watching their payroll until they find out what it will take to

sign Arenado. Murphy's two-year, \$24 million deal is the only signing of more than one year, and Murphy agreeing to defer some of the buyout on his 2021 option helped make that possible.

There appears to be some money available. The club did take a good look at second baseman **Brian Dozier**, but he accepted a one-year, \$9 million offer from the Nationals.

**Are the Rockies still "checking in" on Realmuto? Apparently the Dodgers are now offering a prospect not as good as Brendan Rodgers. If the Marlins are willing to take that, would the Rockies offer up Rodgers to outbid them?**

There is no deal at this point, but MLB.com reported that top Dodgers catching prospect **Keibert Ruiz** -- the club's No. 2 prospect and No. 39 overall -- has been discussed. The key word in that sentence is "catching."

The reason the Marlins' asking price is so high is the same reason the Rockies have yet to jump at the free-agent catching market: There aren't enough catchers to go around. So, the prospect of replenishing their catching in such a deal might be attractive to the Marlins.

Rodgers, the No. 9 overall prospect and ranked third at shortstop, has a chance at second base -- a position where the Rockies have **Ryan McMahon**, **Garrett Hampson** and **Pat Valaika** (who is trying to bounce back from 2018 struggles) competing for the job.

Now only that, but Rodgers would give the Rockies something they haven't had since **Troy Tulowitzki** and Clint Barmes were in the organization at the same time -- shortstop depth. Until Rodgers is ready, however, shortstop **Trevor Story** is the player the Rockies can least afford to lose for a lengthy period.

If Realmuto isn't dealt before the season, expect the Rockies to see what the Marlins' price will be at the non-waiver Trade Deadline. The Rockies obtained **Jonathan Lucroy** from the Rangers at the 2017 deadline.

## Hoffman seeing uptick in velo, vying for rotation

Rockies rightly credits latest boost to time management, mentoring, offseason workout routine

Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Jan. 25, 2019

DENVER -- Sunday's tweet served as a reminder that right-hander **Jeff Hoffman** is still around, with hopes still high. Hoffman, the Rockies' headliner in the trade that sent shortstop **Troy Tulowitzki** to the Blue Jays in 2015, finished last season a forgotten man. A right shoulder/rotator cuff impingement in Spring Training ended his bid to be in the season-opening rotation. He bounced between Triple-A Albuquerque and the Majors, and between starting and relieving. So when he didn't receive a September callup, he went to work -- and he is seeing results.

The tweet from X2 Athletics -- the Scottsdale, Ariz., training facility where Hoffman works out -- showed a 98.9 mph fastball, a personal record. It blew away his 94.3 mph Major League four-seam average since his 2016 debut, and eclipsed his high of 98.2 mph against the D-backs' **Paul Goldschmidt** on June 21, 2017.

Will the increased heater speed earn him a rotation spot on a team looking for its third consecutive postseason appearance? Since debuting in 2016, Hoffman is 6-9 with a 5.88 ERA in 37 games, including 22 starts. In 2018, he had a 9.35 ERA in five relief appearances and one start.

Last season's rotation -- led by lefty **Kyle Freeland**, who finished fourth in National League Cy Young Award voting, and righty **German Marquez**, who struck out 230 -- led the NL in innings pitched. Returning also are **Tyler Anderson**, **Jon Gray** and **Antonio Senzatela**, all with more big league time than Hoffman, who has one more year of Minor League options. Also competing is righty Peter Lambert -- who turns 22 on April 18 -- the Rockies' No. 3 prospect per MLB Pipeline.

"If you look at the model of what needs to happen, he's got that sort ability," Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich said.

"He's got the pitch mix. He's got the velo. He's got the durability and ability to do all of that. It needs to happen, and he needs to look no further than the people ahead of him and their results."

Hoffman, 26, had mixed numbers at Triple-A Albuquerque (6-8, 4.94 ERA) in 2018, partly because he had to build up after the injury, was called up in June to pitch out of the bullpen, then had to re-adjust to starting when sent back. But he can put it all behind him by grabbing a rotation spot.

Here are his steps:

**Driveline, in earnest:** Like much of the Rockies' staff, Hoffman turned to Driveline Baseball, a Kent, Wash., training center that offers patented biometrics, workouts and strategy. He adopted Driveline's weighted-ball workouts last year, but this year did the full biometric workup to address inefficiencies, physically and mechanically.

"To put it simply, it's just everything now is working in sync better, more efficiently," Hoffman said. "At Driveline, we found a couple inefficiencies. One was with my drive leg [the right leg, with the foot contacting the rubber]. There were times when it was not grabbing as much, and wasn't driving as it should be. It can make all the difference."

**Organizing the day, and the mind:** Hoffman's former agent, new Mets general manager Brodie Van Wagenen, introduced him to mental performance mastery coach Brian Cain, who has helped many athletes balance their burgeoning careers with full lives.

"I got on board with him, took his five-week course where I would sit down for 20-30 minutes a day and go through his classes," Hoffman said. "It has a lot to do with managing your time, getting the most out of your day, having positive self-talk and really being committed to your process."

**Detailed monitoring:** Driveline personnel make periodic trips to X2 Athletics in Scottsdale to make sure Hoffman and his training partners, Phillies lefty **Austin Davis** and Royals lefty prospect Jake Kalish, are on the right track.

With a crowded rotation in front of him, and the aura of the Tulowitzki trade following him, Hoffman would have a lot to contend with mentally -- if he weren't so busy honing the proper focus.

"I'm pretty focused on me right now," Hoffman said. "Obviously, I know who I am and who I can be. I am in a good spot and putting myself in a pretty good position. When we roll the balls out, we'll see what happens."



## **Kyle Freeland, a centerpiece of the Rockies' lofty postseason ambitions, embracing workhorse mentality heading into 2019**

The southpaw set club records for single-season ERA (2.85) and home ERA (2.40) while winning 17 games in 2018

**Kyle Newman | The Denver Post | Jan. 26, 2019**

Kyle Freeland turned in a marquee pitching performance for the Rockies in 2018, checking nearly every possible box in a season that saw him emerge as a star on both the local and national stage.

The southpaw set club records for single-season ERA (2.85) and home ERA (2.40). He won 17 games, pitching Colorado into the playoffs for consecutive seasons for the first time in franchise history. And once in October, Freeland delivered one of the most masterful performances in club history, with 6  $\frac{2}{3}$  scoreless innings in an extra-innings win over the Cubs at Wrigley Field.

Beyond his all-star snub and not winning the Cy Young Award — he finished fourth in the National League voting — there wasn't anything left for Freeland to prove. And now this year, Freeland's continued, consistent reliability is one of the primary reasons Colorado has no qualms standing behind an already-stated goal, a run at the World Series, before the team even reports to spring training,

"Kyle made great strides from 2017 to 2018, but we don't need great strides from him this year," manager Bud Black said.

"We just need him to do what he's very capable of, which is what you saw last year, in order to get where we want to go."

Freeland explained his mindset heading into 2019, his third year in the bigs, is "not one of those things where I'm trying to top the season before." Colorado's likely Opening Day starter spent this offseason resting and recently re-finding the groove he was on last summer, when his intensity and focus on pitching to weak contact made him the team's most reliable starter.

"Last offseason we broke down my mechanics and changed things," Freeland explained. "We took the pause away from the bottom of my delivery and put it at the top, and that allowed me to put my weight on my back side and be more consistent down the mound on all my pitches.

"But this offseason, once we started my dry work, it's just been more about picking up where I left off."

After throwing 202  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings last year — "by far the most I've ever thrown," Freeland notes — he didn't touch a ball until the calendar turned to January. In the weeks since, he's been slowly ramping himself up. He's currently four 20-pitch bullpens into his training while looking to embrace a workhorse role again this summer, and in the innumerable ones after. That high-innings vision is complemented by the hybrid workouts the southpaw credits with increasing his stamina in the second half of last season, after he switched up his routine from harder in-season weight lifting to a low-volume, high-weight approach.

“My focus is all on building that stamina early, so I don’t have to worry about anything in September and October (or worry about) going deep into games, consistently hitting that 200-inning mark and just being of those guys who is out there six, seven, eight innings every time,” Freeland said.

The counted-on production from Freeland — along with German Marquez, a right-hander with sky-high potential — is also sparking early confidence in the team’s core positional players, even in light of a quiet offseason for Colorado in which the club has made considerably less noise than their rivals within the division and the National League overall.

“The starters, led by Freeland, have become a strong point of our team,” shortstop Trevor Story said. “That’s why you’ve seen the success we’ve had the past couple years ... That’s where a lot of our confidence comes from. And Freeland is leading (the success), so we expect that to continue.”

## **Saunders: Nolan Arenado's \$30 million bid contract is a line in the sand**

This is about more than money, it's about the shifting balance of power in baseball

**Patrick Saunders | The Denver Post | Jan. 26, 2019**

If it were just a few years ago, Nolan Arenado and the Rockies would have already put a bow on his contract.

Instead, the possibility looms that the two sides will head to arbitration next month to settle matters as the All-Star third baseman enters what could be his final season in Colorado. Keep in mind that the Rockies have taken players to arbitration just four times in franchise history.

Arenado is seeking \$30 million for one season, while the Rockies want to pay him \$24 million. It's Monopoly money that's hard for fans to fathom, but that's a topic for another column.

Arenado's contract stance, I believe, is about more than money, it's about the shifting balance of power in baseball. It's the latest line in the sand, and it hints at troubled times ahead, even though the current collective bargaining agreement does not expire until December 2021.

In a recent column for ESPN.com, Jeff Passan wrote: "With the free-agent market spiraling and pre-free agency contract extensions increasingly rare, arbitration is among the last avenues for players to seek salary gains amid the sport's financial correction."

Passan backed up his observation with a telling quote from an agent who has multiple arbitration-eligible clients.

"I hope every agent holds the line," the agent said. "This would be a wonderful year to see if they can do it. And if not? Go to trial."

There is a growing sense among veteran players that the owners — who are indeed raking in big bucks — might be colluding to hold down salaries. There is a fear that as players reach free agency, the contracts of previous years for the elite players (see Albert Pujols and Giancarlo Stanton) will be shorter in length and pay less.

As veteran pitcher Jake Arrieta recently tweeted: "All of you 1-3 (year) players out there better be paying attention to what's going on in our game. You're next."

Plus, there is concern among players that the increasing emphasis on analytics within the game is being used against veteran players. This what Giants third baseman Evan Longoria recently posted on Instagram:

**"We are less than a month from the start of spring and once again some of our games biggest starts remain unsigned. Such a shame. It seems every day now someone is making up a new analytical tool to devalue players, especially free agents. As fans, why should "value" for your team even be a consideration? It's not your money,**

**it's money that players have worked their whole lives to get to that level and be deserving of. Bottom line, fans should want the best players and product on the field for their team. And, as players, we need to stand strong for what we believe we are worth and continue to fight for the rights we have fought for time and time again."**

I don't entirely agree with Longoria, who's coming off a sub-par season. After all, the owners and front office have every right to measure a player's worth. But many players do share Longoria's sentiment.

Arenado, I believe, would much rather just play baseball and let the money take care of itself. He hates the hoopla and questions that come with the business side of the game. That's one reason why he moved on from super agent Scott Boras and signed with the powerful, but quieter, Joel Wolfe.

Don't get me wrong, Arenado wants to get paid top dollar, as he should. But I also think he knows it's important that he stands shoulder-to-shoulder with his baseball brethren. Plus, as he nears free agency, I think he wants to send a message about his value.

## **Rockies Insider: Spring Training guide with information on dates, tickets, dining and more**

Pitchers and catcher report to Salt River Feb. 12, position players are due in Scottsdale Feb. 17

**Kyle Newman and Jeff Bailey | The Denver Post | Jan. 26, 2019**

With the start of spring training right around the corner, here's a guide to everything fans need to know about #RoxSpring 2019 as Colorado begins its pursuit of a third consecutive postseason berth.

**When does the party start?** Pitchers and catchers report to Salt River Feb. 12, and the first workout for those players is Feb. 13. Position players are due Feb. 17, with the first full workout Feb. 18 before games begin Feb. 23. The Rockies play almost every day, minus March 12 and March 21.

**How do I get tickets?** Individual tickets can be purchased via Ticketmaster (anywhere from \$15 to \$70, depending on opponent) or through various other third-party ticket services such as VividSeats and StubHub. Two season ticket options are also available: a package for all Rockies home games as well as a package for all 30 games at Salt River.

**Where should I stay on my trip?** There is an abundance of hotels near Salt River, from basic to fancy. Options include the Motel 6 Scottsdale (4.8 miles from the stadium, starts at \$162 per night), Days Inn & Suites Scottsdale North (0.4, \$262), Hampton Inn & Suites Scottsdale (1.8, \$287), Talking Stick Resort (2.2, \$348) and Courtyard by Marriott Scottsdale (3.5, \$328).

**What else can I do there?** Besides the 14 other MLB teams and nine other stadiums to soak in during your Cactus League experience, early spring in metro Phoenix provides plenty of other entertainment options. Spend a morning hiking up Camelback Mountain or through the McDowell Sonoran Preserve; take the kiddos to an afternoon at the Phoenix Zoo; shop at Scottsdale Fashion Square; play world-class golf courses; check out the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. Or, just hit the hotel pool.

**Dining/drink options near Salt River?** Old Town Scottsdale is a 15-minute drive south of Salt River, and that area is saturated with all flavors of bars, restaurants and boutique coffee shops. Plus, if you drive a bit further, Mill Avenue in Tempe has plenty of dining options, as does Tempe Marketplace. And if you didn't get enough beer at the stadium, Scottsdale Beer Company, Two Brothers Brewery, Goldwater Brewing Company and Four Peaks Brewery are all a short Uber away.

**Information on other teams?** All other information about the Cactus League, including complete team schedules, stadium locations and the scoop on player availability for autographs can be found at [CactusLeague.com](http://CactusLeague.com).

**Can't get enough spring training?** The Rockies are playing a couple games in Monterrey, Mexico, against the Diamondbacks on March 9 and 10. And, to conclude spring training, Colorado takes on the AAA Isotopes in Albuquerque March 25, followed by a final exhibition game against the Twins in Fort Myers the next day.

## From Wiffle Ball to the Rockies, it's a family affair for Josh Fuentes and Nolan Arenado

Nick Groke | The Athletic | Jan. 26, 2019

Josh Fuentes could play Wiffle Ball for another 100 years — he has already played more or less nonstop for longer than a decade — but might never catch a break.

His cousin, Nolan Arenado, carries an unbroken string of MVP awards from the continuous game of pros and bros, a family affair that started in a Southern California backyard and travels around the country whenever baseball needs a breather. Baseball is their break from baseball.

“He’s the best player in our Wiffle Ball game. He probably deserves MVP,” Fuentes said of Arenado, the Rockies’ all-star star third baseman. “But he’s also the commissioner and he runs the game and he runs the voting, he runs everything. So of course he makes himself the MVP. He cheats.”

Fuentes does not have that luxury. The 25-year-old third baseman was an undrafted late bloomer out of Missouri Baptist. He never landed high on any prospect lists or drew crowds of scouts. They assumed he was never supposed to be anything more than Arenado’s cousin, a fun sidenote more than a promising professional. Even now, after the Rockies sneaked Fuentes onto their 40-man major-league roster just before Thanksgiving, he slips attention.

But the Pacific Coast League player of the year is now the Rockies’ most immediate prospect at third base, after Ryan McMahon was moved to the right side. And if Arenado leaves Colorado — his contract remains in dispute for next season — Fuentes could be the one to replace him.

“I don’t know why I’m always overlooked,” Fuentes said. “I wasn’t a prospect. I wasn’t drafted. But even in High-A and Double-A, I was doing really well and nobody was paying attention. It felt like, ‘Well, we’ll give this kid another year and he’ll burn out.’

“I use that as fuel. Even after the MVP, people are like, ‘He won the MVP, but it’s the PCL MVP, it doesn’t mean anything.’ It’s like, I can’t get a break!”

So Fuentes is making his own breaks. His ceiling, it seemed, was always the level immediately above him, beginning in high school, when he started just two games as a junior at Trabuco Hills High in Orange County, Calif.

Back then, their Wiffle Ball game was already in full swing. The running, unending game started nearly 20 years ago, when they were little leaguers. They play in cul-de-sacs and backyards and neighborhood fields and parking lots, wherever there’s space. That game eventually settled into pros — Fuentes, Arenado and Arenado’s brother, Jonah, a third-base prospect with the Giants — against bros — Josh’s brother Justin Fuentes and cousins Alex Luaces and Gerardo Arenado. Other players cycle in at times.

It was not always meant to be. The idea of professional baseball had only suddenly appeared to Fuentes as a vivid reality late as a teenager.

“What really changed it was Nolan getting drafted,” he said.

The Rockies drafted Arenado out of high school in 2009 in the second round, with a \$625,000 signing bonus.

“It hit close to home to me,” Fuentes said. “He made it to the show. I thought, ‘Well, I can do that.’ But everyone has their own path.”

He devoted himself to baseball. For an entire summer, every day, Fuentes hopped the chain-link fence at his high school with a bucket of balls, hitting and fielding until the sun went down.

“He’s a baseball rat, just like me,” Arenado said. “He just loves playing the game.”

Fuentes played varsity baseball for just one year in high school and hit .250 as a senior in 2011. You’re not going to get a lot of looks hitting .250 in high school. His path took him to Saddleback Junior College. Then he transferred to NAIA’s Missouri Baptist.

The 2014 Major League Baseball draft was split over 30 rounds and 1,215 players were picked by the 30 teams. Fuentes was not one of them. He signed instead later, as a free agent, with a \$10,000 bonus.

“I don’t know why he wasn’t drafted,” Rockies farm director Zach Wilson said. “We knew him better than most because of our relationship with Nolan. But our scouts did a good job, they recognized his character. He was an easy guy to bring into our organization.”

Fuentes’ rise up the ranks in the minors quickly established his defining characteristics. At the plate, he has a nose for the ball, with consistent hard contact. His strikeout totals stayed low and his on-base percentage remained high and he nearly led his leagues in batting in Double-A and Triple-A.

He struggled only at Single-A Asheville, but when the Rockies made Fuentes repeat the level, he dominated, hitting .398 with a 1.120 OPS over six weeks to start the season before a promotion.

Last year, his first at Triple-A Albuquerque, Fuentes cruised through opposing pitchers, leading the PCL in runs, hits and extra-base hits. He added a leg kick to his swing, to drum up more power, but he gets on base often and without the need for walks.

On paper, Fuentes was making it look easy. But it wasn’t.

“I went through my ups and downs,” he said. “I was grinding out ABs. I was stressed out. I was like, ‘Damn, I’m hitting .300, I have to keep hitting .300.’ And it added to the pressure.”

Said Arenado: “He’s worked extremely hard and all of the credit goes to him for the work he’s put in.”



The Rockies in recent seasons made it standard to demand infielders play multiple positions and they pushed Fuentes to become more comfortable at first base along with third. His defense is less rangy than Arenado's, but his hands are soft, according to scouts, with an arm that can handle the width of the diamond. While Arenado routinely awards himself a Wiffle Ball MVP, Fuentes often earns a Gold Glove.

"Which is dumb," Fuentes said, "because it's Wiffle Ball. There are no gloves."

The Wiffle Ball game barnstormed to Scottsdale last fall because Fuentes was there tearing up the Arizona Fall League with the Salt River Rafter. The Rockies sent him there for one more test, one more ceiling for him to climb through. Later that month, facing the risk of losing Fuentes to the Rule 5 draft, the Rockies gave him his first major-league contract.

"His work ethic stands out, how he works, the intent, the desire behind his work," Wilson said. "And truly all of that created the player he is today. There was a lot of development, sure. But who he is and his love for the game, when you combine that with his skills, he's turned into a major-league player."

Something clicked for Fuentes, though, and only recently. Last season, in a July game against the Fresno Grizzlies in Albuquerque, the Isotopes trotted out a lineup stocked with prospects that will probably make up a sizable chunk of Colorado's big-league roster this season. David Dahl, Ryan McMahon and Garrett Hampson played in that game. And Fuentes.

That day, they faced pitcher Ken Giles, whose 2017 season established himself as a powerful relief pitcher with the Houston Astros, a player already established in the majors.

"And he was throwing fuel," Fuentes said. "He was throwing 99. He's a big leaguer." Giles threw two sliders in the dirt to put Fuentes behind 0-2. Then the 25-year-old batter who nearly nobody saw coming slammed a 100 mph line drive off the fence for a double.

"And I stood on second base and I looked in the dugout and it was like, 'Oh my God.' Something came over me. Here we go," Fuentes said. "I was thinking, 'I can do this.' Even before when I did well, I still wondered. But after that, it gave me confidence. Maybe I do belong here. Now I'm gonna do whatever I can to make it happen."

Fuentes will arrive at his first spring training with the Rockies next month. They will put him through the ringer again. He will work with third-base coach Stu Cole taking infield practice at 7:30 every morning. He will be tested at third base and first.

"I'm very excited and curious to see him play up-close every day," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "And he'll play. He'll get at-bats."

Since November, Fuentes and Nolan and Jonah Arenado have settled into their standard offseason routine: wake up, lift weights, hit, find an empty field in Orange County, take groundballs. Every day. Fuentes knows his old coaches at

Trabuco Hills and Saddleback. Nolan knows the Laguna Hills coach. Sometimes they cold-call a coach and tell him that “Nolan Arenado wants to hit at your field’ and they always say yes,” Fuentes said. “I tag along.”

Nobody told him to, but Fuentes started working at second base this winter, trying to find one more possible avenue to the majors. Arenado is already there. Fuentes is mapping his own course, not far behind.

“I’m 25 years old. I understand I’m older. I know I’m on the outside,” Fuentes said. “But I want to belong, I want to win a job. I know what kind of player I am. As long as I get a fair chance, I’m okay.”

## Colorado Rockies Quick Hits: Spring preparations and Wall climbing

Kevin Henry | RoxPile | Jan. 29, 2019

Do you hear that sound? Shhhh, just listen for a second. Do you hear it? Yeah, we don't hear anything either. It's been like that for most of the offseason when it comes to the Colorado Rockies and any potential moves they might be making ... or even considering.

With all of the talk surrounding who will fill the shoes of **Adam Ottavino** in the Colorado Rockies bullpen, there will be a focus on **Seunghwan Oh** and what he will once again bring to the team. After being acquired in a deal with the Toronto Blue Jays at the trade deadline last season, the 36-year-old right-hander shined for the Rockies. In 25 games with Colorado, Oh went 2-0 with a 2.53 ERA in 21.1 innings of work, scattering 15 hits and striking out 24.

Oh will be back this season for the Rockies and should be a key in the late-inning arsenal for **Bud Black**. But what about what Colorado gave away to get Oh? Well, it looks like **Forrest Wall** could get his chance to shine for the Blue Jays this season.

The former Rockies prospect is now the 25th-ranked prospect in the Toronto organization and is forecast to possibly see his Major League debut this season in a jumbled Blue Jays outfield. He also has received an invite to spring training. Speaking of talented outfielders, Colorado has one of those as well. They also have plenty of possibilities for who could see playing time, including a mixture of veterans (**Charlie Blackmon** and **Ian Desmond**) and young players (**David Dahl**, **Raimel Tapia** and maybe even **Garrett Hampson**).

One name not mentioned often is **Noel Cuevas**, who earned 146 at-bats last season with the Rockies in his first taste of big league action. Putting together a .233/.268/.315 slash line, Cuevas hit just .185 in 27 July at-bats before being returned to Triple-A Albuquerque on July 29. In his return on September 1 when rosters were expanded, he received only 10 at-bats the rest of the month, getting one hit.

Cuevas, however, is intent on competing for a spot on Colorado's Opening Day roster. He sent one final message from his home country of Puerto Rico before departing for Scottsdale and spring training ... and also showed off some of the workouts he put in over the offseason.

Where will Cuevas end up on Colorado's outfield depth chart after spring training? It's one of the many things we'll be watching this spring.

## Colorado Rockies: Bud Black's thoughts on the second base job

Kevin Henry | RoxPile | Jan. 28, 2019

If there is nothing else we learned from last weekend's interviews and interactions with Colorado Rockies players and coaches, we absolutely learned that this franchise believes it is time for the younger players to step up and contribute. For quite some time, the Colorado Rockies have had players in the minor leagues just waiting for their chance to shine. Names like **Ryan McMahon** and **Garrett Hampson** have received some chances while **Brendan Rodgers** will likely get his first taste of Major League action sometime this season.

Certainly there are others and other positions that could and will be a focus as we head into spring training (including **David Dahl** securing a starting outfield spot and **Raimel Tapia** fighting for playing time in the outfield as well), but let's focus on second base in this article and what we heard last weekend from Colorado manager **Bud Black**.

With the departure of **DJ LeMahieu**, Colorado will look to McMahon and Hampson to battle for the starting nod at second base. That's one of the things we talked about in our latest predictions article that you can read by clicking [here](#). Black also talked about the competition for second base with us and other reporters inside Coors Field on Saturday afternoon. "With Ryan, with Garrett, with potentially Brendan, with other guys who are going to be in camp, it's going to a healthy competition obviously," Black said. "The versatility that those guys bring with multiple positions that they can play on any given night, you could see them in the lineup, whether it's in the outfield with Hampson or at second, or Mac at first to give (Daniel) Murphy a break or second or third if Nolan needs a day."

And are the younger players up to the challenge of replacing a two-time All-Star?

"I think so. We think so. If you ask those guys, they're definitely ready," Black said. "Players want opportunities. What I've seen in my two years here and their growth and their development, I think they're ready to be contributors."

All of this is welcome news to a fanbase that has been itching to see younger players being given a chance to make an impact on a consistent basis.

What are some things to note from Black's comments? Here are three things that stood out to me.

First, **Daniel Murphy** will be playing first base primarily, which is exactly what the Rockies signed him to do this offseason.

Second, versatility is always important to Black and the Rockies and they like what Hampson, McMahon and even Rodgers can bring in that capacity. Don't be surprised to see the Rockies mixing and matching players at many positions this season, including Hampson spending some time in center field.

Third, the younger players (McMahon primarily and Hampson in a very limited role) showed enough last season to make the Rockies believe they could replace LeMahieu in some capacity. Will any of these players be DJ-like at the plate and in the field? We'll see, but the Rockies are seemingly confident that whatever they can provide will be good enough to win this season.

Sure, it's a roll of the dice if the production from these younger players will really be there. However, that's the belief of the Rockies heading into camp in Arizona. They believe have the players they need in-house to successfully fill the void at second base. Now we'll see how that plays out in spring training.

## Colorado Rockies: Kyle Freeland on Cy Young voting, some new “pitches”

Noah Yingling | RoxPile | Jan. 27, 2019

After the Colorado Rockies season ticket holder hot stove event on Saturday morning, a few of the Rockies players and staff spoke to the media, including our own Kevin Henry. One of the players was Rockies ace starting pitcher Kyle Freeland and he had some interesting comments on his Cy Young placement and pitch development

**Kyle Freeland** spoke to the media yesterday, during one of the few times where players are available to the media during the offseason.

This was the first press meeting since the individual player awards were announced and as a part of those announcements, Freeland came in 4th in the NL Cy Young voting. He was asked if he would be striving for them in the future.

As you might expect, he said that it would be nice to receive those honors but he also said that “it won’t be a number that I’ll try to chase...[because] once you start trying to chase a number like that, when you start playing to a number, pitching to a number, you lose sight of what you are actually playing for and you should be playing for your team. You should be out there trying to win every single time you take the ball and I don’t plan on losing sight of that. There’s no reason for me to pitch to a 2.50 ERA. If that happens, it happens and [if it does], it’s because I went about things the correct way and I was playing for my team...”

Our own Kevin Henry asked Freeland the next question and he asked him it is true that he is developing a new pitch. Freeland did confirm that he is working on a new pitch of sorts and it is with developing his sinker, which he has tinkered with before, but now, he is “exploring with the different locations we can go with it now.” Freeland added that once he got his new mechanics consistently last year, he started talking with **Chris Iannetta** and **Tony Wolters** about throwing “more left-on-left changeups [and] throwing that front-hip sinker to righties” so that he could add more to his arsenal in different locations and counts.

He said that the hardest part about adding these two new “pitches”, or current pitches but differing locations, is “communication with yourself, your catcher, and anyone that you’ll kind of want to lean on about it.” One of those players is **Ryan McMahon**, who Freeland said that he has been using as his left handed hitter for his changeups.

So, essentially, he will still have his current mix of pitches but with working the pitches in new places, he will have different looks to hitters.

The Rockies ace will look to keep developing those pitches for a few more weeks before Spring Training games start in less than a month and he can, Freeland may maintain or even develop into a better pitcher than the one who broke out as the Rockies ace last season.

## Despite big changes, Trevor Story confident in Colorado Rockies roster

Kevin Henry | RoxPile | Jan. 27, 2019

It will absolutely be a season of change for the Colorado Rockies in 2019, but the Colorado Rockies All-Star shortstop still believes that the pieces are there for the team to make a deep postseason run.

**Trevor Story** is coming off his best offensive season and has put himself into the conversation for Gold Glove honors in a very deep talent pool in the National League at shortstop. In a season where he bashed 37 home runs, including the longest in Coors Field history, there is plenty for Story to reflect back upon when it comes to measuring success. Story explained to me on Friday that looking back at those good moments is important for him heading into his fourth season with the Colorado Rockies.

“It’s important for me and that’s a part of my routine every offseason,” Story told me in an exclusive chat. “I look at the stuff that I do well, as well as the other way as well. I’m big on positive affirmations and having those things in my mind.” At the moment, Story provides the stability and calm for the Rockies in the infield. **Nolan Arenado** is heading toward a potential arbitration hearing as his salary for this season is still up in the air in what could be his final season with the Rockies. **DJ LeMahieu** is no longer manning second base as **Garrett Hampson** and **Ryan McMahon** will battle for the position. **Daniel Murphy** will likely make his Rockies debut while **Ian Desmond** will shift to the outfield as Colorado looks for an answer at first base.

There is a lot going on in Colorado’s infield. Story, however, says that there is one constant.

“The goal doesn’t change. Our goal is to win the World Series,” Story said. “We feel like we still have the group that can do that.”

And what of the changes that have seen veterans like LeMahieu, **Gerardo Parra** and **Carlos Gonzalez** no longer in the clubhouse? Story is focusing on the positives being brought in by Colorado’s major offseason free agent signing.

“We obviously did lose some of our big guys but added a big guy as well in Daniel Murphy,” Story said. “I think he’s going to be a big aspect of our team. He’s a veteran, unbelievable hitter and unbelievable guy from what I hear.”

Last season, Story went 3-for-6 in Colorado’s Wild Card win over the Chicago Cubs but struggled (along with the rest of the Colorado offense) against Milwaukee in the National League Division Series, going 2-for-12. Those struggles are helping to fuel Story for 2019.

“That’s one of the biggest driving factors for me, personally. Leaving with that bad taste in your mouth, especially getting swept,” Story said. “We ran into the Brewers and we could’ve done better than we showed. Next year, we’ll be more prepared and have a little bit more experience under our belt and I think we’ll play better.”



Yes, Story is counting on a return to the postseason again in 2019 for the Rockies. If Colorado does make its third consecutive trip to the playoffs, it will likely be because of another solid season by Story.

## **Key storylines as the Colorado Rockies offseason trudges along**

**Luke Zahlmann | Mile High Sports | Jan. 27, 2019**

Hope is a powerful thing. Without hope, a population of sports fanatics and non-sports communities are merely a ship lost at sea.

In regards to the Colorado Rockies, immense hope has developed over the past two years.

In 2017, the franchise made their first postseason appearance since 2009 by way of a Wild Card game against National League West rival, the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Building off of their momentum, the team once again garnered a playoff berth last year, advancing to the NL Division Series. Though they fell in a sweep at the hands of the Milwaukee Brewers, the step forward in the bracket symbolized a new level of success that was imminently possible.

Heading into the 2019 season, hope remains for the Rockies to take the next step amongst the populous of Colorado and beyond.

In their pursuit of a third-consecutive playoff berth and eclipsing the divisional round of the playoffs, a quartet of storylines has come to the forefront in their efforts.

### **There's trust in Colorado's young staff**

In their shortage of moves, the Rockies have yet to garner an upgrade to last year's starting rotation, the fourth-best in franchise history by earned run average.

Though their lack of moves can be concerning, the club is showing their trust in the arms already in the organization and relying on yet another step forward from staff ace, Kyle Freeland.

"You can always improve," Freeland said. "If you're not looking to improve yourself in this game, at this level and you think you've figured it all out... you're probably gonna get hit in the mouth."

Along with Freeland's desire continue his upward ascent, the Rockies will hope to get a full year of German Marquez producing at the level he did in last year's second half.

The yearning for another standout year from Marquez extends to their desire for Jon Gray to regain his form as well.

With the way Bud Black's rotation shakes out, it appears the team will once again boast one of the brighter young rotations in the game.

Outside of a veteran addition for a low sum, the team is showing they are content with their day-to-day starters.

## **Dodgers are pulling further ahead**

Prior to last season, the Rockies were picked to finish fourth in the NL West if you perused Baseball America's projections. Atop the conference, in projections, was once again the Los Angeles Dodgers.

For the past six seasons, no team has reigned atop the NL West outside of the Dodgers. Under a pair of separate managers in both Don Mattingly and Dave Roberts, the club has amassed a .580-winning percentage in the regular season in that same span.

Heading into this offseason, the NL West leaders were slated to deal with the contracts of both Clayton Kershaw and Yasmani Grandal along with their expiring rentals in Brian Dozier and Manny Machado. To this point, they've had mixed results with the four.

Kershaw, with the choice to decline his option, was given a slight raise despite injuries marring his last three seasons. The others, sans Machado, have signed elsewhere with Grandal heading to the Brewers and Dozier making his way to the nation's capital.

The final large question mark of the offseason was the team's plan moving forward with last season's biggest deadline trade acquisition. The Dodgers could pay Machado and set themselves up with a bevy of impactful infield hitters once Corey Seager returned, or go back to their nucleus of Justin Turner and Seager with Cody Bellinger manning first.

The team appears to be choosing the latter with their recent acquisitions of both A.J. Pollock and Russell Martin.

Now, with their trade of Matt Kemp and Yasiel Puig to the Cincinnati Reds, the Dodgers are set to pose a lineup headlined by Bellinger, Seager, Turner, Pollock and Muncy. Their staff will also be largely the same with a full year from Walker Buehler set to enhance it.

In all, the Dodgers have improved financially while also staying relatively even on the offensive end, with a full year from Kershaw and Seager set to be in-house upgrades.

They are still the class of the NL West and appear to be lapping the field in the absence of impact moves by their counterparts.

## **Position changes are on the way**

Whether it's Charlie Blackmon or Ian Desmond's relocation, the Rockies have shown they are looking to change their presence in the field.

"We had a discussion about possibly trying different outfield alignments if it meant winning more games for the Rockies, and I was all about winning more games for the Rockies," Blackmon said during media availability on Saturday.

The changes are, in theory, set to improve the Rockies with a separate impact move notwithstanding.

Moving Desmond to the role of utility fielder off the bench, with Blackmon moving to a corner outfield spot are both heralded.

From the corner opposite Nolan Arenado, Desmond posted a .307 on-base percentage. That mark, among qualifiers, ranked 19th out of 21 first basemen, beating out only Ryon Healy and Chris Davis.

His slugging percentage, though an improvement from his standing in on-base was a mere .422 and sat behind 12 separate first basemen as well.

With Blackmon, his bat remained vital to the team, with his fielding becoming a hindrance. Among qualifiers, the Rockies' center fielder was dead last in defensive runs saved among outfielders.

In the rangy outfield of Coors Field, a move to alleviate the reliance on Blackmon manning the middle behind the Rockies young staff is advantageous.

With the team already downgrading in the infield from D.J. LeMahieu to Daniel Murphy, the outfield switch is needed to juxtapose the downgrade.

### **Arenado is an overwhelming question mark**

Among the many cliches, Arenado's impending free agency is a case of "last but not least," for the franchise.

In his last year before free agency, Arenado's contract extension is at the forefront of the club's future. Set to turn 28 years old in the 2019 season's first month, Arenado's accolades have already begun to stack up.

From the hot corner, Arenado has racked up a Gold Glove in each of his first six seasons, garnered four Silver Sluggers and finished top-10 in Most Valuable Player voting in each of the last four years.

Arenado has aided his efforts with 37 or more home runs in each of those years as well:

Rambling off stats does Arenado slight justice, with his absence of off-field incidents and locker room problems finishing the tale.

Among the many free agents that have led headlines in recent years, Arenado is likely to be the best package among them. Though Bryce Harper and Machado have lore as well, their respective personality and health issues put a dent in their resumes.

The New York Yankees have already been rumored to be interested in the superstar. With their abundance of finances when compared to the Rockies, the club will have to make their case elsewhere.

In both acquisitions prior to and throughout the year, the club will be forced to once again prove to Arenado their desire to win.

The story is well documented already.

If an extension fails to rear its head preceding the year, the storyline figures to dominate the MLB landscape for much of 2019 as well.