



---

## MEDIA CLIPS – Sept. 5, 2018

### **Trevor Story Is Making an All-Time Improvement** Jeff Sullivan | Fangraphs.com | Sept. 4, 2018

There was a time at which FanGraphs got swept up in Trevor Story mania. FanGraphs, of course, wasn't alone in how it responded to Story's big-league debut, because back in April of 2016, Story came out of the gate like a bolt of lightning. In his first-ever major-league game, he hit two home runs. To follow that up, he hit another. To follow *that* up, he hit \*another.\* And then he went deep twice in game number four. Story hit ten home runs that month, and he finished it with a slugging percentage of .696. It was impossible not to sit up and notice.

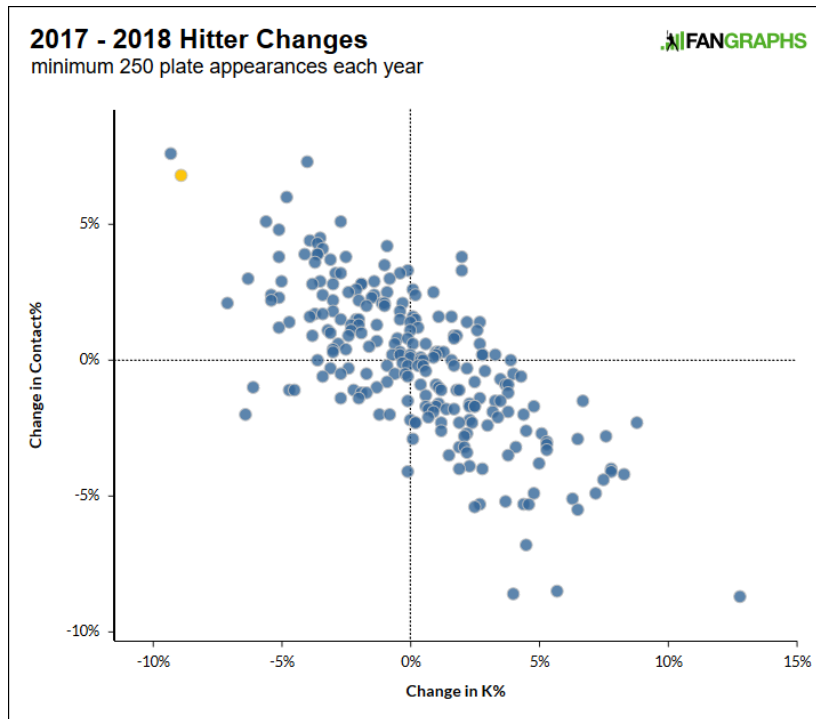
But there are debuts, and then there's the rest. Many players have come up and done well at first. Fewer have sustained their success. The key to sticking around is to adjust to the opponents' adjustments, and from May 2016 through the end of 2017, Story managed a combined 93 wRC+. Playable, certainly, yet hardly fantastic. Story was in danger of being forgotten, and, worse than that, he was in danger of being supplanted. Maybe not right away, but Story had to prove he should be considered a part of the Rockies' longer-term core.

Here we are today, and by any measure, Story's been one of baseball's best shortstops. The Rockies are in first place in the NL West, and while their run differential is far worse than that of the Dodgers, Story has obviously done his part. He's helped to push the Rockies into their present position, and all it's required is an improvement for the record books.

Used to be, Story was like Joey Gallo without the elite-level power. Last year, for example, Gallo struck out 37% of the time, while hitting 28% ground balls. Story struck out 34% of the time, while hitting 34% ground balls. That happened while playing half the time in a strikeout-suppressing environment. Story didn't quite have the full extent of Gallo's swing-

and-miss, but the book on Story was relatively straightforward — he'd try to hit the ball up, and he could be exploited. Even as a shortstop, he was a borderline starter.

Story, then, was a guy with a major strikeout problem. Even today, his strikeout rate remains above the league average. But look at the following plot, showing every hitter with at least 250 plate appearances in each of the last two seasons. You see changes in strikeout rate and contact rate, and Story is the point in yellow.



Story's strikeout rate has improved by nine percentage points. His contact rate, in turn, has improved by seven percentage points. These are exceptional changes, and the only comparable player is Corey Dickerson. Dickerson, though, hasn't really seen an overall change in productivity. Story's wRC+ has vaulted from 81 to 124. By making more contact, Story is having far fewer empty at-bats, and an improvement like this is not easy to pull off.

The above plot considered players from the last two years with at least 250 plate appearances in each season. Now I'd like to broaden the scope, going all the way back to 1900, and considering players with at least 500 plate appearances in consecutive seasons. The resulting sample size numbers 7,219 season-pairs. Here are the largest year-to-year decreases in strikeout rate:

K% Improvements, 1900 – 2018

Player	Year 1	Year 2	Y1 K%	Y2 K%	Change
Mark Belanger	1968	1969	21.5%	9.1%	-12.4%
David Ortiz	2010	2011	23.9%	13.7%	-10.2%
Brook Jacoby	1986	1987	21.4%	11.8%	-9.6%
Jeff Burroughs	1975	1976	23.1%	13.7%	-9.4%
Sam Chapman	1940	1941	17.1%	8.1%	-9.0%
Jason Thompson	1983	1984	20.5%	11.5%	-9.0%
Cory Snyder	1987	1988	27.0%	18.1%	-8.9%
Trevor Story	2017	2018	34.4%	25.5%	-8.9%
Bobby Thomson	1948	1949	15.2%	6.5%	-8.7%
Willie McCovey	1967	1968	20.4%	11.7%	-8.7%

Minimum 500 plate appearances in consecutive seasons.

There's Story, presently eighth, out of 7,219. Ortiz is the only other particularly recent player in the table, and for him, that was more of a return to his normal strikeout baseline. Two relevant comparisons, to me, are Kris Bryant and Xander Bogaerts. Between 2015 – 2016, Bryant lowered his strikeout rate more than eight percentage points, and he hasn't gone back. Between 2014 – 2015, Bogaerts also lowered his strikeout rate more than eight percentage points, and he also hasn't gone back. Bryant had been good as a rookie with a bunch of strikeouts, and Story was good with a bunch of strikeouts in 2016, himself. But Bryant — and Bogaerts — became more polished, complete hitters. Story seems to be achieving the same thing. It's no longer a small sample when the calendar flips to September.

What, then, has been happening for Story? What's the secret behind his greater success? In part, he seems to have a tweaked and simplified swing, even though I couldn't find very much on video. I'll take their word for it. Story knows his own swing a lot better than I do. And then there's also been a mental adjustment — Story is approaching the plate more ready to swing. In this way, he's somewhat reminiscent of Christian Yelich. You can see it when you look at Story's

success on the first pitch; right now he owns a league-leading 21 first-pitch extra-base hits. Last year, he had 12. As a rookie, he had seven.

You can also see it elsewhere. When a hitter is ready to swing right away, you can observe some downstream consequences. About 52% of major-league plate appearances end up at two-strike counts. When Story was a rookie, he got to a two-strike count 61% of the time. In his follow-up year, he got to a two-strike count 62% of the time. This year, he's all the way down at 52%. It's only a little about Story avoiding a third strike. It's more about him avoiding being in that spot in the first place. Story has become more aggressive early and in the strike zone, and so it's become more difficult to put him away. Before there's a two-strike count on the board, pitchers might be less willing to bounce a breaking ball, or throw a four-seamer at the letters. Story is granting fewer such opportunities.

As surprising as it is to say, Story has become something remarkably balanced. The six pitches thrown most often are the four-seamer, the two-seamer, the slider, the changeup, the curveball, and the cutter. This year, out of all qualified hitters, Story is one of just a dozen of them who have above-average run values against each of the individual pitch types. The list runs from Mike Trout and Joey Votto to Miguel Andujar and Didi Gregorius. It's not so much that Story has made a point of becoming a better breaking-ball hitter. It's that he's just a better hitter in general, and he's ending up in fewer putaway breaking-ball situations. His approach and bat-to-ball skills are the best that they've been, and strikeout improvements tend to be pretty sticky. Trevor Story has begun a new chapter.

I don't know if the Rockies are going to hold off the Dodgers. Probably not. The Dodgers are very good, and the Rockies need to scratch and claw for every last win. But Story makes them feel better about their chances now, and he also makes them feel better about their chances down the road. Story *is* a part of the core, just as it seemed a couple seasons ago. Story's strikeout-heavy approach worked for a little while, and then he was forced to play catch-up. He's all caught up these days, as a hitter more prepared to damage any pitch. Just because there's room for further improvement doesn't mean Story's improvement isn't already impressive. It is, in fact, historic.

**Late rally lifts Rockies to series win vs. Giants**  
**Pinch-hitter Ryan McMahon's game-tying solo homer sparked a 5-run 7th**  
**Owen Perkins | MLB.com | Sep. 5, 2018**

DENVER -- For the second night in a row, the enduring image of the Rockies game was a Giants center fielder dangling from the fence after a futile leap failed to contain another Blake Street blast from leaving the yard.

Tuesday night it was pinch-hitter Ryan McMahon with the late-inning heroics, tying the game with a home run and -- four batters later -- Carlos Gonzalez, who knocked a bases-loaded triple to the left-center gap that sent San Francisco center fielder Gorkys Hernandez scrambling to catch up with the ball as it careened off the fence and unloaded the Rockies' LoDo mojo on the Giants for a decisive 6-2 win to clinch the series victory.

The win kept the Rockies (76-62) in sole possession of first place in the National League West, a half game ahead of the Dodgers, who beat the Mets on Tuesday in Los Angeles, and a game and a half up on the D-backs, who defeated the Padres in Arizona. Colorado also claimed the NL's second seed from Atlanta (76-62) by virtue of the head-to-head tiebreaker. The Rockies won the season series against the Braves, 5-2.

"It's just a really good group, especially the contribution that we're getting from the young guys," Gonzalez said of the team's 40th come-from-behind win of the season. "Yesterday it was [Noel] Cuevas and tonight it was McMahon again with a huge home run to tie the game. After that we were able to keep the momentum going to load the bases. It was exactly what we planned."

After managing only a lone run in the first six frames, the Rockies exploded for five in the seventh. McMahon hit in the pitchers spot with one out and nobody on, knocking his fifth round-tripper of the season. It was his second pinch-hit homer this year and the sixth for the Rockies.

"Honestly I'm just trying to go up there, get a knock for the team, get the next guy up there," McMahon said. "It's been working out a little bit. I'm just glad I could help the team."

McMahon's game-tying homer was the spark that lit the Rockies' fuse, as Charlie Blackmon reached on an infield single and DJ LeMahieu walked before reliever Reyes Moronta let loose with a wild pitch that advanced the runners to second and third. The Giants elected to intentionally walk Nolan Arenado, setting up Gonzalez's three-run opposite-field triple.

Over the last couple of seasons, Gonzalez has faced extreme shifts defensively against him, but he's been making teams pay for it of late, and Tuesday night was Exhibit A.

"When they have the shift on you, it's really hard to keep your hands in and shift the ball the other way," Gonzalez explained. "Obviously when they give you a good pitch down and away, it's the perfect pitch to use your hands and use that side of the field. That at-bat tonight was rough, because I knew he was going to come in with sinkers. He got me 0-2 and then I made my adjustment.

"I moved a little farther away from the plate and I gave him the outside corner. I knew he was going to try to go out there and throw that slider, and he missed over the plate, because now that I'm farther off the plate, it's more difficult to throw inside, because the ball inside is going to look more difficult because I'm away. In my mind I wasn't trying to pull the ball, I was just trying to use the big part of the field. A lot of times you have that approach, but the perfect pitch never shows up. On that at-bat it did."

The Rockies refused to relent, as Trevor Story was issued a free pass by Ty Blach and Sam Dyson walked the bases loaded, then walked in a run before McMahon struck out to end the frame.

Much of the game was a pitchers' duel, with the Giants scoring in the top of the first after Gregor Blanco hit a leadoff single to left, stole second and scored on Joe Panik's single. The Rockies countered in the second with a leadoff homer from David Dahl, and the game was knotted at 1-1 until Hernandez's towering solo shot over the left-center fence in the seventh.

Colorado got a brilliant performance from starting pitcher German Marquez, who threw 6 2/3 innings and allowed two runs on seven hits and two walks while striking out 11.

"He threw the ball great, especially the fastball," said manager Bud Black. "The fastball had life down in the zone, good location, some low bullets, mixed in some breaking balls. Into the seventh inning, two runs, obviously we'll take that every single game from every one of our starters and we'll take our chances."

It was his fifth career game with double-digit strikeouts, and his third of the season, following his career-best 13-strikeout game against San Diego last week. Marquez is second in the Majors with 78 strikeouts since the All-Star break.

"I just want to put them away as quickly as possible, and if it happens to be with a strikeout, then so be it," Marquez said.

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Dahl's defense: Dahl's second-inning solo homer stood up as the only Rockies run until their big seventh inning. Almost as big as that run was a defensive play Dahl made in the top of the eighth, snaring a potential extra-base hit from Brandon Crawford with a long run to the foul line and a diving, sliding catch to seal a shut-down inning that kept the Giants from rekindling any life in their bats after the Rockies' rally.

"The diving play in left field was a big one," Black said. "I told David, 'Those are the types of plays that we need from you.' Because he's capable. He's got speed to run those balls down. We need him to play with that aggressiveness on defense."

#### YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

In the midst of the tense pitchers' duel part of the game, Tony Wolters let go of his bat during a fourth-inning swing with a two outs and a man on second, sending it flying to the Rockies dugout. Gerardo Parra feigned anger with his teammate, then launched a sky-high bat flip to toss it back to Wolters, who made a clean catch for a moment of ice-breaking levity.

"I suspect that when we all go home tonight and watch highlights, we'll see that one, and hopefully we see that for years to come," Black said. "That was a good one. It was a great bat toss from Parra, and Tony caught it. It was a 50-foot toss and a nice catch -- a great toss-and-catch."

#### HE SAID IT

"It's still baseball at the end of the day. It's a tight race in the NL West, everybody knows that, but the best way to be good at this game is to go out there and have a lot of fun and move on from the bad things that happen." -- McMahon, on Parra's big bat toss to Wolters

#### UP NEXT

Antonio Senzatela climbs the hill for Wednesday's 6:40 p.m. MT series finale with the Giants. Senzatela held the Padres to one run and four hits in six innings in his last start, and found the missing feel for his fastball despite earning a hard-luck loss. It's his second time facing the Giants this season, having pitched seven shutout innings against them on July 3. With southpaw Andrew Suarez slated to start for the Giants, look for Matt Holliday in the starting lineup.



**Rockies fortify roster with September callups**  
**Owen Perkins | MLB.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

DENVER -- A day after taking sole possession of first place in the National League West, the Rockies fortified their roster with a handful of September call-ups. Three of the new members of the active roster -- outfielder Raimel Tapia, infielder Chris Hampson and left-handed pitcher Sam Howard -- are returning to the Rockies after brief stints earlier in the season, and two -- right-hander D.J. Johnson and outfielder Yonathan Daza -- were promoted to the Majors for the first time.

Adding the players to the big league roster gives the Rockies some specific tools on their bench, and it also gives promising prospects an excellent opportunity to be tested in the fires of a pennant race.

"This is what we play for, whether you're Matt Holliday in his late 30s, or some of these guys in their early 20s," manager Bud Black said of the opportunity for young players to have "building block" moments in games of high consequence. "It's great. And it's the experience in games like this that will make you a better player in situations that arise like this moving forward in your career."

Tapia, 24, has the most experience of the new additions, having played 92 games for the Rockies in 2016 and 2017 and 14 games in a stint earlier this season, when he hit .222 (4-for-18) with four runs, two doubles, a homer and five RBIs. Tapia will have to fight for room in the Rockies' deep outfield ranks, but his speed makes him a valuable weapon off the bench in the late innings, with 21 steals at Triple-A Albuquerque and eight career swipes for the Rockies.

Hampson gives the Rockies a versatile glove and promising bat. In 10 games with the Rockies since making his big league debut this year, Hampson, 23, has played five games at second and a game each at shortstop and center. He hit .273 (6-for-22) for the Rockies and hit .311 (138-444) between Double-A Hartford and Triple-A with 36 steals this season.

Howard, 25, made his Major League debut on June 10, pitching a scoreless inning of relief at home against the D-backs, his only action in the big leagues to date. He was a starter in Albuquerque, going 3-8 with a 5.06 ERA in 21 starts.

Johnson is on his first big league roster following the selection of his contract from the Isotopes. The 29-year-old right-hander posted a 3.90 ERA in 50 Triple-A appearances this season.

Daza made a leap of sorts from Double-A, where he hit .306 (67-for-219) with four homers and 29 RBIs in 54 games. Daza, 24, has been on the 40-man roster all year, and recalling him enabled the Rockies to open a spot for Johnson by putting the injured Daza on the 60-day disabled list with a left shoulder strain Tuesday.

Tuesday's moves put the Rockies' active roster at 35 players and maintained a full 40-man roster.

Chased from behind

The Rockies moved into first place Monday night, taking sole possession atop the division standings for the first time since June 1. It's also the latest date the Rockies have led the division since the strike-shortened 1995 season, when they led as late as Sept. 26. It's the first time the team has occupied first place in September or October since that first Wild Card season 13 years ago.

"I don't think it really changes," Black said of the shift in perspective from chasing the D-backs and Dodgers to leading the pack with a target on the back of their jerseys. "In our sport, especially this year with the interchanging of the teams in our division, we got to play our game and keep doing our thing. Last year was a different story. The Dodgers sort of pulled away. They had a great few months in the middle of the season. But now, new season, we feel that we can be there with any team in baseball. It's good stuff."

The Rockies have the potential to take advantage of playing 16 of their final 25 games at home, where they own the best home winning percentage in the NL (.714, 24-10) since ending an eight-game home losing streak on June 19.

"You just need to get wins right now," Chris Iannetta said after the Rockies started the 10-day homestand with a rollercoaster 9-8 win over the Giants. "This is just another one off the list that we need to get to the playoffs."

## Tuesday's top prospect performers

Mike Rosenbaum | MLB.com | Sep. 4th, 2018

Here's MLB Pipeline's roundup of the top prospect performances in the Minor Leagues on Tuesday.

A light slate of games across the Minors on Tuesday night -- one day after all leagues save for Rookie-level Pioneer League wrapped up their regular-season schedules -- was highlighted by the start of postseason play in the Class A Advanced Florida State League, with Fort Myers and Palm Beach as well as Daytona and Clearwater squaring off in respective semifinals series.

Meanwhile, in the Rookie-level Appalachian League, Princeton and Elizabethton kicked off a best-of-three championship series.

Pipeline

- Top 100 Prospects list
- Top prospects stats
- Team-by-team prospect stats
- Top 10 farm systems
- September callups roundup
- Podcasts

Here's a recap of Tuesday's playoff action:

Florida State League semifinals

Fort Myers 3, Palm Beach 1: No. 30 overall prospect Alex Kirilloff (Twins' No. 2) put Fort Myers on the board with a solo shot in the first inning and was the lone Miracle player to collect multiple hits in the victory, finishing 2-for-4. The 20-year-old outfielder was among the top performers in the Minors during the regular season, hitting .348/.392/.578 with 71 extra-base hits (20 HR, 7 3B, 44 2B) and 101 RBIs in 130 games between two levels. 2017 first-overall pick Royce Lewis (Twins' No. 1, No. 10 overall) hit a single, stole second base and scored a run in the third inning en route to a 1-for-4 performance out of the leadoff spot.

Cardinals No. 7 prospect Elehuris Montero was 3-for-4 with a double for Palm Beach. In his first full season, the 20-year-old third baseman slashed .315/.371/.504 with 16 homers, 37 doubles and 82 RBIs in 127 games between Class A Peoria and Palm Beach. Montero and Dylan Carlson (No. 12), who went 2-for-4 with a double, accounted for all of the Cardinals' hits in the loss.

Clearwater 7, Daytona 6: The Threshers scored six times across the first four frames before ultimately pushing across the game-winning run in the bottom of the eighth on a solo homer, thwarting a late Daytona comeback. Clearwater starter Adonis Medina (Phillies' No. 3, No. 69 overall) pitched through some control problems but ultimately completed six innings in which he allowed three earned runs on six hits. The 21-year-old right-hander issued three walks, hit a batter and struck out four in the outing, throwing 48 of 79 pitches for strikes. He also induced eight ground-ball outs.

Daytona was powered by Reds No. 3 prospect Taylor Trammell, who connected on a two-run home run in the seventh inning that at the time cut the Threshers' lead to one. He finished 2-for-5 at the plate, as did Stuart Fairchild (No. 11). Tyler Stephenson (No. 6) also collected multiple hits, including an RBI single in the fifth inning.

#### Appalachian League finals

Elizabethton 7, Princeton 4: Chris Williams and Jean Carlos Arias both hit two-run home runs to help power the Twins past Princeton in the opener of the best-of-three title series. Seven different players recorded a hit and five finished with multiple hits for Elizabethton in the victory. Jacob Blank was sharp out of the bullpen, striking out five over two hitless innings to lock down his second professional save. Rays No. 4 prospect Wander Franco (No. 40 overall) was 1-for-4 for Princeton in the loss.

#### Pioneer League (regular season)

- Brewers No. 14 prospect Caden Lemons set a career high with seven strikeouts as he turned in his second straight five-inning start for Rookie-level Helena. The 19-year-old right-hander allowed one earned run on five hits and two walks and threw 54 of his season-high 88 pitches for strikes. Milwaukee's second-round pick in the 2017 Draft, Lemons was promoted to Helena in early August after he registered a 1.38 ERA over 13 innings in the Rookie Arizona League.

- D-backs No. 6 prospect Alek Thomas capped a 3-for-5 performance with a walk-off single as Rookie-level Missoula edged Helena, 3-2. It was his second straight three-hit game and the third during his six-game hitting streak. Overall, Thomas has slashed .329/.393/.451 with 20 extra-base hits and 11 steals in 54 games between Missoula and the Arizona League.

- Rockies No. 6 prospect Ryan Rolison did not allow a hit over three innings in his third scoreless start for Rookie-level Grand Junction. He struck out two and picked off the lone baserunner he allowed (via a walk in the second inning) en route to facing the minimum. The 2018 first-rounder has pitched to a 1.86 ERA with 34 strikeouts and eight walks in 29 innings (nine starts).

**Carlos González was waiting for the September ride to start and now he's ready to "push the pedal"**  
**Nick Groke | TheAthletic.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

DENVER — Bouncing like a pogo stick on third base, Carlos González finally felt human in the seventh inning Tuesday at Coors Field. He was hiding himself through three at-bats, after striking out twice and smoking a groundball out, trying to cap his disappointment.

"You don't want to show too many emotions when it's not going well," the Rockies right fielder said. "I was like, 'OK, just keep your head up because there are a lot of guys watching you, a lot of guys watching how you react, especially in September.' "

But the joy escaped, finally, when his game-breaking triple cleared the bases and put González in a spot to see his team pull away for a 6-2 victory over the Giants and maintain their slight lead in a pressure-cooker National League West race. The Rockies (76-62) moved 14 games above .500 for the first time this season and retained a half-game lead over the Dodgers. The Diamondbacks remained 1.5 games behind.

September baseball is González's playground, a stretch when the 32-year-old slugger settles into a smooth sprint. Even when the Rockies flailed through the lean years between his rookie season in 2009, when his team qualified for the postseason, and last year, when they finally returned, González rounds into form when so many others fade.

González was among the best hitters in baseball over four weeks at the end of the 2017 regular season, with a 1.250 OPS in September. A young Rockies team, most of them then without playoff experience, fell in behind him. And González is ready to marshal another parade.

"You have to go for it," he said. "Whatever I have left, I'm gonna leave it out there."

This month, though, started in a breeze. González stuck out three times last week in a loss at San Diego. He went 1-for-4 Monday to start a series against the Giants. He was 0-for-3 to start Tuesday.

If any spring has softened in his knees over time, González still can joust through mind games with a pitcher. Against lefty Ty Black in the seventh, he fell behind 0-2 on two sinking fastballs inside. Then González do-si-doed into a triple. He backed off the plate, moving a half-step toward the dugout, not in fear of another tight pitch, but as a trick.

"I gave him the outside corner," González said. "I knew they would notice."

Black missed with a slider, down and away, so the second-year pitcher from Aurora returned to the pitch that netted two strikes. He threw another sinker.

"But he left it over the plate," González said. "Sometimes you have that approach and the perfect pitch never shows up. But this time it did."

At this point in his career, patience is built into González's bat. Last season, González slogged through the early going, hitting .216 in the first month. His slump carried into summer and he hit .172 in June.

Rockies manager Bud Black never quivered. He put González front and center in a critical series against the Dodgers in Los Angeles, including a surprising start against lefty Clayton Kershaw last September. González went 6-for-13 with two homers and the Rockies swept the series.

"With all veteran players, there's a poise and a confidence in their ability to get it done," Black said. "Because they've done it before, over years. And he's been in situations like that before, from 2009 to 2018. There's an approach, a feeling inside him, that he's going to get it done."

González in late spring signed a one-year, \$8 million contract to return to the Rockies, the team that traded Matt Holliday to Oakland for him in 2008. And more than ever, there are young hitters pushing for his spot. Outfielder Noel Cuevas, 26, on Monday hit a go-ahead two-run single that gained a 9-8 win. Infielder Ryan McMahon, 23, on Tuesday cranked a pinch-hit homer to the center field trees to kick-start a five-run seventh.

Both those players have less combined career service time than González does this year alone. Both of them are finding spots even behind González.

“That’s the fun part,” González said. “As an older player, I want to make sure those guys realize that’s the reason why we play the game, because we want to win and play meaningful games and win a championship.”

“That’s our conversation right now. Nobody wants to fuck up. Nobody wants to blow it,” he said. “But I’m trying to remind everybody, yeah, it’s important to play good baseball in September, but don’t try to overdo it. A lot of times you’ll struggle because you’re trying to get ahead and you’ll give an at-bat away. It’s not going to get any easier. It will only get tougher. And if you pass to the next round, the postseason, it gets even hairier.”

González did that thing he does again in April, struggling to a .709 OPS. It seemed that maybe the time arrived to push a rookie instead. But González wasn’t tripping only picking up steam.

In the second half, he has been the Rockies’ second-best hitter, behind Trevor Story. He is ready for the ride to start.

“The last month is the most fun,” González said. “You have to push the pedal and leave it all out there.”



**Sarris: Four teams are left in the tightest playoff race in baseball. So who will win? And why?**  
Eno Sarris | TheAthletic.com | Sep. 4, 2018

The American League is so over, it's now boring. Well, the Mariners and A's still have reasons to play their games, but other than home field advantage, there's not that much sizzle on that side of the league. The top five teams are all at least 90 percent likely to make the playoffs by FanGraphs' Playoff Odds.

In the Cubs, Dodgers, Braves, and Brewers, the National League has four teams that are more than 75 percent likely to get at least one game after the regular season is over. There's juice there in how exactly they advance — the NL West is wide open — but their odds say they might be feeling okay about the last month.

And then there's the race for the second wild card in the National League. The Cardinals, Rockies, Diamondbacks and Phillies are separated by only three and a half games, with playoff odds ranging from 55 percent down to 25 percent. There's a favorite — the Cardinals are in the spot right now by a half-game over the Rockies — but the margins are super thin. Any of the four could get just the tiniest bit hot and claim the spot.

Each of the four teams has a key unit that will need to step up. One of the four is in the best spot. Who will it be, and why? Let's take a look at each team and see what we can find.

### ***Cardinals***

The Cardinals have the toughest remaining schedule in the National League Central when judged by opponents winning percentages. But at .513, it's not much over .500, and it's nothing like some of the schedules the American League East and National League West are going to see.

And when you jump under the hood, there are a couple of reasons the schedule might actually help the Cards reach the postseason. They will face the second-easiest pitching opponents down the stretch, something the fourth-best offense in the National League over the last 30 days will certainly enjoy.

The bullpen has seemingly been a strength with a 3.44 ERA over the last 30, but they've put up less sexy peripherals along with that ERA. They were actually the second-worst bullpen in the National League over the last month by FIP-

based metrics due to having the worst strikeout rate and the second-worst walk rate in baseball during that period. Jordan Hicks has been great, but he has also contributed to the walk problem with eight walks in 12 games. And everyone behind him has lost the plate, too. Only Tyson Ross has a good walk rate, and he's struck out four batters in 13 innings.

Maybe it won't matter too much what the middle of the 'pen does, though. The Cardinals' rotation has a 2.38 ERA over the last month — the second-best in baseball — and in Austin Gomber, Jack Flaherty, and John Gant, has three pitchers with an ERA under two in that time frame. There's some worry because it's so young in the rotation, and they've also suppressed home runs, which isn't something you might project them to do going forward. But then it's nice to know that the Cardinals will play in the third-most pitcher-friendly parks over the last month. A pitcher-friendly home schedule down the road and visits to Washington and Detroit may be the boost their staff needs.

So the schedule looks tough, but due to featuring poor pitching opposition in pitcher-friendly parks, the Cardinals should feel right at home and may match up well with their situation.

### **Rockies**

The Rockies, on the other hand, are facing the toughest remaining pitching schedule in baseball, and the toughest overall schedule outside of the American League East. They're pretty much only playing their division before welcoming the Phillies and Nationals to finish the season, and the Giants, just a few games under .500, are the easiest opponents they'll get.

<b>Toughest NL Schedules</b>	
Team	Opponents' Projected Winning Percentage
Diamondbacks	0.531
Rockies	0.531
Braves	0.515
Cardinals	0.513

Giants	0.504
--------	-------

A lot more may depend on Matt Holliday than it seems. The Rockies' offense has been second-worst offense in the National League all year and they could use some help. But the park factors that feed that ranking may penalize the team too much. There's at least some evidence that Coors may affect their hitters on the road... still, even just by OPS, the Rockies have had the 10th-best offense over the last month, and this is with David Dahl up and playing well. Holliday could lengthen that lineup.

Ironic for a team that spent so much on the bullpen, but their starting rotation has been the Rockies' pitching strength. Fifth-best in the National League over the season, they've been within a rounding error of that ranking in the last month and it doesn't look like Kyle Freeland, German Márquez and Jon Gray are slowing down right now.

However, the 'pen was struggling to be a top-10 NL unit for the season, and so they had the fewest appearances in the NL, too. It's been a little better recently — sixth-best in the NL over the last 30 — but the relievers are still having some homer-itis: only two pens have a worse homer rate in the last month, and even their steady guys like Wade Davis and Adam Ottavino are giving up homers. The Rockies have the 10th-friendliest schedule for homers over the last month, too. A tough slate of opponents, combined with parks that will augment their bullpen's biggest issue over the last month — these things may make it tough for Blake Street Magic to come through.

### ***Diamondbacks***

The D-Backs have the same schedule problems for the same reasons. They are tied for the toughest schedule outside of the American League East, and that's because they're going to see the second-toughest pitching schedule in all of baseball (judged by their opposing pitching staff's league and park-adjusted Fielding Independent Pitching (FIP-) over the last 30 days, where 100 is average).

Team	Average Opponent FIP-
Rockies	89.9

Diamondbacks	93.6
Blue Jays	93.7
Braves	93.8
Red Sox	94.8

And the D-Backs also have offensive issues that are being made worse by looking at park-adjusted metrics. They've been the 10th-best offense by park-adjusted metrics, but their park just added a humidifier, which has taken the gas out of those batted balls. Oh well, they're 10th-best by OPS as well. They're going to need someone to join in with Paul Goldschmidt, the red-hot David Peralta, and acquisition Eduardo Escobar to get anywhere this September.

Of the four teams here, the D-Backs have had the best 'pen over the last 30 days. They have the best bullpen ERA in the National League all season, and yet they also have the fewest innings pitched in the NL over the last 30 days. These things don't go together, and in a related matter, the Diamondbacks have the worst third time through the order penalty in baseball, as Jeff Wiser found. A good bullpen should be used more.

Unless maybe the point was keeping the bullpen fresh? Archie Bradley at 63 innings so far is the only pitcher who's really been pushed, and even he won't hit that 80-inning threshold that seemed to presage injury difficulties for relievers. Bradley is still throwing 96 mph and hasn't faded terribly, but he also hasn't averaged 97 mph in a game since late July. With Arizona facing difficult opponents that can pitch well, they'll either have to make the most out of their bullpen by using it more, or hope that Steven Souza and the rest of the hard-hitting offense will see better results in September.

### ***Phillies***

Yes, the Phillies are two and a half back of the Cardinals and have the second-lowest playoff odds of the group. They also have something nobody else has: an easy schedule. By winning percentage, they're facing the second-easiest opponents down the stretch. They'll see the worst pitching of the group, and have the sixth-easiest pitching schedule in baseball.

This could help.

<b>Easiest NL Schedules</b>	
<b>Team</b>	<b>Opponent's Projected Winning Percentage</b>
Pirates	0.479
Phillies	0.482
Dodgers	0.488
Reds	0.489
Brewers	0.490

The offense could use this help, too. That unit has been the fifth-worst in baseball over the last 30 days. Roman Quinn and Wilson Ramos are the only two hitters in the lineup that have been over average in that time frame, so they'll need their studs to get right. It hasn't really been luck, either — they've earned their poor performance at the plate and need to change something.

They do have a top-five starting rotation for the season, but are they falling off a bit? Down to 12th over the last month, the rotation is searching for some help from the last four spots: Starters other than Aaron Nola have a collective ERA over five in the last month. And they're not struggling with the same things: Jake Arrieta can't keep the ball in the park, Vince Velasquez is having trouble with walks, Zach Eflin's been playing with his third pitch (curve or change?) to up-and-down results, and well, Nick Pivetta is still having those same ball-in-play issues.

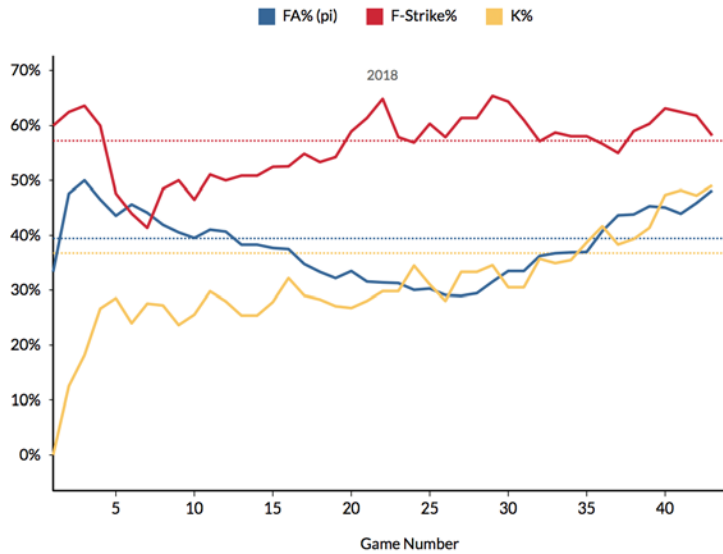
Gabe Kapler is trying his best to mix and match the bullpen to keep his team in the race — no team in the National League has had more reliever appearances in the second half — but the 'pen has a 4.72 ERA in that timeframe and hasn't deserved much better due to some problems with the home run.

Could Héctor Neris be the savior here? With Seranthony Dominguez struggling, the Phillies could use someone with the velocity from the right side in the late innings to join Tommy Hunter and Adam Morgan, and Neris has been a revelation ever since he came back from the minor leagues. It looks like he's been using his fastball more to get ahead, and that's putting hitters into a more defensive approach against him. His strikeout rate has risen with his fastball usage, at least.

## Hector Neris' 15-Game Rolling Average

Pitch type stats, 2018

FANGRAPHS



### ***The Big Finish***

The Phillies may actually be my second-favorite squad, given that they'll see poor pitching and easier opposition than the other three teams, and that could go a long way to solving their hitting problem. Their starting pitching is good, and there's quantity in that bullpen — quantity that could easily produce a couple good months from relievers with great stuff.

The D-Backs and Rockies not only have tougher schedules, they have schedules that mesh poorly with their offensive troubles right now. Up-and-down offenses against some of the best pitching in baseball over the next month? Doesn't calm any butterflies in the gut.

There's a reason the Cardinals have the best odds to grab that second wild-card spot. They've got it right now, they've been hitting well, their rotation has been pitching well and their schedule may help them keep the ball in the park as their bullpen continues to find its way. It may come down to some of the young swing pitchers — Austin Gomber, Daniel Pineda, and Luke Weaver — as they move between the starting rotation and the bullpen and keep that staff together. Or it may come down to some young players on the Tigers, Pirates, and Giants playing spoiler and making all of our schedule-based analysis moot. One thing that we know is true, though: at least we have this race, or we'd have nothing to do for three weeks.

**Dahl, Gonzalez key 5-run burst, Rockies beat Giants 6-2**  
**Associated Press | ESPN.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

DENVER -- The Colorado Rockies' younger players are making their presence felt down the stretch.

Rookie infielder Ryan McMahon had a pinch-hit home run and Carlos Gonzalez tripled with the bases loaded during a five-run seventh inning that carried NL West leading Rockies past the San Francisco Giants 6-2 on Tuesday night.

David Dahl, who played in only 19 minor league games last season because of a stress reaction in his rib cage after making his major league debut late in 2016, also homered for the Rockies. On Monday, rookie Noel Cuevas had a pinch-hit two-run single to make the difference in a 9-8 win over the Giants.

Colorado, bidding for its first NL West title, has a lead in the division in September or October for the first time since 1995. It was the fourth straight loss for the Giants, who also have lost six in a row to Colorado.

"It's just a really good group, especially the contributions we're getting from the young guys," Gonzalez said after the Rockies' 40th come-from-behind win of the season. "Yesterday was Cuevas. Tonight was McMahon with a huge home run to tie the game. After that, we were able to keep the momentum going, getting guys on and trying to get that big hit."

Rockies starter German Marquez had shut down the Giants since allowing a run in the first inning, striking out 11 over 6 2/3 innings. But with two outs and the bases clear in the seventh, Gorkys Hernandez snapped a 1-1 tie with his second home run in as many games.

That set the stage for a rally in the bottom of the seventh by the Rockies, who batted around after being limited to a run in six strong innings by Dereck Rodriguez.

With one out, McMahon drove an 0-1 offering from reliever Reyes Moronta (5-2) over the wall in straightaway center for his second pinch homer of the season.

"Honestly, I was just trying to get a knock for the team and get the next guy up there," McMahon said. "It just worked out. Marquez went out there and pitched so well. He's been amazing. We were just out there and we were going to grind through it. This team is pretty resilient. It's a fun group to be around."

An infield single by Charlie Blackmon -- his third hit of the game -- and walks to D.J. LeMahieu and Nolan Arenado loaded the bases before Gonzalez tripled to the wall in center off Ty Blach.

Pinch-hitter Gerardo Parra drew a bases-loaded walk off Sam Dyson to drive in the final run of the inning to vault the Rockies into a four-run lead.

"It's a shame that we can't hold onto some of these games, certainly when he's pitching," Giants manager Bruce Bochy said of the effort by Rodriguez. "What a nice job he did."

Chris Rusin (2-2) got the final out in the seventh for the victory. Adam Ottavino and Wade Davis each pitched scoreless innings to finish up.

Gregor Blanco singled to lead off the game and stole second before Joe Panik followed with an RBI single. The Rockies evened the score when Dahl started the second with a home run, his ninth of the season.

## TRAINING ROOM

Giants: CF Steven Duggar underwent season-ending surgery Tuesday to repair a torn labrum in his left shoulder. "All went well," manager Bruce Bochy said. "He came out of it fine." Duggar suffered the injury a week ago diving back into second base. He's expected to be ready in time for spring training.

GIANTS MOVES: RHP Jeff Samardzija (right shoulder inflammation) has been transferred to the 60-day disabled list and INF Abiatal Avelino had his contract purchased from Triple-A Sacramento. He is awaiting his major league debut.



ROCKIES MOVES: RHP D.J. Johnson had his contract selected from Triple-A Albuquerque and is making his debut on a major league roster. INF Garrett Hampson, LHP Sam Howard and OF Ramiel Tapia were all recalled from Albuquerque. Hampson, Howard and Tapia all spent time with the Rockies earlier this season.

#### UP NEXT

Giants: LHP Andrew Suarez (6-9, 4.19 ERA) will be seeking a third consecutive win when he starts Wednesday night's series finale against Colorado. He pitched seven innings of two-hit ball as part of the Giants' 7-0 win over the New York Mets last time out.

Rockies: RHP Antonio Senzatela (4-5, 4.88 ERA) has gone 2-1 with a 4.24 ERA in three previous starts this season at Coors Field.

**Two Good Starts, Two Bad Starts: John Gant and Jon Gray**  
Al Melchior | FanGraphs.com | Sep. 4, 2018

When I started writing *Two Good Starts, Two Bad Starts* earlier this season, the idea wasn't to point out trends in small samples so that fantasy owners could act on them right away. That is almost always a bad idea. It was to identify changes in pitcher performance that could conceivably turn into longer-term trends, which in turn could be useful guides for making roster decisions. It could have easily been called *Who To Put On Your Watch List*.

Now that Labor Day is behind us, there isn't much time left for small samples to become sufficiently large samples for making decisions. Then again, if you are still in contention, roster decisions will be especially crucial going forward. If you've been on autopilot in starting **Jon Gray** every week, there's no time like now to consider if he is potentially worth benching. Similarly, if you continue to dismiss **John Gant**, even as he has shaved close to a run off his ERA over the past four weeks, you may be doing so at your own risk. Or maybe not...

**Two Good Starts: John Gant**

John Gant's Two Good Starts

Date	Opponent	IP	H	R	ER	BB	K
Aug 25	at COL	7	3	1	1	5	6
Aug 30	vs. PIT	5.2	3	0	0	3	6

**Setting The Stage:** Gant has been a largely steady presence in the Cardinals' rotation since late June, and even prior to his two most recent starts, he had been effective. Over his previous 11 appearances (nine starts), Gant had compiled a 3.44 ERA and a 1.24 WHIP, though he did so in spite of a 17.4 percent K% and 11.0 percent BB%. However, after two strong outings, Gant has become the most-added starting pitcher in CBSSports.com leagues and the third most-added starting pitcher in Fantrax leagues.

**What's Different:** Depending on how far back you go, not that much has changed for Gant. His two most recent starts have fallen in the game score range between 61 and 70, but so did his consecutive starts on Aug. 8 and Aug. 14. In those previous outings against the Marlins and Nationals, he walked only one batter over 11.1 innings, but he got swinging

strikes on only 5.3 percent of his pitches. His last two starts have been his only back-to-back appearances with a SwStr% of at least 10 percent in the second half, but he returned to having an ample walk rate.

The latter of those starts was against the Pirates, against whom he has induced 37 swinging strikes out of 243 pitches he has thrown to them over three starts this season. Gant has a 15.2 percent swinging strike rate on his four-seam fastball in those starts (per Baseball Savant), and maybe it's not a coincidence that the Pirates rank 27th in offensive pitch value on four-seamers. In addition to possibly being helped out by a matchup, Gant also received assistance in the form of a .161 BABIP and a 100 percent strand rate over his last two starts.

**Recommendation:** Given his mediocre strikeout and walk rates, as well as his recent reliance on favorable BABIP and strand rates, there is no particular reason to anticipate that Gant will have another strong outing on Wednesday at the Nationals. He does currently line up to face the Pirates for a fourth time next week, so he could be useful for strikeouts in that game. It's worth noting, though, that Gant is 0 for 3 in quality starts against them this year, and back on Aug. 3, he allowed six runs to the Pirates in just four innings. There just isn't much urgency to join the crowd and go after Gant on waivers.

### Two Bad Starts: Jon Gray

Jon Gray's Two Bad Starts

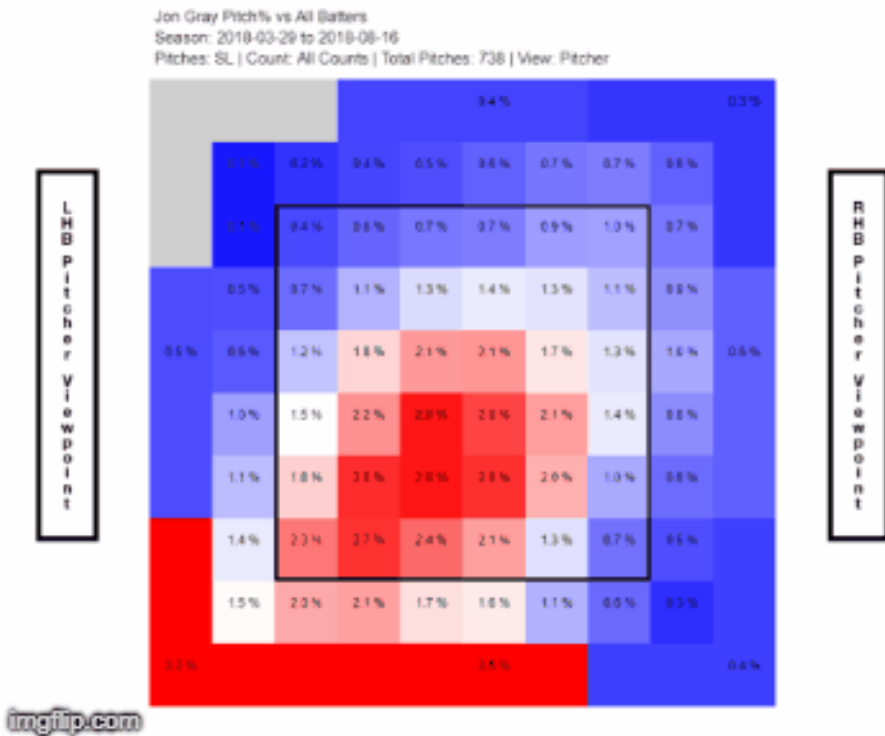
Date	Opponent	IP	H	R	ER	BB	K
Aug 27	at LAA	6.2	7	5	5	0	1
Sep 1	at SDP	6	7	2	2	1	1

**Setting The Stage:** Gray returned from his brief and controversial midseason demotion to Triple-A Albuquerque in much better form than he showed prior to getting sent down. He reeled off a string of seven starts in which he recorded six quality starts and a 2.59 ERA. While Gray was striking out fewer batters (28.9 percent K% pre-demotion, 23.1 percent K% over his next seven starts), his line drive rate normalized, so he was far more successful on balls in play. Whereas he suffered under the weight of a .386 BABIP over his first 17 starts, that mark was a trimmed-down .216 over his first seven post-promotion starts.

**What's Different:** After posting a 14.1 percent swinging strike rate over his previous seven starts, Gray induced a total of seven swings-and-misses over his last two starts for a rate of 4.0 percent. It's a particularly concerning sign that Gray was unable to get whiffs against the teams that compiled the third- and second-highest strikeout rates against right-handed pitchers in August (the Angels and Padres, respectively).

After Saturday's start against the Padres, Gray said **he was going to work on his slider**. Both of the runs he allowed were on **Hunter Renfroe** solo homers, and both were hit off sliders. The problems with Gray's slider go beyond that, though. On what is normally his best swing-and-miss pitch, Gray was able to generate only six swinging strikes out of 67 sliders thrown over his last three starts. His third-to-most-recent start, by the way, was also against the whiff-happy Padres.

Over those last three starts, Gray has been leaving his slider up in the heart of the strike zone more often, as you can see by comparing his before-and-after heatmaps. He has also used his slider less in his last two starts, possibly suggesting a lack of confidence in it. Given that Gray has not experienced much change in his slider velocity, movement or spin rate, location appears to be the main culprit.



**Recommendation:** Since Gray has not been able to get strikeouts against two of the teams that have recently struggled the most to make contact against righties, he could be in for a long night at home against the Dodgers this Friday. In any

mixed league with more than 12 teams, it does seem rash to bench Gray just because of a short-term dearth of whiffs. However, it's probably worthwhile to at least look at alternatives in shallower formats.

**Vinny Castilla and Nolan Arenado would like to see MLB expand outside of the US**  
**Drew Creasman | BSNDenver.com | Sep. 5, 2018**

DENVER – When the 2019 MLB schedule was announced on Wednesday, August 22, a fun little nuance was buried in the details.

For the third time in their history, the Colorado Rockies will be returning to Mexico to play baseball. Last appearing in 2015 Spring Training, they will return to the city of Monterrey for another pair of practice games against their division rivals, the Arizona Diamondbacks.

The games are set to take place at Estadio de Beisbol Monterrey, the current home of the Sultanes of the Mexican League.

Additionally, the Cincinnati Reds will face off against the St. Louis Cardinals for a two-game regular-season set in April and the Los Angeles Angels and Houston Astros will do the same May.

The Rockies have a special relationship with Mexican baseball with two of the best and most notable players in franchise history also being two of the best and most notable players in the history of our neighbors to the south.

Jorge De La Rosa is easily in the club's Top 5 pitchers of all time and Vinny Castilla firmly in the Top 10 overall players in organizational history. Other natives of Mexico to play in Colorado include current farmhand Daniel Castro and blasts from the past Armando Reynoso, Elmer Dessens, Alfredo Amezaga, and Rodrigo Lopez.

BSN Denver caught up with Castilla, a coach for Team Mexico in the World Baseball Classic and one of the most celebrated players in the nation's history.

"I'm very excited," he said. "The Rockies are gonna play in Monterrey, man! It's going to be pretty cool."

He says he hopes to be there when they play in spring training but knows that either way the Rockies will be met by a city with a deep running passion for the game.

“It’s really cool,” Rockies’ star Nolan Arenado said of the specialty game. “I think it’s cool to spread it out and involve different teams. It’s a great experience and it’s great for baseball to get as many counties and people involved as possible.”

A popular running topic for seemingly every offseason as the game continues to grow has been whether or not that growth could result in even further expansion of the league.

There are plenty of fun debates to be had about the validity of such a notion, but for me, the most interesting part comes in imagining the new places that the magic of major league baseball can come to.

Portland is a great sports town and the Northwest could use more baseball. New Orleans has a rich history with the game.

But for a truly international sport that already includes one other country and boasts a “World Series”, it is well past time for MLB to come to Latin America.

While probably deserving considering the extraordinary amount of talent the countries have produced, places like Puerto Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela present too many pragmatic problems.

But, Arenado argues, expanding to Mexico should be both doable and beneficial.

“I mean, we have one in Canada,” he laughed. “Mexico’s not too far off, either. It would be cool. Something different but I think it would be good for the game.”

Of course, you knew Vinny Castilla would be a supporter of the idea.

“That’d be nice,” he said. “I think if any city can hold a major league team, it’s Monterrey or Mexico City. There’s a lot of money in those cities man and they love the game and would support a major league team. I would love it, man.”

The viability of expanding such an already massive enterprise into a new city and country can certainly be argued. What would the travel have to look like? Would it dilute the quality of the on-field product too much? What kind of effects will the environment have? Do they need a humidior?

But if the most elite level of baseball comes to Mexico, the stands will be packed and alive with song, the food will be out of this world, and the unbridled love for the game shown through in Vinny Castilla at the mere mention of the possibility, will pour from the bleachers and soak into the grass onto the field.



**Rockies hold on to first place with late win over Giants**  
**Drew Creasman | BSNDenver.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

DENVER – The past few games for Colorado Rockies' starter German Marquez have been brilliant personally but have not resulted in wins for the club.

On Tuesday night in the second of three against the San Francisco Giants, he looked doomed to fall to that fate once again with the offense sputtering behind another dazzling performance.

He worked 6.2 innings and struck out 11, allowing just two runs but departed the field down by one.

It was the fifth double-digit strikeout game of Marquez' career and only the fourth time in franchise history a pitcher has managed that feat in consecutive games. Jon Gray was the last to do it in September of 2016.

Luckily for him this time, the Colorado offense sprang into action late with a huge seventh inning, powering them to a 6-2 that keeps them atop the standings in the NL West.

Predictably, with the Rockies odd first-inning issue, the Giants took the lead in the opening frame. Gregor Blanco began things with a single to left and a steal of second base. Joe Panik followed that up with a jam-shot single just by Arenado at third for a single to fire the first shot. Marquez retired the next three in order.

The Rockies pulled even in the bottom of the second when David Dahl hit a laser line drive over the high fence in right-center field for a solo home run, his ninth round-tripper of the year.

Marquez went on a stretch where he allowed just one single over 17 at-bats before Brandon Belt hit a hard line drive single to right and he walked his first batter of the game, losing a battle to Evan Longoria. But he bounced back to strike out Brandon Crawford, ending the threat while earning his 10th strikeout of the game.

He came back out for the seventh having thrown 92 pitches and still stuck in a 1-1 tie. Nick Hundley led the inning off with a bloop single to right but was caught trying to advance on a ball in the dirt by a nice throw from Tony Wolters and an

athletic jumping swipe tag from Trevor Story. Marquez then struck out Chris Shaw but hung a two-out 0-1 slider to Gorkys Hernandez who has haunted the Rockies all season. It was his seventh home run of the year against the Rox.

Hernandez clobbered the pitch and drove it over the wall in left-center field for his 15th home run of the season, giving the Giants a 2-1 lead.

A single from Ryder Jones and a walk to Blanco led manager Bud Black to remove Marquez from the game and call on southpaw Chris Rusin to face lefty Joe Panik. Perhaps trying to settle into that role, Rusin got the job done, inducing a weak grounder to first, stranding a pair of inherited runners and moving the game to the bottom of the seventh still a one-run affair.

The Rockies responded in a huge way. The bottom of the frame began with frustration when pinch-hitter Gerardo Parra was called out on a check swing when it appeared he held up, earning the walk. A second straight pinch-hitter, Ryan McMahon, then strode to the plate and somehow delivered another big clutch late-game hit, launching one deep over the wall in center field for his fifth home run of the year, tying the game at two runs apiece.

Charlie Blackmon then hit a chopper into no man's land behind the mound for an infield hit and DJ LeMahieu drew a walk. Once both moved up on a ball in the dirt, the Giants elected to intentionally pass on Nolan Arenado, loading the bases up for Carlos Gonzalez.

The longest-tenured Rockie fell behind 0-2 but took one out of the zone before going down and shooting a sinker the opposite way into the left-center field gap for a bases-clearing, three-run triple.

After another intentional walk, this time of Story, Dahl struck out but Desmond worked a normal walk to load the bases once more for Parra's second at-bat of the inning. This time, he had no such issue taking ball four, bringing in the fifth run of the inning before McMahon struck out to end it.

After entering the inning down 2-1, the Rockies emerged up 6-2.

Adam Ottavino pitched a 1-2-3 eighth getting a beautiful sliding catch from Dahl for the final out in the eighth.

Despite it not being a save situation, the Rockies went to closer Wade Davis for the ninth. Things immediately got off to an inauspicious start with a five-pitch walk to Hundley and a single up the middle from Austin Slater.

But he got arguably the most dangerous hitter in the Giants lineup when he sees purple on the other side, Hernandez, to ground into a 6-4-3 double play. Alen Henson ripped a liner toward right but Desmond reached up and grabbed it for the final out.

Colorado improves to 76-52 and remains in first place in the NL West.

#### FINAL STATS:

German Marquez: 6.2 IP, 7 H, 2 ER, 2 BB, 11 K

Chris Rusin: 0.1 IP, 0 H, 0 ER, 0 BB, 0 K

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

Carlos Gonzalez: 1-for-4, 3 RBI

Charlie Blackmon: 3-for-4, 1 R

David Dahl: 1-for-4, 1 R, 1 RBI (HR: 9)

#### WHAT'S NEXT:

The final game of the series is set for Wednesday evening. Antonio Senzatela will look to follow up his solid start in his last outing, facing off against lefty Andrew Suarez. First pitch is scheduled for 6:40 Mountain Time.

**Rockies-Padres Series Grades: A split with tons of missed opportunities**  
**Andre Simone | BSNDenver.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

The Colorado Rockies had a huge opportunity in their four-game series against the San Diego Padres and just couldn't come out victorious, salvaging a split after losing the first two games.

We make sense of it all, as we do after each series, using our advanced statistics and our in-house all-encompassing metric DPR, for our Rockies grades.

Note: The scores below are each player's average DPR for the series. All Rockies stats and individual player profiles can be found [here](#).

Trevor Story (79.72 — B+): Story was pretty special in the final three games getting a hit in each, with three doubles, two RBIs and two runs scored, while adding a stolen base to the mix. He was the catalyst for the Rockies offense and still had a walk and two runs scored in game one, by far his worst outing in SoCal. If not for striking out five times, his grade would've been even higher.

Nolan Arenado (59.79 — C): Nolan started off slow with two disappointing games, then picked it up with a big game three where he got a single and a double and scored a run. In game four he had a single but also struck out once. Nothing too spectacular as he lost some ground to the other top hitters in the NL this weekend.

Charlie Blackmon (72.43 — B): Blackmon was massive in the final game of the series, as Colorado's bats woke up, with an RBI single, a double, and another single. He had another decent outing in game two with two more hits.

However, Chuck was really disappointing in game one with a 0-for-6 but had a pretty solid series after that.

DJ LeMahieu (44.89 — D): DJ started in all four games, but wasn't great, striking out four times and only having one real worthwhile performance in game three, where he had a solo-jack. After that, there wasn't much to take from his time in San Diego.

David Dahl (54.79 — C-): Dahl only started two games but had a valuable pinch-hit walk in game one and was stellar in game four with a two-RBI jack, though, his WPA was in the negatives for three of his four appearances.

Carlos Gonzalez (29.48 — F): CarGo had a rough series, getting only a hit and a walk in three games while striking out four times. As a result, he had a negative WPA in each outing.

Ian Desmond (64.47 — C+): Desmond didn't do much in the first two games but was crucial in the final two with three hits, an RBI, and a run scored while also stealing two bags.

Ryan McMahon(34.27 — F): McMahon was called upon to pinch-hit in each game and managed a single in game one, probably his highlight of the series. The rest of the way he had a strikeout and really struggled in his one start in game two with two Ks. A series to forget.

Gerardo Parra (40.98 — D): Parra appeared in two starts and didn't do much aside from a walk that he then stole a base off of and scored on in game four. The rest of the way he was fairly absent not managing a hit in six ABs.

Matt Holliday (82.18 — A-): Holliday was supremely efficient with three singles and four walks in eight plate appearances. A really nice contribution which will make it even harder to not see him get regular ABs in the future.

Chris Iannetta (71.55 — B): Iannetta was solid in game four with a two-RBI double and a walk, in his other start in game two, he managed a single and struck out once. Nothing off the charts but a valuable contributor without a doubt.

Tony Wolters (27.71 — F): Wolters struggled offensively in two starts, going 0-for-7 and grounding into a double play in game three.

German Marquez (97.99 — ☆): It is an absolute shame that the Rockies couldn't take advantage of Marquez's lights-out start, losing in extra frames. Marquez was phenomenal, with his stuff dominating the Padres to the tune of a career-high 13 strikeouts as he had a strike percentage over 70. His FIP of 0.29 was untouchable as he only walked one and allowed two runs off of two hits.

Marquez has now had consecutive starts with a DPR above 95, a feat he only accomplished one other time this season. He's breathing rarified air and is on the cusp of breaking into the top-40 best starting pitchers in the MLB per our metric. His average DPR of 84.32 in his last seven starts would be a league best.

Antonio Senzatela (77.45 — B+): Senza did a nice job in a quality start, going six frames while only allowing a run off a solo homer. He conceded four hits in all, walked one and struck out four. Where he made his mark was by inducing 12 grounders to only six fly balls in a really efficient performance.

Jon Gray (58.73 — C): Gray, much like in his last outing against the LA Angels, was far from lights out. However, he was effective, getting the win and going six innings, allowing two runs off of two solo bombs for a quality start.

Gray's stat line was very atypical for his standards, striking out only one—he's only had two Ks in his last 12.2 innings—walking another and conceding seven hits. The big righty got the job done by inducing 13 ground ball outs for a WPA of .097, though, his FIP of 7.66 was pretty ugly.

Kyle Freeland (64.37 — C+): Freeland's start in game four got the Rockies the series split, so you can't hold a less than perfect game against him as he was still efficient. That said, he didn't have his best stuff, striking out only three and walking two while conceding seven hits. His 7-to-14 ground ball to fly ball ratio wasn't stellar either, and his WPA was actually in the negative after he allowed three runs in six innings with a FIP of 3.16.

Freeland still got the 'W' but had his worst outing per DPR in his last six starts, he gets a passing grade for going a full six innings but nothing more.

Wade Davis (89.45 — A): In the Rocks one close win—game three—Davis was asked to come in and get the save and he did so perfectly, forcing two grounders and a strikeout. His 1.16 FIP was masterful in a really smooth performance.

Jake McGee (13.88 — F): McGee appeared in the first two outings of the series with a mixed bag. He was solid in the first game allowing a hit but getting out unscathed with a 69-percent strike percentage. His game two outing was atrocious, though, as he allowed three hits, four runs, and two homers without getting a single out for a FIP of 91.04. Simply the definition of a rough outing.

Scott Oberg (77.88 — B+): Boy, Oberg's been incredibly reliable lately and would have a much higher grade if not for his first outing in game one, where he allowed two hits but got out of it by inducing a double play.

He got progressively better the rest of the series, appearing in game three and forcing three grounders and then topped that in the final outing with a two strikeout performance with a FIP of -0.84. His WPA was positive in each game as his DPR just keeps rising and his ERA keeps on dropping.

Adam Ottavino (80.44 — A-): Ottavino didn't allow a hit or a run the entire series, appearing in three different games. His only blimps were walking two while striking out five in a masterful showing.

His grade is lowered a bit by his game one performance where he walked one and only threw 46-percent of his pitches for strikes for a FIP of 7.16, if not for that he'd have had an off the charts grade.

Seunghwan Oh (75.43 — B+): Oh, like Oberg, appeared in three games and was masterful in two of them. Where he struggled was in game two allowing two hits and a run, though he produced a FIP of only 1.16, so was maybe a bit unlucky.

The rest of the series he was on top of things, striking out four and allowing zero hits the rest of the way, as he pounded the strike zone to the tune of 70-percent for the series.

Bryan Shaw (23.29 — F): Shaw's struggles continued as he allowed a run in each of the two outings he was called upon and was the goat of the series as he was walked-off with a homer in game one. He threw a lot of strikes but allowed five fly balls to only two grounders and had a FIP of 22.86 in his first game.

**Rockies fight back to beat Giants 6-2, hang on to first place in NL West**  
**Aniello Piro | MileHighSports.com | September 5, 2018**

The Colorado Rockies' late-game heroics continued on Tuesday night as they defeated the San Francisco Giants 6-2.

The Rockies are now 76-62 on the season, and continue to hold on to first place in the National League West.

The Giants were able to quickly add a run in the first inning of the ballgame as Gregor Blanco started the evening with a single to left field. Joe Panik then followed with a single of his own that allowed Blanco to score, giving the Giants an early 1-0 lead.

The Rockies got the run back in the bottom of the second inning, when outfielder David Dahl blasted a solo home run to right field in the opening at-bat.

Besides the early run allowed by each respective pitcher, both starters were strong on the mound for their respective teams. Rockies' starter German Marquez limited the Giants to two runs on seven hits in 6.2 innings of work. Dereck Rodriguez, son of Hall-of-Fame catcher Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez, worked six innings, allowing just one run on six hits for San Francisco.

The Giants re-established a lead in the seventh inning when Gorkys Hernandez smacked a solo home run to left center field off of relief pitcher Chris Rusin, making the score 2-1.

With their backs against the wall once again, the Rockies refused to quit in the bottom of the seventh inning. Down a run, youngster Ryan McMahon proceeded to crush an 0-1 slider into the seats in center field to tie the game at two runs apiece. Charlie Blackmon then reached base on an infield single, which was followed by a walk issued to LeMahieu. After the Giants opted to intentionally walk Nolan Arenado, veteran Carlos Gonzalez pulled a rabbit out of his hat by hitting a triple to deep center field, scoring three runs to give Colorado a 5-2 advantage. San Francisco then issued another intentional walk to Trevor Story before striking out Dahl. Ian Desmond followed with a walk to load the bases for Colorado. Rattled on the mound, Giants' pitcher Sam Dyson issued a five pitch walk to Gerardo Parra, forcing home a run and extending the Rockies lead 6-2.



Now with a lead, relief pitchers Adam Ottavino and Wade Davis locked down the 8th and 9th innings for the Rockies to solidify the victory.

The win marked the 40th come-from-behind victory for Colorado this season.

The Rockies and Giants will conclude their series Wednesday afternoon with first pitch set for 6:40 MST.

**Colorado Rockies morning after: Ryan McMahon and his new approach**  
**Kevin Henry | RoxPile.com | Sep. 5, 2018**

Ryan McMahon came through for the Colorado Rockies once again in a pinch-hitting role late in the game on Tuesday night. It's becoming a thing of habit for the 23-year-old infielder.

McMahon's pinch-hit home run in the seventh inning lit a five-run fuse for the Colorado Rockies, sparking a come-from-behind 6-2 win over the San Francisco Giants. The win was Colorado's sixth straight against San Francisco, including five straight victories at Coors Field. It also kept them alone at the top of the National League West as the end of the regular season creeps ever closer.

Of course, Rockies fans remember McMahon's first pinch-hit homer of the season, an August 10 shot against former Colorado pitcher Zac Rosscup and the Los Angeles Dodgers that propelled the Rockies to a 5-4 victory. The next night, in a starting role, McMahon again provided the heroics with a three-run walk-off blast against the Dodgers.

Since being recalled from Triple-A on July 29, McMahon is hitting .275/.359/.478 overall. However, in high-leverage situations, he has put together (in 36 plate appearances) a line of .394/.417/.727 with an OPS of 1.144.

McMahon credits the time in Triple-A between June 21 and July 29 as an eye-opening time for him and his approach at the plate, especially when it comes to pinch hitting.

"As soon as I stopped looking at it (regular hitting versus pinch hitting) so differently like that, I go up there and take it like I would take my first at-bat of the game," McMahon told me in an exclusive chat after Tuesday's win. "Once I've done that, I've found a little more success in that role.

"When I went back down, I was like, 'Why don't I just take the same at-bat? Why am I so worried about possibly missing it, a pitch to hit? Who cares? I miss pitches in normal at-bats all the time and I still get hits.' I just went up there and let it all hang out and said, 'Hey, I'm just going to go up there and grind it out.'"

That approach has made a difference for McMahon, who had just a .211 average in 95 at-bats before the June 21 send-down. It's also making a difference for the Rockies as young players who were up with the team earlier in the season are

coming through with some big moments in September. On Monday, Noel Cuevas delivered the game-winning hit and McMahon started the ball rolling again for the Rockies late on Tuesday night.

“With Noel or any young player, it’s a growth opportunity every time you get into a big league game,” Colorado manager Bud Black said before Tuesday’s game. “Experience is the best teacher.”

That experience includes being sent down to Triple-A to work on the things necessary to succeed at the Major League level. McMahon is living proof of that and Rockies fans are seeing some of the work put in by McMahon, Cuevas and others 425 miles south of Coors Field in Albuquerque pay off in big ways.

## German Marquez flashes power stuff again, Carlos Gonzalez ropes bases-clearing triple in Rockies' comeback win over Giants

Kyle Newman | DenverPost.com | Sep. 4, 2018

German Marquez was money again, Carlos Gonzalez delivered a clutch bases-clearing, go-ahead triple in the seventh inning and the first-place Rockies — now officially surging to start September — earned their 40th comeback victory of the season in a 6-2 victory over the San Francisco Giants on Tuesday night at Coors Field.

The latest Colorado rally was set up by Marquez's eighth straight quality outing in which the emerging 23-year-old Venezuelan became the only pitcher in Rockies history to tally 11 or more strikeouts in consecutive starts, as the right-hander posted a career-high 13 K's his previous time out.

"He threw the ball great, especially the fastball," manager Bud Black said. "It had life down in the zone with good location, and he mixed in some breaking balls."

San Francisco began the game by taking advantage of what is becoming a comically predictable performance by the Colorado pitching staff in the first inning of games — a frame in which the team boasts a major league-worst 7.63 ERA — via Joe Panik's RBI single to make it 1-0.

But Colorado responded in the bottom of the next frame with David Dahl's home run, his ninth of the year, to tie the score at 1-1.

"Our young guys keep coming through lately," Gonzalez said, "and that started with Dahl tonight."

From there, both starters were settled in. Marquez allowed only three baserunners from the second through the sixth innings, while Dereck Rodríguez, a converted outfielder and the son of Hall of Fame catcher Pudge Rodriguez, also continued his strong rookie campaign.

The Giants finally got to Marquez again with two outs in the seventh inning, with Gorkys Hernandez hammering a hanging curve to left-center for his seventh longball against Colorado this season as San Francisco retook a 2-1 advantage it would not have for long.

After Gerardo Parra struck out on a controversial check swing to begin the bottom of the seventh, Ryan McMahon ushered in the game's penultimate momentum swing with a solo home run to center that evened things 2-2 as the Rockies' rally was just getting going.

"We're out there, grinding through it," McMahon said. "This team is pretty resilient, and it's a fun group to be around. Seeing (rallies) happen before is obviously a good thing, and the key is to keep doing it down the stretch with some big games coming up here at home."

A Charlie Blackmon infield single, a DJ LeMahieu walk and a Nolan Arenado intentional walk followed, after which Gonzalez made hometown product Ty Blach — a Regis Jesuit High School product — pay with his gapped triple on a 1-2 sinker to give Colorado a 5-2 lead.

"(Blach) was coming inside, and the first two pitches were sinkers in, so I backed up off the plate a little bit," Gonzalez said. "I knew they were going to notice, and he came back with a slider away. He left it over the plate down and away, and I was able to stay through it and drive the ball the other way."

Walks to Ian Desmond and Gerardo Parra followed, bringing home another run as the Rockies batted around in the inning to make it 6-2.

From there, the Colorado bullpen held steady, with Adam Ottavino turning in a one-two-three eighth inning before Wade Davis, despite some traffic, locked down the victory in the ninth. The Rockies improved to 7-1 against the Giants at Coors Field this season and 16-2 at the stadium against San Francisco dating to 2017.

"These come-from-behind wins are a combination of the late offense, the reliable pitching at the end, the team defense," Black said. "These are good wins, especially this time of the year against teams (out of contention) who are trying to make a statement. No matter who you're playing, there's an edge to every single one of these games."

**Kiz vs. Saunders: What's biggest game in town Sunday: Rockies-Dodgers or Broncos-Seahawks?**

*"If I were sitting on the sofa at home, I'd have my TV set on baseball and would sneak a peak at the Broncos between innings"*

Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Sep. 4, 2018

Question: What's the biggest game in town Sunday: Rockies-Dodgers or Broncos-Seahawks?

Kiz: What's a Colorado sports fan to do? We're looking at a humongous sports Sunday in this dusty old cowtown. The Rockies, in the heat of a playoff race, face the Dodgers at 1:10 p.m. And the Broncos kick off their NFL season against Seattle at 2:25 p.m. There could well be 125,000 fans congregated at two stadiums within 2 miles of each other. Where would you rather be: Coors Field or Mile High?

Saunders: Seriously, you are asking me this question? I've been covering the Rockies almost daily since February, so I'm genuinely excited to see how this all ends. Plus, let's face it, baseball is simply a better game than football. I covered the Broncos for years and I wore blue and orange since I was about 5 years old, but baseball has stolen my heart. That's blasphemy in the Rocky Mountains, I know, but there it is.

Kiz: OK, the choice is easy for you, baseball guy. But here's what I want to know. Denver has been a Broncos town since the 1960s. Has fandom in these parts grown enough that we are now a bona fide big-league city? While the Broncos' season-opener is a celebration of football, there's no question in my mind Rockies versus the Dodgers is a game with much more on the line (unless your name is Case Keenum).

Saunders: Case who? Was that the American Top 40 guy? I kid because I care ... sort of ... a little bit. I agree with you that the Dodgers-Rockies game might have more on the line, simply because it's September and the pennant race is hot. But I understand Broncos fans' joy or angst regarding the opener. That's one-sixteenth of the Broncos' entire season, or the equivalent of 10-plus major-league games.

Kiz: Any fan with tickets to either the big baseball or football game is going to be everyone's favorite aunt or the most popular guy at the office. I'm blessed. I can buy you brunch at Coors Field, Mr. Saunders. See first pitch. Then hop over to Mile High in time for Courtland Sutton's first touchdown reception. But if I were sitting on the sofa at home, I'd have my TV set on baseball and would sneak a peak at the Broncos between innings.

Saunders: That is, unless there is a big-time soccer match going on. Kiz, I know you too well. But your strategy for couch potatoes is sound, and here's why. A fan can click back to an NFL game and get the essence of the game through highlight and big plays. That's why NFL RedZone is such a hit. Baseball in September, with a possible pennant on the line, is something to be savored, pitch by pitch, inning by inning. Non-baseball fans won't get it, but true baseball fans know exactly what I mean.

**Rockies — playoff contenders in September for a second straight year — find success paired with enhanced fan expectations**

***About half of the 800-plus votes in a recent Denver Post online poll believe the Rockies will win the division this year***

**Kyle Newman | DenverPost.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

For much of their 26-season history, many area fans have seen the Rockies as more of an entertainment outlet and less of a true baseball experience.

Coors Field became the beacon for LoDo's social butterflies. And even when Colorado churned out each of its four wild-card berths, including an improbable run to the 2007 World Series, the city's expectations for on-the-diamond results have never been sky-high.

Until this year, that is, with Colorado coming off the excitement of a 2017 postseason appearance and — entering Tuesday night's game against the San Francisco Giants — sitting in first place in the NL West later in the season than they have in more than two decades.

The fan base's enhanced expectations were stoked by that tiny taste of last October, further legitimized by the team's offseason spending spree on both the bullpen (\$106 million) and locking up Charlie Blackmon long-term (\$108 million), and solidified by a rotation that's putting up a historic year collectively.

"I thought they were getting close last year, and then with the offseason contracts — my expectations are huge this year," explained Barbara Moore, 59, a die-hard Rockies fan who lives in Centennial. "They tried to fix the holes in the bullpen, and you see the talent they have with the starting pitching, which has gotten more seasoned. When you get that kind of talent, you just can't waste it, because you don't get it every year."

Moore, who attends around a half-dozen games each year while catching the rest on TV, shares similar expectations as other well-versed Rockies fans, of which there are becoming more and more this season.

Some of those gung-ho expectations — about half of the 800-plus votes in a recent Denver Post online poll believe the Rockies will win their first division title this year — are also rooted in the realization of the team's postseason window, as



Moore points out that “we’re all worried about (Nolan) Arenado leaving, and DJ (LeMahieu) not getting another contract. The team could look a lot different next season, or the one after.”

The players themselves have heard, firsthand, the shift in fans’ thinking.

Just ask Ian Desmond, who was booed mercilessly on numerous occasions early in the season as he struggled at the plate. Ask Bryan Shaw, Jake McGee and others in the much-beleaguered Colorado bullpen who have also been booed off the mound by the hometown crowd. LoDo may not be the Bronx by any means, but the recent uptick in booing is, perhaps, an indicator of how area fans are refusing to deal with the failure they once drank beer, contentedly, alongside.

“Now, there’s definitely an expectation here to be a playoff team year in and year out,” said catcher Chris Iannetta, who’s in his seventh season (and second stint) with Colorado. “The days where they’re OK with us just having a mediocre team, winning 80 games and falling short of the playoffs by five, six games are gone.”

Alas, winning, and winning consistently, can intensify a fan base quite quickly. The Rockies have done nothing but contend since manager Bud Black took the helm prior to the 2017 season, and Arenado believes “the fans understand that.”

“The group we have now is the right group. It fits our mold that we need to win,” Arenado said. “And I think (the fans) would agree. The brand of baseball that we’ve been playing recently has been a lot better than it has been in the past.”

And as Black’s recently cited ethos indicates, getting used to the pressure of playing meaningful September baseball — and the locals’ lofty annual hopes that come with that — is something the Rockies welcome.

“As this continues to happen to us, it becomes part of what we’re about,” Black said.

Looking ahead

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

Trevor Story and Chris Iannetta have taken Suarez deep before, and Colorado is hitting a collective .217 (10-for-46) against the left-hander. But Suarez has turned in two straight impressive outings, throwing seven scoreless innings against the Rangers on Aug. 25 before repeating the feat in a win over the Mets last week. All but one of the rookie's 18 home runs given up this season have come to right-handed hitters, as have the vast majority of opposing RBIs. Meanwhile, Senzatela is coming off six strong innings of one-run ball in San Diego, and tossed seven shutout innings against the Giants in Colorado's win at Coors Field on July 3.

Thursday: Off day

Friday: Dodgers LHP Clayton Kershaw (6-5, 2.40) at Rockies RHP Jon Gray (11-7, 4.70), 6:40 p.m., ATTRM

Saturday: Dodgers LHP Walker Buehler (6-4, 2.92) at Rockies LHP Kyle Freeland (13-7, 2.96), 6:10 p.m., ATTRM

Sunday: Dodgers LHP Alex Wood (8-6, 3.37) at Rockies LHP Tyler Anderson (6-7, 4.80), 1:10 p.m., ATTRM

**More September call-ups for Rockies: Garrett Hampson, Sam Howard, Raimel Tapia and D.J. Johnson**  
*Hampson, Howard and Tapia have all seen stints with the Rockies this season, while Johnson makes his MLB roster debut*  
Kyle Newman | DenverPost.com | Sep. 4, 2018

The Rockies' active roster expanded again Tuesday ahead of a home showdown against the San Francisco Giants, as Colorado recalled infielder Garrett Hampson, left-handed pitcher Sam Howard and outfielder Raimel Tapia from Triple-A Albuquerque in addition to selecting the contract of Isotopes closer D.J. Johnson.

In a corresponding move, outfielder Yonathan Daza was recalled from Double-A Hartford and placed on the 60-day disabled list in order to make room for Johnson on the 40-man roster.

Hampson, Howard and Tapia all have seen stints with the Rockies this season, with Hampson making his debut July 21 in Arizona and Howard making his June 10 at Coors Field against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Hampson hit .273 (6-for-22) in 10 games, with six starts, for Colorado this year, and Howard pitched only one total inning (in his debut). Tapia, meanwhile, batted .302 (131-for-434) in 105 games for Albuquerque while also hitting .222 (4-for-18) in his first stint with the Rockies during July.

Johnson, 30, is making his first career appearance on a major-league roster after going 3-5 with a 3.90 ERA in 50 relief appearances for the Isotopes. Colorado now has 35 players on its active roster.

**Kiszla: The party never starts until after 9 p.m. Rockies beat Giants for 40th comeback win of year. Consider yourself warned. LoDo doesn't heat up until the sun goes down. Mark Kiszla | DenverPost.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

It's the hottest, most-happening bar in Denver. But the Rooftop doesn't really get rockin' until after 9 p.m.

Before the sun went down on Coors Field, the place was as dead as the Rockies' bats. The crowd did more nervous eating than cheering. Dippin' Dots, anyone? The seventh-inning stretch came and went. The whole night had felt like an awkward struggle for the home team, wrestling with the pressure of living in unaccustomed territory, first place in the National League West.

And then, at precisely 9:01 on Tuesday night, Carlos Gonzalez stepped in the batter's box.

Any guesses what happened next?

First hint: The Rockies have 40 come-from-behind victories.

Second hint: And the Rooftop doesn't really get rockin' until after 9.

It was time to get this party started, CarGo.

Deep into the eight o'clock hour, Colorado had trailed San Francisco by a run. The Rockies finally got even in the bottom of the seventh on a solo home run to center field by Ryan McMahon.

The joint came to life. LoDo doesn't heat up until the sun goes down.

When the giant baseball clock on the scoreboard showed 9:04, with the bases loaded with Rockies, Gonzalez went the opposite way with a two-strike pitch. The baseball jumped off CarGo's bat, never stopping until it bounced against the outfield wall in left field.

Faster than you can say three-run triple, Colorado was in the lead, and just another quiet Tuesday evening in LoDo became one of the best nights of the summer for 24,727 fans celebrating good times.

The five-run rally in the bottom of the seventh produced a 6-2 victory. Some analysts would say the best description for a team with a 76-42 record based on 40 come-from-behind wins is lucky.

I'd prefer to go with the word magical.

"This is a group that never gives up," Gonzalez said.

Late in the game, Gonzalez added, "we have that confidence we can come back."

Maybe the Rockies thrive under pressure because they have been trained to embrace the tension.

"This time of year, when every game means so much, this is fun. You hear me talk about heightened focus. Well, this time of year is the maximum heightened focus," Rockies manager Bud Black said.

"But I try to stress heightened focus way back in spring training games, so we don't have to ratchet it up in September. Because that doesn't work."

The Rockies don't really get rolling until after you put the kids to bed. This team knows when it's winning time.

For example: Early in day, when the clock showed five minutes until batting practice, there was Gonzalez near the Rockies dugout, playing air guitar on his bat. And CarGo was fully committed to striking a classic rock star pose, doing the one-legged hop version of the duck walk, popularized by Chuck Berry, who sang "Maybellene" 30 years before Gonzalez was born.

How to relieve playoff pressure? Get up and dance.

“I think you learn to be loose over time as a big-league player, because of experience in big games and pennant races,” Black said. “This group went through big games late in the season for the first time last year, and I think they are better off for it.”

If the Rockies claim the first division title in franchise history, it will probably come down to the final innings of the final home series, with a fidgety Dinger spinning his purple head, as the crowd gets on its feet, clapping hands as rapidly as every beat of every anxious heart in the ballpark.

Consider yourself warned. LoDo doesn't heat up until the sun goes down.

But ... wait for it.

After 9, when the Rooftop finally gets rockin', the Rockies throw the best party in town.

**Desmond Selected as Rockies Roberto Clemente Award Nominee**  
**Tracy Ringolsby | InsidetheSeams.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

First baseman Ian Desmond was selected as the Rockies' 2018 nominee for the Roberto Clemente Award, the most prominent individual player award bestowed by MLB.

The Roberto Clemente Award is the annual recognition of a player from each MLB Club who best represents the game of Baseball through extraordinary character, community involvement, philanthropy and positive contributions, both on and off the field.

Each Club nominates one current player to be considered for the Roberto Clemente Award in tribute to Clemente's achievements and character. Wednesday, September 5th marks the seventeenth annual Roberto Clemente Day, which was established by Major League Baseball to honor Clemente's legacy and to officially acknowledge local Club nominees of the Roberto Clemente Award. As part of the league-wide celebration, the Roberto Clemente Day logo will appear on the bases and official dugout lineup cards and a special tribute video will be played in ballparks. Desmond is one of the 30 Club nominees for the annual award.

Throughout his career, Desmond has worked extensively to raise awareness and funds to combat Neurofibromatosis. NF is a genetic disorder that causes tumors to grow along nerve tissue, including the brain and spinal cord, affecting roughly 1 in 3,000 births worldwide. After developing a close friendship with a young man who suffers from NF, Ian became an integral part of the #EndNF community. During Neurofibromatosis Awareness Month in May, Ian pledged to donate \$1,000 for every run and RBI he recorded during the month. Ian and the Desmond family donated \$29,000 to the Children's Tumor Foundation as a result of his efforts on the field, besting his 2017 donation by \$13,000. In addition to his work with the NF community, Ian has been a strong supporter of the children of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community in Scottsdale, Arizona, the Rockies' Spring Training home. In March of this year, Ian, along with the backing of the Colorado Rockies and Arizona Diamondbacks, hosted a school supply and equipment drive. Each day of the drive, Rockies wives and Minor League players staffed the gates and collected donations. After three days of the drive, they collected over \$6,000 in cash and several boxes full of gear/supplies.

"Ian demonstrates daily the importance of giving back to the community. He is always thinking of new and creative ways to share his life experience with others, and he is a great example to younger players in the game. I believe Mr. Clemente

would be proud of the husband, father and baseball player that Ian Desmond has become in his career,” said Colorado Rockies Vice President of Community & Retail Operations Jim Kellogg.

“Being nominated for this award for the second straight year is a tremendous honor. Roberto Clemente continues to be an inspiration to all professional baseball players, and his legacy pushes us to be positive contributors to the communities around us and those people within them who are in need,” said Desmond.

The league-wide winner of the Roberto Clemente Award, who will be announced during the 2018 World Series, will be selected among the group of nominees via a blue ribbon panel that includes individuals connected to the game. The blue ribbon panel includes Baseball Commissioner Robert D. Manfred, Jr., representatives from MLB-affiliated networks (MLB Network, FOX Sports, ESPN and TBS) and MLB.com, as well as Vera Clemente (the late Roberto’s wife & MLB Goodwill Ambassador). Beginning on Roberto Clemente Day, fans can vote for the overall winner of the Roberto Clemente Award via a dedicated website. The site will feature bios of each of the nominees and will allow fans from Roberto Clemente Day on Wednesday, September 5th, until Tuesday, September 18th. The winner of the fan vote will count as one vote among those cast by the blue ribbon panel. Fans are encouraged to vote by visiting the following link: [mlb.com/clemente21](http://mlb.com/clemente21).

The concept of honoring Major League players for their philanthropic work was created in 1971 as the “Commissioner’s Award.” The recognition was renamed to the “Roberto Clemente Award” in 1973 in honor of the Hall of Famer and 15-time All-Star who died in a plane crash on New Year’s Eve 1972 while attempting to deliver supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. Major League Baseball has commemorated Roberto Clemente Day each September since 2002.

Year	Winner	Year	Winner
1971	Willie Mays+**	1983	Cecil Cooper
1972	Brooks Robinson+**	1984	Ron Guidry
1973	Al Kaline+	1985	Don Baylor
1974	Willie Stargell+	1986	Garry Maddox
1975	Lou Brock+	1987	Rick Sutcliffe
1976	Pete Rose	1988	Dale Murphy
1977	Rod Carew+	1989	Gary Carter+
1978	Greg Luzinski	1990	Dave Stewart



1979	Andre Thornton	1991	Harold Reynolds
1980	Phil Niekro+	1992	Cal Ripken, Jr.+
1981	Steve Garvey	1993	Barry Larkin+
1982	Ken Singleton	1994	Dave Winfield+
Year	Winner	Year	Winner
1995	Ozzie Smith+	2007	Craig Biggio+
1996	Kirby Puckett+	2008	Albert Pujols
1997	Eric Davis	2009	Derek Jeter
1998	Sammy Sosa	2010	Tim Wakefield
1999	Tony Gwynn+	2011	David Ortiz
2000	Al Leiter	2012	Clayton Kershaw
2001	Curt Schilling	2013	Carlos Beltrán
2002	Jim Thome+	2014	Paul Konerko *
2003	Jamie Moyer	2014	Jimmy Rollins *
2004	Edgar Martinez	2015	Andrew McCutchen
2005	John Smoltz+	2016	Curtis Granderson
2006	Carlos Delgado	2017	Anthony Rizzo

**Johnson Gets 1st Big-League Opportunity; Among 4 Monday Additions to Rockies**  
**Tracy Ringolsby | InsidetheSeams.com | Sep. 4, 2018**

With Triple-A Albuquerque's season completed, the Rockies recalled infielder Garret Hampson, left-handed pitcher Sam Howard, and outfielder Raimel Tapia, each of whom had spent time with the big-league team this year.

And then they added right-handed pitcher D.J. Johnson, who also had been at Albuquerque, but wasn't on the Rockies 40-man roster. To make room for him on the 40-man roster, outfielder Yonathan Daza was technically recalled from Double-A Hartford, and placed on the 60-day disabled list.

Johnson is the feel-good story. The 29-year-old, signed by Tampa Bay as an undrafted player in June of 2010, he made his debut on a big-league roster at the end of the ninth year of a professional career that has seen him spend time in the Tampa Bay (2010), Arizona (2011-13), Minnesota (2014), Miami (2015), Los Angeles Angels (2016) and Rockies' organization (2017-18).

Johnson went 3-5 with a 3.90 ERA (55.1 IP, 24 ER), 15 walks and 84 strikeouts across 50 relief appearances for Albuquerque this season. In nine Minor League seasons, Johnson is 17-19 with a 3.57 ERA (358.0 IP, 142 ER), 132 walks and 375 strikeouts

Hampson, 23, is with the Rockies for the third time this year, having debut on July 21 with a start at second base in Arizona. He has a .273 big-league average with a double, triple, two RBI and five stolen bases in 10 games, six starts. He hit a combined .311 at Double-A Hartford and Triple-A Albuquerque this season with 25 doubles, six triples, 10 home runs, 40 RBI and 36 stolen bases.

A native of Reno, Hampson was the Rockies third round draft choice in 2016 out of Long Beach State.

Howard, 25, has made one relief appearance in two stints with the Rockies this season, working a scoreless inning against Arizona on June 10. He was 3-8 with a 5.06 ERA with 34 walks and 80 strikeouts in 96 innings at Albuquerque. He was the Rockies third-round draft choice out of Georgia Southern in 2014.

Tapia, 24, spent parts of this season and last year with the Rockies. In 105 games with Albuquerque this year, he batted .302 with 81 runs, 33 doubles, nine triples, 11 home runs, 62 RBI, 32 walks and 21 stolen bases. In his big-league career with the Rockies he has hit .278 with 35th 35 runs, 14 doubles, two triples, three home runs, 24 RBI, 12 walks, 52 strikeouts and eight stolen bases.

**When Run Differential Doesn't Say All: Colorado Rockies**  
**Joe Mangano | OfftheBench.com | Sep. 5, 2018**

This post is one in a series on team's who's run differential has proved a poor indicator of actual results. Read our posts examining the run differential of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Seattle Mariners, and Washington Nationals, here.

Generally, a team's win-loss record and its run differential correlate positively.

As of August 31, the league leaders in run differential were Boston and Houston, at an astounding +215. As we might expect, their record reflects this. The Red Sox were 50 games above .500 as of this date, best in Major League Baseball. Not to be outdone, the Astros were 29 wins above .500.

Other contenders in the MLB have differentials to match their records, or vice-versa. The New York Yankees (+153), Cleveland Indians (+140), Chicago Cubs (+111), Atlanta Braves (+97), Arizona Diamondbacks (+85), and Oakland A's (+81) are all leading their respective divisions or are otherwise currently Wild Card qualifiers.

Of course, there are always outliers. Just look at the 2007 Arizona Diamondbacks, who managed a 90 – 72 record and an NL West crown despite a -22 run differential. In 2018, other teams possess records which seem to defy what we'd anticipate given their run differentials. Let's look at some squads which have either exceeded or fallen short of expectations:

**COLORADO ROCKIES**

Win-loss record as of (8/31): 72 – 62

Expected win loss-record: 65 – 69

Despite a middling -21 run differential, the Colorado Rockies find themselves right in the thick of the NL West race and the National League Wild Card race. Since finishing the first "half" of the season at 51-45, the Rockies have posted a 21-17 record. With Arizona, Colorado, and the LA Dodgers all jockeying for position atop the NL West, the Rockies are most certainly in the hunt.

**HOW DID THEY GET HERE?**

Few teams can boast the kind of offensive talent the Colorado Rockies possess. Nolan Arenado is, as usual, a stud, hitting at a .300+ clip with 30+ HR and 90+ RBI on the campaign. Trevor Story is having a career year, and his thievery on the basepaths has notably improved. Story has 20+ steals alongside his 25+ home runs. Charlie Blackmon continues to be a reliable run scorer and producer. Carlos Gonzalez, seemingly past his prime, has been reasonably productive with the bat. DJ LeMahieu, despite missing time in May and July, has been above-average when on the field. Even Ian Desmond has shown flashes of excellence at times, managing 20+ HR, 75+ RBI, and 15+ stolen bases on the season. It's no wonder Colorado is tied for 10th in the league in runs scored. That may be underachieving by their standards.

Speaking of Colorado standards, and despite the Coors Field factor, the starting rotation has been reliable. Kyle Freeland is pacing the club in wins, ERA, and WHIP. German Marquez just posted his best full month of 2018 and leads the staff in strikeouts. Tyler Anderson has been serviceable, and Jon Gray, once considered the staff ace, has performed better since his brief demotion to the minors. While by no means a dominant rotation, there is certainly more room for optimism here than in past years.

#### WHERE DO THEY GO FROM HERE?

Two series apiece against the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Los Angeles Dodgers loom largest here, as they may decide the NL West. Apart from these series, though, the Colorado Rockies' schedule seems favorable. They face the San Francisco Giants in two series as well. They also close out against Philadelphia and Washington, who may not be playing for anything meaningful by this point. In addition, seeing as the bullpen outside of Adam Ottavino and Scott Oberg seemingly can't pitch much worse than it has up to now, the Rockies could well get hot coming down the stretch.