



MEDIA CLIPS – Dec. 14, 2018

Rockies use Winter Meetings to window shop Bridich recaps Winter Meetings Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Dec. 13th, 2018

LAS VEGAS -- Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich went to the Winter Meetings to browse for the offensive impact his team needs, but there are plenty of shopping days before the 2019 season begins.

Having hired Dave Magadan as hitting coach and then focused on filling the hole at first base, Colorado engaged in discussions with the Mariners about Carlos Santana and the Indians about Edwin Encarnacion, but saw them traded for each other Thursday morning. The Rockies still have plenty of options.

Biggest remaining needs

1. **Offense:** The latest possible targets are free agents Daniel Murphy, Neil Walker and Logan Morrison, and trade possibility Justin Smoak. Infielder-outfielder types Marwin Gonzalez and Josh Harrison have been listed among possibilities.
2. **Bullpen:** It's constant. With dollars going to improving the offense and Colorado still paying on big investments last offseason (Wade Davis, Jake McGee and Bryan Shaw), it would be extremely difficult to bid on retaining righty Adam Ottavino, who was one of the National League's most effective relievers last season. But that doesn't preclude a lower-salary find.
3. **Catcher:** The search for depth here is also constant. While it's hard to imagine a big financial splash, there could be a move to bolster the spot. Colorado has Chris Iannetta, Tony Wolters and Tom Murphy on the 40-man roster, and picked up Brett Nicholas (formerly with the Rangers) last month on a Minor League contract.

- Rox shift 1B/2B search to short-term options

Rule 5 Draft

The Rockies did not draft anyone in the Major League phase, but lost right-handed reliever Brandon Brennan when he was chosen by the Mariners.

Brennan, 27, split last year between Double-A Birmingham and Triple-A Charlotte in the White Sox organization and was recently signed by the Rockies to a Minor League contract. He was 4-3 with a 3.10 ERA in 40 outings (one start) with Birmingham and 1-1 with a 5.40 ERA in four relief appearances for Charlotte.

- 2018 Rule 5 Draft results

In the Minor League phase, Colorado re-acquired Chris Rabago in a circuitous manner.

Rabago was on the 40-man Major League roster last season, but was claimed off waivers by the Yankees on Aug. 22 when Colorado needed a spot for veteran reserve Matt Holliday. On Tuesday, the Royals selected Rabago from the Yankees, then sent him to the Rockies for cash considerations.

GM's bottom line

"It's tough to come here, start something and finish something. You pick up on conversations that precede these meetings and you hope to advance those conversations down the field. I think we've done that in a couple of different areas." –

Bridich

**Rox shift 1B/2B search to short-term options
Murphy, LoMo, Walker, Smoak emerging as potential targets
Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Dec. 13th, 2018**

LAS VEGAS -- The Rockies' most-rumored trade targets -- Carlos Santana and Edwin Encarnacion -- were traded for each other Thursday near the end of the Winter Meetings. However, the Rockies already had begun a pivot toward free agency in their search for offense and to solidify the right side of the infield.

Left-handed-hitting Daniel Murphy and Logan Morrison, and switch-hitting Neil Walker are on their radar on the free-agent market. The Rockies haven't totally turned away from the trade front -- especially with Blue Jays switch-hitting first baseman Justin Smoak, owed \$8 million in 2019, reported to be available.

While Murphy and Smoak bring the most thump of the possible quartet, they all have something in common.

Whether it's a free agent or Smoak in a trade, all would be short-term options that don't alter the plan to give increased playing time to left-handed-hitting Ryan McMahon. He turns 24 Friday and can really celebrate if he realizes his potential after hitting .232/.307/.376 in 91 games as a rookie, playing mostly first base.

McMahon has received high marks at second base and was drafted as a third baseman (although the Rockies don't need one of those, thanks to star Nolan Arenado).

Thursday's flurry of trade activity before teams hopped in their rides from the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino ended up not involving the Rockies.

Santana, who played last season with the Phillies and was dealt to the Mariners last week, was sent to the Indians for Encarnacion as part of a three-team trade that also involved the Rays. Immediate speculation had the Rockies trying to obtain Encarnacion from the Mariners, but that ended up a thread to nowhere.

The possible targets offer experience and positional versatility. Murphy, who turns 34 in April and has been primarily a second baseman, is coming off a solid offensive year -- .299/.336/.454 for the Nationals and Cubs, although his power numbers dipped (slugging .543 in 2017 and from 23 homers to 12).

Walker, 33, struggled to a .219 average and .664 OPS with the Yankees but might benefit from a return to the National League -- where he had a more-representative .801 OPS with the Mets and Brewers in 2017. Like Murphy, Walker has played some first base but has spent most of his career at second.

Morrison, 31, was a back-burner possibility last year before he signed with the Twins, then struggled to a .186 average (but with 15 home runs) in 95 games last season.

The Rockies have also been linked to a couple of multi-position free agents -- Marwin Gonzalez, who turns 30 in March, and Josh Harrison, 31. Both have been infield and outfield contributors to successful teams in recent years -- Gonzalez with the Astros, Harrison with the Pirates.

Also emerging from the Winter Meetings, the Rockies stayed true to their strategy of hanging on to their top prospects.

According to multiple baseball sources with knowledge of the Rockies' trade conversations, right-hander Jon Gray -- who struggled in 2018 after a big '17 -- was a popular request, as he was at the non-waiver Trade Deadline last season. When trade proposals involved players with large salaries, teams were receptive to discussing Ian Desmond, who is guaranteed \$40 million (including a \$2 million buyout on a \$15 million option for 2022).

Desmond, who has played first base and left field, could show up at all three outfield positions if he isn't traded, as the Rockies consider moving center fielder Charlie Blackmon to a corner, either permanently or as part of the program. Left-handed-hitting David Dahl has pushed his way into the outfield picture, and lefty-hitting Raimel Tapia is among candidates to earn increased playing time.

**Rockies depart winter meetings still searching for an upgrade to offense
Justin Smoak and Daniel Murphy emerge as possible targets
Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Dec. 13, 2018**

LAS VEGAS — The Rockies' "Twittersphere" lit up Thursday when baseball's winter meetings closed without the club making a major move.

The tweets flashed frustration when word broke that the Indians, Mariners and Rays finalized a three-team deal that including sending designated hitter/first baseman Edwin Encarnacion to the Mariners and first baseman Carlos Santana to the Indians. Both Encarnacion and Santana had been possible trade targets for a Colorado team looking to upgrade its offense.

Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich, meanwhile, was quite satisfied with the groundwork the club laid down over four days at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino and remained confident he'll find his man. Bridich has always viewed the winter meetings as part of the process, not the be-all and end-all of the offseason.

"It's tough to come here, start something and finish something," he said Thursday morning. "You pick up on conversations that precede these meetings and you hope to advance those conversations down the road. I think we've done that in a couple of different areas."

Asked if the Santana-Encarnacion trade derailed the Rockies' offseason plan, Bridich replied with a definitive no.

So now what? A major-league source confirmed that Colorado has discussed a possible trade for Toronto switch-hitting first baseman Justin Smoak, who batted .242 with 25 home runs, 77 RBIs and a .808 OPS last season. He's owed \$8 million in 2019 in the final year of his contract. Bridich said he's open to acquiring a player for one-year to help jump start the offense.

Colorado could also turn toward the free-agent market. MLB.com reported Thursday that left-handed-hitting second baseman/first baseman Daniel Murphy and first baseman Logan Morrison are on the Rockies' radar. So is switch-hitting Neil Walker, a source confirmed.

None of those three players would provide power to the lineup the way Santana or Encarnacion likely would, but Murphy could add pop to the lineup if he had a bounce-back season. Murphy, who turns 34 in April and has been primarily a second baseman, slashed .299/.336/.454 for the Nationals and Cubs last season, though he hit only 12 home runs, down from the 23 he hit in 2017.

Pitching in. Bridich's focus is not only on offense. While he said that the club is unlikely to add a starting pitcher, he is open to adding a veteran reliever, especially with right-hander Adam Ottavino leaving as a free agent.

"I don't see us doing anything to the degree that I chose to do last year at this time," he said, referring to the signing of Wade Davis, Bryan Shaw and Jake McGee, all for three years for a combined \$106 million. "We need last year's decisions to pitch better. It's not a lack of talent or an inability to perform. They need to do a better job, flat out.

"The bottom line with the bullpen is that if Bryan and Jake and Chris pitch to their abilities, we are most likely a very different sort of a bullpen."

Catching depth. Catcher Chris Rabago returned to the Rockies organization Thursday in a roundabout way through the minor-league phase of the Rule 5 Draft. The Royals selected Rabago from the Yankees, then sent him to the Rockies for cash considerations.

Rabago was on Colorado's 40-man roster last season, but was claimed off waivers by the Yankees on Aug. 22 when Colorado needed a spot for veteran reserve Matt Holliday. Bridich said they brought Rabago back for catching depth, but he is not on the 40-man roster.

The Rockies did not select anyone in the major-league phase of the draft, but lost right-handed reliever Brandon Brennan when he was chosen by the Mariners. Brennan, 27, split last year between Double-A Birmingham and Triple-A Charlotte in the White Sox organization and was recently signed by Colorado to a minor-league contract. He was 4-3 with a 3.10 ERA in 40 outings (one start) with Birmingham and 1-1 with a 5.40 ERA in four relief appearances for Charlotte.

Rockies' Jeff Hoffman has raw talent to make rotation; can he harness it?
Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Dec. 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS — The 2019 season presents a huge challenge — and opportunity — for a number of Colorado's young players. It's major exam time for one in particular: right-hander Jeff Hoffman.

The centerpiece of the 2015 trade that sent star shortstop Troy Tulowitzki to Toronto has yet make a positive impact in the majors. Hoffman's 2018 season was discouraging, and that's being kind.

But general manager Jeff Bridich remains hopeful that Hoffman, who turns 26 next month, can compete for a spot in the Rockies' rotation.

"The flashes of talent that he's shown at the major-league level need to expand," Bridich said Wednesday on the final full day of baseball's winter meetings.

Bridich said Hoffman needs to harness and develop his talent the way Kyle Freeland, German Marquez and Antonio Senzatela have over the past two seasons.

"He's got that sort of ability, he's got that pitch mix, he's got the (velocity), he's got the durability," Bridich said of Hoffman.

"But it needs to happen. And he has to look no further than the people who've been around him the most."

Hoffman pitched just 8⅓ big-league innings over six appearances and two separate call-ups in 2018. His 9.35 ERA and 2.45 WHIP were, perhaps, misleading because of the small sample size, but his command was off even at Triple-A Albuquerque, where he posted a 4.94 ERA over 105 ⅔ innings. He struck out 8.7 batters and walked four per nine innings as a starter. That's indicative of Hoffman's inconsistency.

Rumor central. The Rockies continue to explore a variety of trade possibilities. According to a major-league source, a legitimate target is Cleveland first baseman/designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion.

At first glance, it seems like an odd fit, given that Encarnacion played just 23 games at first base in 2018, and given the Rockies' emphasis on solid defense. Plus, Encarnacion will be 36 next season and is due \$20 million.

On the other hand, Encarnacion swatted 32 homers, drove in 107 runs and posted a .810 OPS for Cleveland this past season. He would add a dangerous bat to Colorado's lineup and could be the run producer general manager Bridich is seeking.

The Indians, looking to dump some salary, might be willing to give up Encarnacion for prospects, perhaps including a young pitcher.

Switch-hitting first baseman Carlos Santana, recently acquired by a Mariners team that still might be looking to dump high salaries, also remains on Colorado's radar.

Bridich has made it clear what his top offseason priority is.

"Generally, it's run production — consistent run production," Bridich said. "And I think as we saw in the latest parts of our season the ability to score in the toughest of situations and the most challenging situations in this game, in those playoff games that we have designs on participating in for years to come."

Blackmon's move. Charlie Blackmon has thrived as the Rockies' center fielder, but at some point — maybe sooner, maybe later — he'll probably be moved to a corner spot in an effort to save wear and tear on his body.

He'll turn 33 on July 1, and Coors Field's expansive outfield can be unforgiving. Plus, he'll be in just the second year of a six-year, \$108 million contract, and the team wants to keep him healthy and productive at the plate.

"The topic overall and in general was breached and discussed up front during the contract negotiations," Bridich said.

"There was no time frame put on it. But we felt like this was probably as his career progressed with us where it was going to head at some point. We wanted to have cooler minds and rational heads to discuss it as adults when the time was right."

Manager Bud Black added: "We've talked about that with our group and among ourselves, and with Charlie I think he knows that at some point there might be a move to the corner."

Black said David Dahl and Ian Desmond are possibilities to play center field.

JAWS and the 2019 Hall of Fame Ballot: Jeff Kent
Jay Jaffe | FanGraphs.com | December 14, 2018

2019 BBWAA Ballot

The Ballot's

Big Questions

Mariano Rivera

Edgar Martinez

Mike Mussina

Roy Halladay

Larry Walker

Scott Rolen

Todd Helton

Andruw Jones

Omar Vizquel

Gary Sheffield

Manny Ramirez

Fred McGriff

Lance Berkman

Jeff Kent

The following article is part of Jay Jaffe's ongoing look at the candidates on the BBWAA 2019 Hall of Fame ballot.

Originally written for the 2014 election at SI.com, it has been updated to reflect recent voting results as well as additional research. For a detailed introduction to this year's ballot, and other candidates in the series, use the tool above; an introduction to JAWS can be found here. For a tentative schedule, and a chance to fill out a Hall of Fame ballot for our crowdsourcing project, see here. All WAR figures refer to the Baseball-Reference version unless otherwise indicated.

Jeff Kent took a long time to find a home. Drafted by the Blue Jays in 1989, he passed through the hands of three teams who didn't quite realize the value of what they had. Not until a trade to the Giants in November 1996 — prior to his age-29 season — did he really settle in. Once he did, he established himself as a standout complement to Barry Bonds, helping the Giants become perennial contenders and spending more than a decade as a middle-of-the-lineup force.

Despite his late-arriving stardom and a prickly personality that sometimes rubbed teammates and media the wrong way, Kent earned All-Star honors five times, won an MVP award, and helped four different franchises reach the playoffs a total of seven times. His resumé gives him a claim as the best-hitting second baseman of the post-1960 expansion era — not an iron-clad one, but not one that’s easily dismissed. For starters, he holds the all-time record for most home runs by a second baseman with 351. That’s 74 more than Ryne Sandberg, 85 more than Joe Morgan, and 86 more than Rogers Hornsby — all Hall of Famers, and in Hornsby’s case, one from before the expansion era (note that I’m not counting homers hit while playing other positions). Among players with at least 7,000 plate appearances in their career who spent at least half their time at second base, only Hornsby (.577) has a higher slugging percentage than Kent’s .500. From that latter set, only Hornsby (1.010) and another pre-expansion Hall of Famer, Charlie Gehringer (.884), have a higher OPS.

Offense isn’t everything for a second baseman, however, and in a Hall of Fame discussion, it needs to be set in its proper context, particularly given the high-scoring era in which Kent played. Taking the measure of all facets of his game, he appears to have a weaker case with regards to advanced statistics than to traditional ones. On a crowded ballot chockfull of candidates with stronger cases on both fronts, he has struggled to gain support, topping out at 16.7% in 2017, his fourth year on the ballot.

2019 BBWAA Candidate: Jeff Kent

Player	Career WAR	Peak WAR	JAWS
Jeff Kent	55.4	35.7	45.6
Avg. HOF 2B	69.4	44.4	56.9

H	HR	AVG/OBP/SLG	OPS+
2,461	377	.290/.356/.500	123

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

Born in Bellflower, California (a suburb of Los Angeles) on March 7, 1968, Kent was most interested in motocross — a sport in which his father, a former motorcycle cop, competed — while growing up. He played baseball at Edison High School in Huntington Beach, but despite being an all-county selection as a shortstop, he was kicked off his team as a senior due to a personality conflict. Coach Ron La Ruffa called it “a bad case of senioritis,” and the Los Angeles Times characterized it as an “attitude problem.” Playing American Legion and Connie Mack League baseball that summer instead, he still secured a baseball scholarship to the University of California.

Kent helped Cal to the College World Series as a sophomore in 1988, but a broken wrist ended his junior season, scared away scouts, and dropped his draft stock. Nonetheless, he signed with the Blue Jays when they chose him in the 20th round of the 1989 draft. Splitting his first professional season between shortstop and third base, he struggled both in the field and at the plate but showed good power at every minor-league stop, and a greater aptitude for second base. He was set to start the 1992 season at Triple-A Syracuse, but injuries opened a roster spot in Toronto and playing time at third and second. He played 65 games for the Blue Jays, hitting .240/.324/.443, but on August 27 — mere days after Dave Winfield joked in the pages of Sports Illustrated that Kent was Wally Pipp-ing injured third baseman Kelly Gruber — they sent him and a player to be named later to the Mets for David Cone, who went on to help Toronto win the World Series.

Alas, the Mets were headed the opposite direction, bound for their second straight losing season after seven (1984–90) with at least 87 wins. The 1992 squad gained infamy as The Worst Team Money Could Buy (after the book of the same name), but the 1993 one truly stunk: New York went 59–103, the team's worst showing since 1965. The 25-year-old Kent spent most of that season as the starting second baseman, hitting a respectable .270/.320/.446 with 21 homers in 140 games, but he was terrible in the field (-20 runs, according to Total Zone), offsetting nearly all of his value with the bat; he finished with 0.3 WAR.

Kent maintained that offensive level over the next three seasons, hitting a combined .284/.333/.457 (108 OPS+) and averaging 15 homers a year from 1994-1996, and his defense improved enough that he averaged 2.8 WAR across that stretch. Even so, he disliked a 1996 shift to third base, and it took its toll. As Franz Lidzwrote in a February 15, 1999 SI profile:

"I hated third," he says. It showed. Once, after a Shea Stadium ball girl backhanded a foul ball, a fan shouted, "Hey, Kent. You should trade positions with her." When errors — 21 in 89 games — began mounting faster than the national debt, Kent became defensive about his defense. "Bobbling a ball would so humiliate me that I couldn't speak," he says. The Mets remained mired below .500, but Kent caught a break when he was traded to Cleveland in a four-player deal that sent Carlos Baerga to New York; the Mets, on the other hand, caught a falling knife in Baerga, but that's a story for another day. The Indians had won the American League pennant the year before and were bound for 99 wins and another postseason appearance. Kent filled in at first, second, third, and designated hitter down the stretch and started twice in a losing cause in the Division Series. On November 13, he was part of a six-player trade that sent him to San Francisco, with slugging third baseman Matt Williams headlining Cleveland's end of the deal.

Giants manager Dusty Baker wasn't wild about the trade because of Kent's temper, but he did return him to second base and batted him cleanup behind Bonds. Now 29 years old, Kent responded by setting career highs with 155 games, 29 homers, 121 RBIs, and 4.1 WAR despite a rather lopsided .250/.316/.472 line that equated to a modest 105 OPS+. The Giants won the National League West at 90–72, but they were swept by the Marlins in the Division Series despite a pair of solo homers from Kent in Game 3. He received down-ballot support in the MVP race, finishing eighth in the voting.

Thus began Kent's six-year run of 20-homer/100-RBI seasons, thanks in part to hitting behind Bonds, an on-base machine as well as an elite slugger. Kent matured at the plate, suddenly able to hit for both average and power after altering his stance by holding his hands higher — an epiphany that came from watching Edgar Martinez. In 1998, Kent hit .297/.359/.555 with 31 homers and 4.4 WAR, but the Giants lost a Game 163 play-in for the Wild Card — something they might have avoided had they not gone 11–13 while Kent missed most of June due to a hyperextended knee.

Kent earned All-Star honors for the first time in 1999, then took his game to a new level in 2000 as the Giants moved into brand new Pacific Bell Park (now AT&T Park) and won the NL West with a 97–65 mark; he hit .334/.424/.596 with 33 homers and 7.2 WAR that year, all career bests. The latter mark ranked fourth in the league, but thanks to his 125 RBIs, he beat out Bonds (who hit .306/.440/.688 with 49 homers, 106 RBIs and 7.7 WAR) in the MVP race. The Giants lost the Division Series to the Mets in four games despite Kent going 6-for-16.

The 2001 season was Bonds's turn to shine, as he bashed 73 homers to shatter the single-season record and won his fourth MVP award. By that point, however, tensions between the two stars were bubbling to the surface. In the August 27 issue of SI, Kent told Rick Reilly, "On the field, we're fine, but off the field, I don't care about Barry and Barry doesn't care about me. [Pause.] Or anybody else." Kent himself had a good year (.298/.369/.507, 5.2 WAR) and earned All-Star honors, but the Giants missed the playoffs.

The 2002 season saw highs and lows for the 34-year-old Kent. On March 1, he broke a bone in his wrist, initially claiming it happened while washing his truck. Soon it surfaced that eyewitnesses reported seeing a motorcyclist crash while doing a wheelie near Scottsdale Stadium in Arizona, the Giants' spring training home; further information showed that it was Kent, riding in violation of his contract. The incident became the butt of jokes, but the Giants showed leniency, and Kent wound up missing just four games. On June 25, after yelling at third baseman David Bell, Kent scuffled with Bonds in the

dugout. Afterward, he dismissed the altercation, saying it wasn't a "big deal" and adding it to the "half-dozen times we've done it before." Even so, he was also reported as telling Baker afterwards, "I want off this team."

For all of the tension, Kent set a new career high with 37 homers, hitting .313/.368/.565 en route to 7.0 WAR, helping the Giants win 96 games and the NL Wild Card; they proceeded to beat the Braves and Cardinals to advance to the World Series against the Angels. Kent hit .276/.290/.621 in 31 plate appearances for the Series, homering in a losing cause in Game 2, then homering twice and driving in four runs in a 16–4 rout in Game 5 that put the Giants within one win of their first championship since moving to San Francisco in 1958.

In Game 6, the Giants were up 5–0 with nine outs to go when all hell broke loose after a pair of three-run Angels rallies, the second keyed by a Bonds error. San Francisco lost the last two games, with Kent going 0-for-4 with two strikeouts in Game 7.

That was it for Kent's run in San Francisco. In December, he signed a two-year, \$18.2 million deal with the Astros, bumping All-Star second baseman Craig Biggio to center field. Superficially, Kent's performance with Houston (.293/.350/.521 in 2003–2004) looked a whole lot like his six years in San Francisco (.297/.368/.535), but in reality, hitter-friendly Minute Maid Park was masking his decline. He totaled just 6.7 WAR over those two years; his OPS+, meanwhile, went from 136 as a Giant to 121 as an Astro — good, but not outstanding. Kent missed four weeks in 2003 due to wrist inflammation, and again, his injury probably cost his team a playoff spot. Despite the presence of Biggio, Jeff Bagwell and Lance Berkman, the Astros went 12–11 in his absence and lost the NL Central by one game.

Kent earned All-Star honors for the fourth time in 2004 and hit 27 homers. Career home run no. 300 came off St. Louis' Jeff Suppan on September 29, and no. 278 as a second baseman — the record-breaker at the position—came on October 2 off Colorado's Adam Bernero. Bolstered by the midseason arrival of Carlos Beltran, the Astros won 92 games and the Wild Card, then beat the Braves to advance to the NLCS against the Cardinals. Kent homered three times in the series, with his three-run shot off Jason Isringhausen in the ninth inning of Game 5 providing all of the scoring and putting Houston one win away from their first trip to the World Series, but the team lost the next two.

A free agent again, Kent returned to California on a two-year, \$17 million deal with the Dodgers, his favorite team growing up, and the NL West champs in 2004. Alas, he was one of the few bright spots on a squad that tumbled to 71–91 amid

such a slew of injuries that he was one of just two players to reach 100 hits. Kent himself was limited to 115 games and 0.7 WAR the following year due to wrist and oblique injuries, not to mention deteriorating defense (-18 Defensive Runs Saved). His 14 homers and 68 RBIs ended a string of nine straight years of at least 22 homers and 93 RBIs, though his last homer was noteworthy. Hit on September 18, 2006 off the Padres' Jon Adkins, it was the first of four consecutive ninth-inning homers that allowed the Dodgers to tie a game they ultimately won. Los Angeles soon claimed the NL West flag, but despite Kent going bananas in the Division Series against the Mets — 8-for-13 with a double and a homer— the Dodgers were nonetheless swept.

In March 2006, Kent signed an extension to cover the 2007 season with an option for '08. At 39, he had one more big year with the stick left, hitting .302/.375/.500 with 21 homers, though bad defense (-12 DRS) again offset much of his value, limiting him to 2.2 WAR. Late in the year, as the Dodgers' playoff hopes slipped away, he made waves by criticizing the professionalism of some of the team's young players, particularly Matt Kemp. Kent mulled retirement but returned for 2008, then hit just .280/.327/.418 with 12 homers. He needed late-August knee surgery before coming back for the playoffs — the Dodgers had won the NL West at 84–78 — but was limited to a bench role. In January of the following year, he announced his retirement.

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Kent finished with 2,461 hits and 377 homers — respectable counting stats to accompany a hefty .290/.356/.500 line, particularly for a player who spent almost 90% of his career as a middle infielder. Among post-expansion players who spent most of their careers at the keystone, only Hall of Famers Biggio (3,060), Roberto Alomar (2,724), and Morgan (2,517), and Robinson Cano (2,470), accumulated more hits. Cano's 311 homers is the next closest total, and he's heading into his age-36 season, with five more years under contract.

At a cutoff of 5,000 plate appearances for such players (of whom there are 69), Kent's batting average ranks ninth, his on-base percentage 15th, and his slugging percentage first (seventh points ahead of Cano). Adjusting for the offensive environment of his era, Kent's 123 OPS+ ranks fourth in that group behind Morgan (132), Cano (127), and the unjustly bypassed Bobby Grich (125). From that vantage, his candidacy for Cooperstown certainly has credibility, particularly because second base is generally a defense-first position where the offensive bar is lower.

But that bar is lower because in the middle infield, defense counts, and Kent didn't really add any extra value with the leather relative to other post-expansion second basemen — and again, this is including those players' time at all positions. By Baseball-Reference's combination of Total Zone and Defensive Runs Saved, he's 42 runs below average for his career, with a Defensive WAR (dWAR) of -0.1 after accounting for positional adjustments. That ranks 57th among those 69 players, higher than Biggio (-2.9) but lower than Morgan (3.8 and with far more offensive value), to say nothing of Grich (16.8), Chase Utley (18.3), or Hall of Famers Sandberg (13.5) and Bill Mazerowski (18.0).

Coupling offense and defense, and adjusting for ballpark and era, Kent's total of 55.4 WAR ranks 19th among second basemen — respectable but nonetheless 14 wins below the average enshrined second baseman and better than just seven of the 20 enshrined, none of them BBWAA selections. Even among those below the Hall average, he's a mile behind Sandberg (68.0), Alomar (67.1), Biggio (65.5) and Utley (65.4), whose careers overlapped with his. Only twice did he even have a WAR that cracked the league's top 10.

Turning to peak WAR, which covers his best seven seasons, Kent's 35.7 ranks 25th, about nine wins behind the average Hall of Fame second baseman, and below 14 of the 20 enshrined. Kent had just three seasons of at least 5.0 WAR and two more seasons of at least 4.0. By comparison, Morgan had 10 seasons of at least 5.0 WAR, and Cano has seven and counting; Alomar, Grich, Ian Kinsler, Dustin Pedroia, Sandberg and Utley had six apiece; and Biggio and Rod Carew each compiled five. Even at the 4.0 WAR bar, 11 post-expansion second basemen had more big seasons.

In the end, Kent's 45.6 JAWS is 11.3 points below the Hall standard for second basemen, 20th all-time, below 12 of the 20 Hall of Famers and too far to be made up for by the parts of his resumé that the system doesn't capture, mainly the awards and the postseason (a characteristic .276/.340/.500 with nine homers in 189 plate appearances). Outside of his 2000 MVP award, his highest finish was sixth; he made just five All-Star teams; and so on. Kent scores 122 (“a good possibility”) on the Bill James Hall of Fame Monitor, but the average score for a Hall of Fame second baseman is 161.

When Kent debuted on the 2014 ballot, I noted that it's rare that my own system surprises me. While the distance between Kent and the Hall of Fame standard for second baseman is one of those cases where the data runs contrast to my gut feeling, it bears remembering that Kent played in such a high-offense era that 40 players with at least 5,000 plate appearances over the span of his career (1992–2008) surpassed his OPS+, in contrast to only six surpassing his RBI

total. Moreover, while he accumulated 9,537 plate appearances, he reached 600 in only six seasons due to injuries and the players' strike, and only 500 in 11. Only some of that owes to being mishandled by the Mets; health is another factor.

Each of Kent's five years on the ballot featured at least 10 players who score above the JAWS average at their position, the maximum that an individual can vote for under the rules. This year, the count is down to eight. While granting that some of those players have PED issues attached to them, there are also cases to be made for players who don't quite measure up that way, such as 2018 honorees Vlad Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman, and 2019 newcomers Roy Halladay and Todd Helton. Confronted with the hard choices of how to pare my (virtual) ballot down to 10 (an exercise I'll repeat before the December 31 deadline for ballots), I can't see bumping enough of those 10 to include Kent because of how far below the JAWS standard he is.

As I suspected when he debuted, voters have had a hard time finding room for him as well. He debuted with just 15.2% of the vote in 2014, dipped in 2015, peaked at 16.7% in 2017, and sank to 14.5% in 2018. Worse for him, he now has only four more years after this one (instead of nine, thanks to the 2014 rule change) to make up the remaining ground. Since 1966, when the BBWAA returned to annual voting, 26 players besides Kent (including ballot-mates Fred McGriff and Larry Walker) have received between 10 and 25% of the vote in their fifth year of eligibility. Of that group, only four are now in the Hall of Fame, none of them elected by the writers. In other words, reaching Cooperstown via the writers will require an unprecedented climb for Kent, who has five cycles to make up ground instead of 10. While I remain open-minded on his candidacy, I'm not alone among those who will take far more convincing that he truly belongs.

Bud Black addresses his own potential long-term future in Colorado
Drew Creasman | BSNDenver.com | Dec. 13, 2018

Las Vegas – The attention this offseason has rightfully been on the Colorado Rockies roster and potential changes it might see moving forward.

This is a volatile time for the organization with longtime members of the franchise likely on their way out. Adam Ottavino and Gerardo Parra have become invaluable components of the clubhouse and DJ LeMahieu and Carlos Gonzalez are inarguably among the most beloved Rockies of all time.

And while the world turns its lonely eyes to Nolan Arenado, knowing full well that his eventual decision to either stay or go could fundamentally alter two franchises, there is another man whose uncertain future may be just as interesting.

Bud Black is no more free of fan scrutiny than any other manager or coach in professional sports but aside from the most stringent of his personal critics, he has been universally praised for turning around the Rockies franchise, especially when it comes to the pitching.

After 23 years of futility, Black has made pitching the Colorado Rockies calling card. In so doing, he took the Rockies to back-to-back postseasons for the first time in their history. He hasn't missed the playoffs since pulling on purple.

Kyle Freeland, German Marquez, Tyler Anderson, Jon Gray, Chad Bettis and the rest are constantly telling BSN Denver how important their relationship with Black is and how lucky they feel to have him.

If having Black around makes those guys the best versions of themselves, his value to the club is astronomical.

And while details of manager contracts are shrouded in more mystery than an episode of Lost, and it sounds like there is an option already on the table for 2020, Black is going into the final year of his base contract, prompting questions about his long-term future in Colorado.

GM Jeff Bridich said that specifics haven't been worked out yet but that he had a "good vibe" about getting something done.

Black himself responded with his usual wryness but couldn't help flashing a smile when discussing a potential stay in Denver.

"Well, I'm concerned about what's going on at the present, right? I think that where we are as a team takes precedence over anything that might be happening with me," he said. "So that's where my focus is. But I'm happy to hear that Jeff thinks there's a good vibe. That's a good thing."

Bud Black discusses roster, coaching philosophy, and Arenado's future
Drew Creasman | BSNDenver.com | Dec. 13, 2018

LAS VEGAS – During a gathering of reporters at the Winter Meetings, Colorado Rockies manager Bud Black fielded a series of questions, many of which didn't have much to do with the current makeup of his team or their future plans.

Still, there were some fun and interesting tidbits in the mix among the various topics of conversation.

Here are some of those statements.

On getting involved with front office decisions

"There's a drastic change in the Winter Meetings now than back in the day. And even the last I'd say five years. But I still enjoy it. I still think there's a place for a gathering of all of us. I think there's a collection of us in the room that offer different perspectives on the direction of our team and our roster, Big League roster, even what's going on in the minor leagues. I think the managers are a part of that collaboration. And I enjoy that."

On Adam Ottavino's recent comments that he would strike out Babe Ruth every time

"You know, Babe was pretty good down and in. That breaking ball coming down and into him. He might be able to get that at Yankee Stadium, or at Coors Field if Babe played at Coors. But I think the record speaks for itself. Babe was a pretty good hitter."

On his own chances against the Babe

"I once threw a pretty good slider down and away to Babe that he had a pretty good swing on. He was a tough out for me. For the most part, I felt pretty comfortable against left-handed hitters, but Babe was always a challenge for me."

On analytics driving the coach hiring decisions around baseball

“We’ll see going forward. But I like the creativeness of the thinking of those of us in this game from the people who were making hires, I think it shows that it’s not a closed box; it’s opened for whoever might have a skill set that a certain team is looking for or to give it a shot. And I think that’s great.”

On what he looks for in his own staff

“That’s a — I wouldn’t say it’s a tough question, but it’s really open ended. But for me I think — and I’ll say this: As long as I’m in this game, I think from a coaching perspective, I think there’s a teaching component that I think is real. So the coaches that I have, I want them to be regarded as teachers. I want them to teach our players.”

“I think there’s a leadership component that comes with a good coach. The ability to individually lead men or as a group lead a group. And I think there’s an aspect of coaching that is motivational, to be able to motivate players, inspire players. So those three aspects, I think, the teacher, leader, motivator.”

“I look at the qualities of that person as a coach. So to have those, that’s sort of the baseline of where I go from.”

“There’s also the knowledge, the credibility that where they’ve been to be able to get through to players.”

“I think there’s the interaction and the collaboration of the coaching staff is vital. But I do think that the diversity also of each coach is important, too.”

“But there’s a collectiveness to us that seven or eight guys as a coaching, Big League coaching staff, there every day with the players, that unit has to be together.”

On the ways in which managing has changed over the years

“I think as a manager or in any leadership position, I think you have to be really current with what’s evolving. You have to be aware of what’s happening in the game.”

“Do you change as a person? No. I mean, do you change in who you are on a day-to-day basis? No. I think there’s some principles that we all have about how to lead and what we do in our sport to get the most out of our players and the most out of our team.”

“But what it’s changed is I think that the front office dynamic has changed from my first year in 2007 and even going back to when I was with the Angels in 2000, when I really became part of the coaching staff.”

“So these last 18 years, we’ve seen the front office expansion of just people in the offices from the general manager to the many assistant GMs and all the people who are surrounding the GMs, the different departments, the analytics departments, strength and conditioning, medical staff, I mean, it’s a much bigger group of people on the baseball op side.”

“Even the coaching staff has expanded to assistant pitching coach, assistant hitting coaches. Eighth and ninth coaches across the board.”

“So with that, I think what has changed is your ability to manage all that and how we interact with all those different departments that are growing and being able to utilize all those departments in the present. Of everything that is happening. I think that is what’s changed. And I do think way back when there was only one time when you met with the media per day. Now it’s two, potentially three.”

(Sorry about that.)

On his relationship with Giants manager Bruce Bochy considering he may retire soon

“Well, I hope it’s not his last year. I truly mean that, because Bruce is — he’s great for the game. Because he’s a great manager. I think historically, what he’s done in his entire career, and more recently with the Giants winning three world championships, that’s fantastic work. That’s hard. I mean, it’s hard to win one let alone three.”

“And he’s done it. But my relationship with Bruce, especially the last number of years, has become a little closer. We’ve socialized more, doing some things in the offseason together with other guys.”

“But his impact has been a big one, I think, in the game, because I think a lot of other managers have looked at Bruce to see how he’s done things.”

“And for me there’s been in my career — and I’ll go back to my days with the Angels when he was managing the Padres, there’s been no better in-game manager strategically than Bruce.”

“I always felt as though when the game started, there was never going to be a mistake on his side. And there were many times when I thought we were going to be in a pretty good position to pinch-hit or a pitching change, but I wasn’t. So he’s very good in that regard.”

“And I think he brings a — I think there’s an old-school sturdiness to Bruce and a grittiness and a toughness that I admire, that I think is natural and genuine. And it’s good stuff, man. He’s a good guy. I think that’s the main thing.”

On covering his mouth when visiting the mound

“I don’t. I’m not sure I do.”

“I don’t think I ever have. So if there’s a lip reader, I’m in trouble. That might be the tenth coach, lip reader.”

On whether or not baseball is becoming more paranoid

“For sure. I think there’s a lot of inherent paranoia going on. And we’ve all talked about that as far as, because of technology, number of cameras, scouting, you know people really scouting the other teams from a different variety of perspectives. The camera technology has really made advances in the ability to maybe get some sensitive information.”

On the ongoing Nolan Arenado contract situation and whether that might be an on-field distraction in 2019

“Do I want him back? Absolutely. I think from my perspective, Nolan is very aware of our feelings. I’ll speak for everybody, coaching staff, players, Jeff, Dick, we’d love to have Nolan as a long-time Rockie.”

“To your first question, do you think it will affect Nolan, I don’t think so. I truly think that the best place for him all the time is on the field. That’s where he feels most comfortable. And I think that will continue to happen. I think his performance will be fine.”

“Will I get involved? Probably not — no, that’s something for — I think that’s really a small circle. That’s Dick and Jeff and Nolan and Nolan’s representative and probably — and the people that Nolan is closest to. I think that’s a pretty small group that when you really get down to it, those are the people in those conversations.”

**Rox Rumors: Smoak, Murphy, Walker, LoMo, J. Gray, Desmond
Connor Byrne and Jeff Todd | MLBTradeRumors.com | December 13, 2018**

The Rockies have at least given internal consideration to pursuing Blue Jays first baseman Justin Smoak, according to Patrick Saunders of the Denver Post (Twitter link). It seems the Rox could also consider some free agent bats, with MLB.com's Thomas Harding writing that Daniel Murphy, Neil Walker, and Logan Morrison are all on the club's radar.

Colorado received National League-worst production at first base last season, putting it in the market for help there. Smoak, meanwhile, put together his second straight solid offensive campaign. He's due an affordable \$8MM in 2019, and MLBTR's Mark Polishuk noted in October that he'd make sense for the Rockies. Murphy, Walker and Morrison were less successful than Smoak in 2018, but they've experienced varying degrees of success and should come at affordable prices this winter. Further, both Murphy and Walker are versatile enough to line up at multiple positions.

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More on the Rockies from Harding, who reports that right-hander Jon Gray and utilityman Ian Desmond drew trade interest at the Winter Meetings. It's no surprise teams inquired about Gray, a potential front-end starter with three years of control left, but there's no word on whether the Rockies would consider dealing the 27-year-old. Desmond isn't nearly as appealing, on the other hand, but "teams were receptive to discussing" him, Harding writes. Not only has the 33-year-old Desmond combined for minus-1.5 fWAR since 2017, but he's still owed \$40MM through 2021 (including a \$2MM buyout of his \$15MM club option for 2022).

MLB Winter Meetings 2018: Colorado Rockies Quiet For Now But Will Make Moves
Jack Magruder | Forbes.com | Dec. 13, 2018

The Rockies entered the winter meetings with an eye toward adding a bat or two because of the expected loss of free-agent second baseman DJ LeMahieu and the departure of free-agent outfielders Carlos Gonzalez and Gerardo Parra. But like most, they are waiting for the big names to drop before getting involved.

Full Forbes coverage: what all 30 teams did at the MLB winter meetings.

Rockies' Winter Meetings Moves: none

Analysis: Once the place to make a splash, the winter meetings now serve as more of a way to further discussions that began at the general managers' meetings while at the same time reacting to the trades and the free-agent market as names go off the board.

Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich told reporters he will engage in "responsible growth," a positive indicator that the team will continue to push after spending a franchise-record \$169 million on payroll in 2018 while making the playoffs for the second straight year. The Rockies have made the playoffs the last two seasons, and their young starting pitching has developed into a team strength despite the inherent distractions of Coors Field.

Bridich also went on record saying the Rockies could afford to spend \$200 million on a long-term deal for third baseman Nolan Arenado — arguably the best player in baseball over the last four years — when his contract expires after the 2019 season.

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The sobering news for Colorado, of course, is that Arenado could encounter suitors offering considerably more if/when he gets to free agency, depending on where the market lands for plums Bryce Harper and Manny Machado this winter. Agent Scott Boras represents both, which usually means the final number will be higher than clubs want.

Harper turned down a 10-year, \$300 million from Washington on the final day of the regular season, and Arenado's numbers are demonstrably better than Harper's in the recent past. Arenado has won a Gold Glove in all six of his seasons and has led the NL in homers in three of the last four years.

Off-Season Outlook: The Rockies will attempt to improve an offense that still scores runs (and, with Coors as its home park, always will). They were second in the NL in runs last season but were in the middle of the pack in on-base percentage.

Losing LeMahieu, a solid two-way player, will not help. He led the NL in hitting with a .348 batting average in 2016 and has won Gold Gloves in three of the last five seasons, including the last two. Finding a player who can do all that will not happen, but the Rockies hope to find a work-around with the depth of the free-agent market and their own internal flexibility.

The answer will come in the way they attack second base and first base/outfield while also determining if this is the year to move Charlie Blackmon off center field and into one of the corners. Both Blackmon and the team have discussed the possibility, which was addressed when Blackmon signed his six-year, \$108 million contract before last season.

If Blackmon moves this season, center field will be open for David Dahl, Ian Desmond or a newcomer. The Rockies have been linked to free agent A.J. Pollock and Toronto center fielder Kevin Pillar via trade, but Pollock seems an unlikely option because he is seeking Lorenzo Cain money — five years, \$80 million. If the market comes down, Pollock could be back in play.

Since signing with the Rockies two years ago, Desmond has played mostly first base when healthy, he but was Texas' regular center fielder in 2016. The super-talented Dahl will be a regular for years to come; it is just a matter of at which spot. He is considered an above-average center fielder.

Center field in Coors is one of the most challenging outfield spots in the majors because of its wide expanse, and it might be more convenient for the Rockies in the short term to move Desmond back to the outfield, given the glut of first basemen on the market.

The Rockies were interested in switch-hitting first baseman Carlos Santana before he was traded to Cleveland for Edwin Encarnacion on Thursday. Seattle general manager Jerry Dipoto could still move Encarnacion, but he is now only a DH and does not fit the Rockies' profile.

Free agents Logan Morrison, Matt Reynolds (an old friend) and Matt Adams can play first, and Marwin Gonzalez and Josh Harrison would provide flexibility, inasmuch as each can play the infield and the outfield.

The in-house candidates at second base are Garrett Hampson and Ryan McMahon, both of whom spent time in the majors last season, but the market is full of second basemen, including Brian Dozier, Jed Lowrie, Daniel Murphy and Neil Walker.

Murphy could become a target because of his bat, but the Rockies passed on him at the 2018 trade deadline and may not want to sacrifice defense, especially at Coors Field. His selling point is that he can play first or second, and he would provide greater value at first. McMahon can also play first.