



MEDIA CLIPS – Dec. 7, 2018

**2018 Sportsperson of the Year: Kyle Freeland
Shawn Drotar | MileHighSports.com | December 7, 2018**

Rockies ace Kyle Freeland was the best there was in 2018

The following article is from the December issue of Mile High Sports Magazine.

Editor's Note: In 2018, there was no shortage of gaudy statistics, facts and figures. There were postseason runs galore, and even a title or two. But our annual selection of the Sportsperson of the Year runs deeper than that. The criteria? Who impacted the local sports landscape the most, or the most significantly?

So, rather than write stories and dissect the numbers, I asked those who followed Rockies baseball the closest this past summer to pen their own version of "why." Why was Kyle Freeland our choice? The answers follow.

The Clutch Gene by Doug Ottewill

I have been covering sports for the better part of 20 years now. Once a slave to the numbers, statistics don't wow me like they used to. Of course there are exceptions, but by and large, records are made to be broken. I find the longer I do this, the intangibles, the stories and the winning and losing hold my interest more than anything else.

Ask most anyone who actively follows baseball, and they easily tell you that Babe Ruth hit 714 home runs, and that Hank Aaron walloped 755. Ask them where Barry Bonds finished and they don't always know. It's 762, to be exact, but the thing they'll know most is that there's some kind of "asterisk" that follows whatever number Bonds posted.

The point is that the numbers alone don't tell the whole story. There's more to them. Ask those same folks who the greatest home run hitter of all time is and most would say either Ruth or Aaron – despite knowing that Bonds finished with superior marks. There's going to be a “Well...but...” before anyone answers the question.

Rockies lefty hurler Kyle Freeland had numbers that wowed in 2018. A baseball pitcher's statistics are what they are – comparable, both against opponents and history. And the numbers tied to Freeland – the ultimate local boy done good – are impressive. They're not numbers for the ages, certainly not unprecedented in the sport of baseball. But they are respectable across baseball. To point, Freeland finished the season in the NL's top-10 in all of the following categories: Wins Above Replacement-All (4th, 8.2); WAR-Pitchers (4th, 8.4); ERA (5th, 2.85); Wins (4th, 17); Winning Percentage (6th, .708) and Innings Pitched (5th, 202.1).

Not bad for a Rockies pitcher. So “not bad” in fact, that Freeland finished fourth in the Cy Young Award voting.

His numbers, when compared to those historically produced at Coors Field (generally thought of as a bad word amongst MLB pitchers), indicate he was arguably the best Rockies pitcher for a season, ever. His ERA of 2.85 is the best of all time. His 17 wins are second only to Ubaldo Jimenez's 19 in 2010.

But again, numbers bore me.

What was exciting was that Freeland captured the imagination of Rockies fans in ways that have never been done before. Freeland's start-to-finish season, where he truly got stronger as the season trudged on, was really unprecedented. The debate of which Rockies pitcher has had the greatest single season in team history is between Freeland's 2018 and Jimenez's 2010; they're the only two that really stake claim to “best ever.”

Freeland was a bulldog down the stretch, though. From August, he only pitched less than six innings once. In his starts – all 12 of them – he never gave up more than three earned runs. During that same stretch, when he started, the Rockies were 10-2; his record was 8-1 with three no-decisions. By comparison, Jimenez got off to a hot start in 2010, but fizzled down the stretch. His August looked more like a slide. The team went 5-7 in his starts, and his personal record was worse, as he went 3-6 including losses in his final three starts. In 2018, the Rockies surged to an unlikely a Wild Card berth

because of Freeland's intestinal fortitude. In 2010, the Rockies slid from contention largely because by season's end, Jimenez was not the same pitcher he was in April and May.

Freeland was gutty. And that's not a word used too often when referring to Rockies pitchers.

And then there's the one thing in sports I love above all else – clutch. It's what Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant had. It's what Reggie Jackson and Mariano Rivera had. It's what Joe Montana and John Elway had.

They all had the clutch gene.

There is no stat or skill that can match clutch. If an athlete's competence is at or above his level of competition, the only thing that truly separates the good and the great is the clutch gene. It's that inexplicable quality that allows those athletes to excel on the biggest stage, in the biggest moments, when the game is in the balance. No matter the performance they've had leading up to that moment, clutch takes over when things matter most.

Kyle Freeland has the clutch gene.

His start against the Chicago Cubs at Wrigley Field in the NL Wild Card game was one for the ages. In reality, the deck was stacked against him. The Rockies had a brutal travel schedule to end the season; by the time they'd reached Chicago, they'd flown from Colorado to L.A. to Chicago in three consecutive days. The Cubs trotted out playoff-tested lefty Jon Lester. The "national" broadcast team had penciled in the Cubs to advance from their pregame notes.

Yet, Freeland stood tallest.

The Thomas Jefferson High School product delivered a gut-wrenching performance, allowing only four hits while surrendering no earned runs. And he had to be that good, as Lester seemingly matched him inning for inning, pitch for pitch. More than once Freeland was asked to get out a jam, and never did he fail. It was as clutch of a performance as has ever been seen by a Colorado Rockies pitcher. With the stakes the highest, Freeland was flawless.

But that's who he is. Whether he's starting his first game as a rookie at Coors Field and beating the Dodgers 2-1 in front of a sellout crowd, or nearly delivering the first no-hitter by a Rockies pitcher at Coors Field, he's clutch when it counts.

His numbers dazzled. But Freeland's ability to be his best when it counted, in a town starved for postseason baseball, dazzled me.

That's why he's my Colorado Sportsperson of the Year.

One of Us by Aniello Piro

Kyle Freeland was not supposed to be a pitcher.

Growing up, Freeland's father Don wanted to develop him into a middle infielder, like he was back in his days at Denver's John F. Kennedy High School. Kyle was the second brother of the family; the first, Colin, was already groomed to play up the middle. The pieces were in place for Don Freeland's dream of having a set of brothers play the middle infield positions to come true – except a very young Kyle had plans of his own.

Every time Don would attempt to place a ball in Kyle's right hand, he would switch it to his left. Being left-handed causes problems when playing the middle infield positions, so Kyle and his father had to adjust the plan. And the adjustment – nothing more than becoming a southpaw – ended up taking Kyle from being a Thomas Jefferson Spartan to the ace of the Colorado Rockies' starting rotation.

Are you a Kyle Freeland guy?

Just about all of Colorado baseball fans are, and I am, too. Freeland has emerged as the leader of the Rockies' rotation after only two seasons in the big leagues and serves a much larger purpose than baseball in the state of Colorado. He's one of us. Cheering on the hometown team is fun, but when the best player on that team is a homegrown product, it's something special.

Freeland was once just like you and me – a fan. A fan of the game. A fan of the Rockies. He recalls entering the confines of Coors Field at a young age to watch his favorite players, Larry Walker and Todd Helton. I'm sure he dreamed, as we all did as kids, about playing in the big leagues. I'm not so sure he thought that one day he would solidify the best season from a pitcher in Rockies history and pave a more precise way for the franchise to potentially capture its first championship.

Sitting back after what was a roller coaster of a season for the Colorado Rockies in 2018, one thing is for sure: The Rockies have their ace.

Other pitchers within the organization have flirted with the term in the past, but after a miraculous season in which Freeland received votes for the Cy Young award and set a single-season franchise record for ERA (2.85), it's fair to put him in the conversation with the best arms in the National League. Moreover, what makes him the de facto No. 1 arm in the Rockies' rotation is the confidence he instills within the club. Every fifth day, when Freeland takes the bump, the Rockies and their fans have the utmost confidence they can emerge victorious. Colorado lost only two games in Freeland's last 16 starts this season. Additionally, Freeland led the team in WAR with a mark of 8.2 and pitched to a 2.40 ERA at home, the lowest in franchise history.

Numbers never lie, but even some of the best pitchers statistically in the history of the game have faltered in prime-time. You either have what it takes, or you don't perform on the biggest stage. That said, the one postseason start of Freeland's career happened to be one that solidified him as the ace the Rockies have been looking for in their 25-year history.

After losing out on the division title, the Rockies squared off against the Chicago Cubs in the National League Wild Card game, their second consecutive appearance in the one-game playoff. After a disappointing performance the year before, Freeland was given the nod, and thus control, of the Rockies' destiny. Going up against a superior team, on the road, in your third city in as many days is by no means a walk in the park. However, Freeland made it appear to be just that.

Freeland outdueled three-time World Series champion Jon Lester and made the potent Cubs offense look silly by posting a line of 6 2/3 innings pitched, allowing four hits and one walk while striking out six batters en route to Colorado's thrilling, 13-inning victory. It was the first of hopefully many marquee outings for Freeland in his career, as he is hungry to keep his team in the title conversation.

“Having those mentalities and that drive to win, that drive to compete... You are extremely hungry for it.” Freeland said.

For the first time in franchise history, the Rockies have a legitimate No.1 starter, a guy that can go out and get a win any day of the week, regardless of the weather, altitude, pressure or opponent. Being a Cy Young candidate and getting to the postseason for the second consecutive season for the first time in franchise history are excellent accomplishments, but Freeland plans to take his game, and the franchise, to the next level.

“It’s a nice stepping stone for me, hopefully in the right direction, that I can continue to have the success that I had last year and keep my name in that mix of guys,” Freeland said of his season. “Being in this mix of Cy Young, playoffs, World Series, all that.”

Nationally, Freeland has helped change the view of the Rockies’ organization. For the first time, Colorado has demonstrated an ability to not just hit at altitude, but pitch. Freeland has become the front man in changing the narrative that has been attached to the Colorado Rockies since their inception.

“We are going to start highlighting our pitchers and prove that we can win at Coors Field,” said Freeland. “We can pitch at Coors Field, and we can have consistent success with it.”

Colorado is dangerous entering 2019 and beyond. The Rockies are gearing up to put forth the greatest era of baseball the franchise has ever seen, led by the hometown kid and potential hometown hero. The future is a very bright one at 20th and Blake.

As Freeland puts it, “We are looking to go out there and hit somebody in the mouth; shock the world.”

With Kyle Freeland, a local product who was supposed to be a middle infielder, the Rockies’ future is on pace to be the brightest it’s ever been.

I’m a Kyle Freeland guy.

On May 14, 1993, the Colorado Rockies played only the 35th game in team history; Major League Baseball's newest team in baseball was bludgeoned on the road by its oldest in a 13-5 loss to Cincinnati. Starting pitcher Andy Ashby took the loss that night to fall to 0-3; the eight runs he allowed in only 2-2/3 innings doomed the purple-clad newcomers in a game that was over early.

Little did anyone know that the Rockies' evolution from a bumbling, expansion curiosity to a full-fledged, Major League contender began that day.

Back in Denver, little Kyle Richard Freeland came into the world; eventually growing up in a Colorado that had always had a Major League baseball team. For Freeland, unlike every other native older than 25, the Rockies have always been part of the Colorado sports landscape. For Freeland, they're no different than the Nuggets or Broncos; teams founded in the 1960's and so completely integrated into the state's tapestry that it's impossible to unwind them.

Consider: in 1993, John Elway was entering his 11th season as the Broncos' quarterback. Wade Phillips was the head coach of a team still trying to repair their national reputation after being embarrassed in an ever-worsening trio of Super Bowl losses over the seven previous seasons. The Nuggets had just finished another moribund season of their own; sitting out the NBA playoffs that May for the third straight year. Their famous rainbow uniforms weren't retro-cool yet... because they were still wearing them.

That was the Colorado sports world that Freeland was born into; one where the newborn Rockies had as many world championships as the Broncos or the Avalanche — who were still years away from even existing; they were too busy thriving as the Quebec Nordiques in the old Adams Division. A world in which the Rockies' possibilities were as promising as any others in the Centennial State.

That's the way Freeland pitches, by the way — like the Rockies were any other Major League club, rather than an anomalous group of beer-league softball mashers playing in a ridiculous place. Around the slow-to-change baseball world, that's still how the Rockies are perceived; as a fluke, a one-off in a place where baseball shouldn't ever be played, anyway. Rockies fans share a righteous indignation for the treatment of Larry Walker, Todd Helton and Nolan Arenado; all

Hall-of-Fame-caliber players whose careers are too often derided as a creation of Denver's thin air; their bona fides discounted, dissected and spread to the warm summer winds.

It's easier to hit in Denver. There's no way to sugarcoat it. That's why it's much harder for the baseball cognoscenti to ignore the man who's never seen the Rockies that way; they're not just another team – since he was born, they've always been Kyle Freeland's team.

When you're just a kid, tossing baseballs with a grade-school chum at recess, you're not thinking about how the altitude affects spin rate – you're imagining yourself waving to Mom and Dad as you finish off Game 7 of the World Series. Those dreams drive young players; they're not yet thinking about how to win – they're just thinking about winning.

Freeland's numbers as a member of the Rockies leap off the page, of course, but his success isn't about statistics; it's a mindset that makes the second-year hurler into one of the franchise's best-ever pitchers. No, it's not too soon to say that, because what Freeland has brought to the Rockies will outlast his entire career, no matter how long it turns out to be. Freeland isn't the best player on the team – that lofty title still belongs to the sterling Arenado. The lanky lefty doesn't have the best fastball in the Rockies' young rotation – that belongs to wayward, erstwhile “ace” Jon Gray. His breaking stuff isn't, either – ask anyone who's looked foolish striking out against teammate German Márquez; there are plenty to choose from. What Freeland brings is attitude; a never-back-down mentality that forces teammates to keep up... to believe.

His gritty, gutty performance in October's wild-card defeat of the mighty, big-budget Cubs was due more to willpower than firepower; the Rockies' bats went silent in a 13-inning affair, but that didn't deter Freeland. In his first postseason appearance, and on short rest, Freeland outlasted and outdueled the Cubs' Jon Lester (who was making his 26th, mind you) and shut down the Cubs for 6-2/3 thrilling, high-wire innings.

Freeland didn't get to pitch in the National League Division Series loss to the Brewers – the offense that seamheads habitually take for granted went AWOL – but the ripples from his phenomenal 2018 season will be felt for years to come. The Thomas Jefferson High School product has smashed all the preconceptions about pitching in Denver, and will enter 2019 as not only the Rockies' ace, but as a Cy Young contender on a team with postseason expectations.

Just like he always imagined as a boy growing up in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Kyle Freeland, Colorado's native son, is Mile High Sports' Sportsperson of the Year. Purple majesty, indeed.

Rosenthal: Extending Goldschmidt could be difficult; the DBacks' return; a curious move by the Angels; more notes

Ken Rosenthal | TheAthletic.com | Dec 6, 2018

The Cardinals know how to play this game. For more than a decade, they had a knack for signing major trade acquisitions to long-term contracts. Mark McGwire in 1997. Jim Edmonds in 2000. Scott Rolen in '02. Matt Holliday in '09.

The pattern, however, ended with Jason Heyward in 2015, and it will not necessarily resume with Paul Goldschmidt, whom the Cardinals acquired from the Diamondbacks on Wednesday for right-hander Luke Weaver, catcher Carson Kelly, infielder Andy Young and a Competitive Balance Round B draft pick.

Goldschmidt, who is eligible for free agency at the end of the 2019 season, is represented by the same agency as Heyward, Excel Sports Management. Heyward joined the Cardinals entering his walk year, and like Goldschmidt had no previous ties to the organization.

Excel took him to free agency.

The parallels between the two players are not precise — Heyward became a free agent at 26, and Goldschmidt will be one at 32, perhaps making him more open to a contract extension prior to becoming a free agent.

Goldschmidt, though, will be coming off a below-market deal that ultimately will be worth \$46.5 million over six years, including his \$14.5 million club option, which the DBacks exercised for '19. He figures to be the most attractive first baseman in the 2019-20 free-agent class, ahead of José Abreu, who is a year older.

The Cardinals, if they made Goldschmidt a qualifying offer and lost him to another club, would receive a draft pick as compensation.

"Those chances for extensions are consistently overstated," one rival executive said. "It's hard to buy a guy out of free agency, especially when he already signed an extension and now knows he could have made way more in free agency."

Goldschmidt delayed his free-agent rights by two years with his extension, which he signed in March 2013. Without the deal, he would have become a free agent during the 2017-18 offseason, when he was 30 and coming off a season of 36 homers, 120 RBIs and a .966 OPS.

Perhaps Goldschmidt will simply fall in love with St. Louis and happily sign a new deal. But he switched agencies in June 2016, leaving ISE Baseball (formerly Relativity) for Excel. He has been active in the union, serving in the past on the executive board. No one should be surprised if he finally seeks his big payday.

Either way, too soon to judge the return

While one executive asked, "where is the star power?" when assessing the Diamondbacks' return, a number of others were impressed by the work of the Arizona front office, considering that Goldschmidt is under club control for only one more season.

The fact that Weaver, 25, and Kelly, 24, were expendable to the Cardinals does not mean the DBacks acquired dreck; it's more a reflection of the depth of young talent in the St. Louis organization. Likewise, the regressions of Weaver and Kelly last season do not mean that their careers are doomed; young players do not always progress in linear fashion.

The Cardinals' success at churning out pitching talent is perhaps unmatched in the sport, making Weaver's inability to develop a breaking ball somewhat alarming. Still, the DBacks believe Weaver might benefit from their pitching infrastructure, which includes not only pitching coach Mike Butcher, but also pitching strategist Dan Haren, bullpen coach Mike Feters and catching coach Robby Hammock, all former major leaguers.

Weaver also is joining a better defensive club. The losses of Goldschmidt and free-agent catcher Jeff Mathis to the Rangers will diminish the DBacks' defense, but the team ranked first in the majors last season in defensive runs saved while the Cardinals ranked 11th. Like Mathis, John Ryan Murphy is evolving into a top framer, the kind of catcher who helps make pitchers better.

Kelly, a top 100 prospect entering both the 2017 and '18 seasons, stalled in his limited opportunities behind Yadier Molina, who is under contract for two more seasons. His 131 major-league plate appearances have been unevenly distributed. It's difficult to judge him by his .154 batting average and .415 OPS.

The DBacks view Kelly as an above-average defender from both scouting and analytic perspectives. He has minor-league options remaining, but the team likes carrying three catchers and might start incorporating him into their mix next season, along with Murphy and Alex Avila.

The two other pieces in the deal also might have value to Arizona. Young, 24, followed his .950 OPS at Double A with a .936 OPS in the Arizona Fall League, raising the possibility the former 37th-round pick might prove a surprise major leaguer. The draft pick the DBacks will receive currently is No. 78, giving the team eight of the first 93 selections.

A different perspective on LeMahieu

The last thing baseball needs is another statistic, but a recent creation by Baseball Prospectus — Deserved Runs Created (DRC+) — makes a case for free-agent second baseman DJ LeMahieu as a hitter who is not simply a creation of Coors Field.

LeMahieu, like many Rockies players, has significant career splits: .835 at home, .673 on the road. But DRC+ uses a park adjustment that better reflects the influence of a stadium on offense than OPS+ and wRC+, and LeMahieu is a beneficiary.

The metric shows LeMahieu has been an above-average hitter in each of the past three seasons. Combine that with his terrific defense — LeMahieu was second only to Kolten Wong last season in defensive runs saved at second — and his overall package looks even more impressive.

Including the adjustment for DRC+, LeMahieu is first among second basemen the past three seasons in Prospectus' version of Wins Above Replacement, followed by Jose Altuve and fellow free agents Brian Dozier, Daniel Murphy and Ian Kinsler.

The Angels' curious call

Right-handed reliever Blake Parker was one of the more surprising non-tenders last Friday, becoming a free agent after the Angels declined to offer him a contract through arbitration.

Parker, 33, produced a 3.26 ERA in 66 1/3 innings last season, pitching less effectively than he did in his stellar 2017 campaign, but certainly well enough to merit a salary that industry sources projected to be between \$3.3 and \$3.5 million in arbitration.

Under general manager Billy Eppler, the Angels seemingly are not eager to spend on relievers — they lost Jesse Chavez, Bud Norris and Yusmeiro Petit as free agents after the 2017 season (though only Petit was coming off an impressive performance).

But the team's decision on Parker — combined with the availability in trade of outfielder Kole Calhoun, who is signed for \$10.5 million plus a \$1 million buyout in '20 — indicates Eppler's budget might be tight.

Parker is drawing widespread interest as a free agent, according to a source; all five teams from the AL Central have checked in, among many others. His goal likely is a two-year contract that would buy out his remaining arbitration years. A one-year deal might be more realistic, and Parker at least figures to get a number similar to what he would have earned in arbitration.

Around the horn

*According to sources, only \$10 million of left-hander Patrick Corbin's six-year, \$140 million free-agent contract with the Nationals will be deferred until after the deal expires.

That number is considerably lower than the amount the Nats deferred in previous agreements with right-handers Max Scherzer (\$105 million of \$210 million) and Stephen Strasburg (\$70 million of \$175 million).

The Corbin deal also is backloaded. He will receive a salary of \$12.5 million in his first season — along with a signing bonus described as "small" (in relative terms) — and \$19 million in his second. His average annual value of \$23.3 million ranks 29th in major-league history and his total guarantee 38th, according to Cot's Baseball Contracts.

*After completing major trades with the Mets and Phillies, Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto said, "I suspect we'll be generally quiet until we get to the winter meetings," which begin Monday in Las Vegas.

Uh, maybe not.

The Athletic's Jayson Stark reported Wednesday that the Mariners are talking to multiple teams about newly acquired first baseman Carlos Santana.

The Astros, Twins and Rays are among the possible fits for Santana; Derek Falvey, the Twins' chief baseball officer, knows Santana well from their days together with the Indians.

"The Mariners are everywhere," one industry source said. "Santana might be next."

*New Mets GM Brodie Van Wagenen is pursuing Marlins catcher J.T. Realmuto in a trade and talking openly about his interest in center fielder A.J. Pollock as a free agent.

He also is not finished with his bullpen, sources said.

The Mets are maintaining contact with the two top left-handed relievers on the free-agent market, Andrew Miller and Zach Britton. Either could serve as a setup man for new closer Edwin Díaz, though Britton, in particular, might prefer a team that would allow him to close.

*An executive offered unsolicited praise for the ACES agency, which negotiated a six-year, \$108 million contract for Rockies center fielder Charlie Blackmon rather than direct him to the current free-agent market.

"No chance he gets that deal this winter," the exec said.

The contract covers Blackmon's age 32 to 37 seasons at a time when his defense is in decline. Blackmon ranked 35th among center fielders last season in defensive runs saved. His offense also regressed, dropping to .860 after his career-high 1.000 in 2017.

Rockies' mainstay Jerry Weinstein, winner of the 2018 Tony Gwynn Award, is a baseball polymath
The annual lifetime achievement honor is given by Baseball America to someone who's made lasting contributions to the game
Kyle Newman | DenverPost.com | Dec. 5, 2018

Most succinctly described, Jerry Weinstein is a baseball polymath.

Weinstein, a scouting-and-player development assistant for the Rockies, was recently named the winner of the 2018 Tony Gwynn Award by Baseball America. The annual lifetime achievement honor is given to someone who's made lasting contributions to the game.

In addition to a dozen-plus seasons of service with the Rockies, including a stint as Double-A Hartford's manager in 2017, Weinstein has also managed or assisted for various other minor league and Division I teams, the USA Baseball team and Team Israel in the World Baseball Classic. But he said his crowning baseball achievement was the 23 seasons he spent building Sacramento City College into a junior college powerhouse.

"It was a good program when I got in, but we really built it into the way it is, from the ground up," Weinstein said. "We built a \$5 million facility with very little school money as a result of the community, the labor unions and the work of our players. And the fact we had 30-plus big-league players come through there in less than 24 years — it was a perfect storm of the right community and the right level of local interest in the game."

It was at "Sac City" where Weinstein began building a legacy that would eventually earn him the Tony Gwynn Award. The three previous winners were Hall of Fame third baseman Cal Ripken, legendary college baseball coach Augie Garrido and longtime coach/scout Tom Kotchman.

With Friday's non-tender deadline looming, Nolan Arenado and Trevor Story among eight arbitration-eligible Rockies Under Weinstein, the Panthers amassed a 831-208 record (.800) while winning two state titles as well as a national championship in 1998. From that success, Weinstein found a new hardball identity as the Dodgers' director of player development, did it again as an assistant coach at Division I Cal Poly, and then did it again while managing Team Israel to its first WBC appearance in 2017.

All the while, the 75-year-old amassed a devoted following via Twitter, where he's known for detailed analysis on everything from technique to baseball theory.

"I started putting out little excerpts or thoughts from my book on catching (in 2013), and I got all kinds of responses," Weinstein said. "But I didn't just get catching responses — people would DM me about other stuff. So I just started tweeting about whatever baseball stuff came across my head each day and now, when I go out and talk or I meet someone, they go, 'Oh, so you're the Twitter guy?' I laugh and say, 'No, I'm actually a baseball coach.'"

In his current role with the Rockies, Weinstein enjoys the on-field instruction at spring training that he gets to pair with the off-the-field evaluation of amateur prospects done in conjunction with scouting director Bill Schmidt.

Along that vein, who in particular will be atop the radar of the Tony Gwynn Award winner come February at Salt River? He projects that Tyler Nevin, who won the Arizona Fall League batting title with a .426 average, could be Colorado's first baseman of the future.

"If Tyler stays healthy, he's going to be a big impact player," Weinstein said.

Colorado Rockies: Will there be little movement during Winter Meetings?
Aaron Hurt | Roxpile.com | Dec. 6, 2018

“Well ... we’re waiting!!!” As Ted Knight’s character, Judge Smails, eloquently put it in the classic 1980 film “Caddyshack,” Colorado Rockies fans are eagerly waiting for news as other teams begin to make moves as “hot stove” season begins to heat up before the start of the Winter Meetings.

There are quite a few items on the Colorado Rockies’ Christmas list this winter: A right-handed corner bat, a catcher who is actually competent with a bat, a back-end reliever to replace Adam Ottavino (who is likely to depart via free agency), an established starter to solidify the rotation and locking up Nolan Arenado as the face of the franchise for years to come, just to name a few.

As we all wait for general manager Jeff Bridich and the Rockies’ front office to begin wheeling and dealing, the lack of news coming out of Denver is starting to feel oddly familiar.

Flashback a few months ago to July of last season, as the Rockies were in the middle of a playoff race with the trade deadline approaching. The Rockies were facing some of the exact same issues and looked to be possible buyers but little was done to address them. Besides the acquisition of Seunghwan Oh and the signing of Matt Holliday, they stayed relatively quiet. Instead of filling glaring holes on the roster, they watched other teams, especially the Los Angeles Dodgers, pick up key pieces that were crucial to their own playoff runs.

Now, with the Rockies heading into baseball’s Winter Meetings (starting on December 10 in Las Vegas), do not be surprised if they, once again, sit idly by. This is not saying that moves will not be made. It is saying that the moves that many of us are clamoring for the Rockies to make may not come to fruition.

Last season, grumbings for the Rockies to move on from struggling veterans and go with promising prospects fell mostly on deaf ears. Now that some of those key vets having departed, do not be surprised if they finally give the likes of Ryan McMahon, Raimel Tapia, Tom Murphy and others their first real shot at regular playing time instead of making a splash in the free agent market.

So as MLB's hot stove season begins to heat up, lower your expectations as temperatures may just stay the same in Colorado.

**Colorado Rockies: Adam Ottavino on free agency, his “new pitch” from 2018, the playoffs, and more
Noah Yingling | RoxPile.com | Dec. 6, 2018**

MLB Network’s show MLB Now is hosted by Brian Kenny weekdays at 12 PM MT. It has a recurring panel of 2 MLB Network analysts and insiders and one special guest for everyday. On Wednesday, former Rockies reliever Adam Ottavino was that special guest for the entire hour long show and he delved into many different topics.

Adam Ottavino was the special guest on MLB Now on Wednesday (the first of a few days, according to Kenny) and he had a chance to talk about a lot of things during the hour, including the recent signing of Patrick Corbin to the Nationals, the possibility of defensive shifts being banned (you can listen to his thoughts on that here), the Arizona Diamondbacks offseason outlook, and the Robinson Cano/Edwin Diaz trade but in a one-on-one interview with Brian Kenny, he spoke about a number of different concerning himself and the Colorado Rockies.

To lead off the interview, Kenny asked Ottavino about how it’s like being on the free agent market. Ottavino said that he “still feels the same...[but I] wait for my agent to call—talk to him, get the feel [of the market] but ultimately, I know I’ll be playing baseball somewhere next season so [I’m] just try[ing] to enjoy the offseason with my family and do my training.”

Kenny then asked him how often he talks with his agent and Ottavino said that they talk often, if not everyday “just because I like to know stuff and stay in the loop.”

Ottavino was asked about listening to media reports and rumors on him and he said that he listens to them a little bit but he tries to tune it out as much as he can because if his agent doesn’t mention it to him in their conversations, the rumors probably aren’t true.

Ottavino on his “new pitch”

Kenny asked him about his “new pitch” that he developed in 2018, which Ottavino described as a “cutter/hard slider.” He said that he tested it out last spring and struggled with it early but he got more of a feel for it and used it more as the season moved on.

He developed it so it would give him a third pitch to throw in a velocity and movement profile that he didn't have previously. The two other pitches are a fastball/sinker, which averaged at about 94 MPH, and a slider that averaged about 82 MPH. This "cutter/hard slider" was about in the middle at 87 MPH, according to Brooks Baseball.

Ottavino also said that pitchers "creating" different pitches for themselves is starting to become more popular because more tools and technology are available.

"You can look at the pitch tracking devices, the flight dynamics of your pitch, see how they're spinning and how much they're spinning, and then you can go look at it [with] a really high speed camera and see how you are accomplishing that goal and what you're doing it right and what you're doing it wrong and, I think, it takes a person to kind of look in the mirror a little bit and look at their stats and see where there's room for improvement and this is just a way to get to that end."

Ottavino on the postseason

Ottavino said that it was "a little different" in the postseason and that he was "surprised" by it. He said that his emotions and adrenaline level were higher in the Wild Card game.

He said that's part of the reason why he, as you may remember, was so wild in the first inning of his appearance during the Wild Card game in Chicago in 2018. He said that he "felt really good" in the second inning of the Wild Card game but "at the beginning, it was almost like I couldn't throw anything with feel because I was vibrating at, like, such a frequency that you're not accustomed to."

In the Division Series, he talked about how he gave up a walkoff single to Mike Moustakas to end Game 2. He said that Moustakas connected on a fastball, the fourth straight of the at-bat, and he said that while Moustakas wasn't successful with up and away fastballs in that situation throughout the season, Ottavino said he "got a little too caught up in the numbers in that specific at-bat instead of going with a feel there."

You can check out the entire interview [here](#). Also, at the end of the show on Wednesday, Kenny said that Ottavino will be with them for a "few more days" so, presumably, he will be on the show through the end of the week so you can tune in on MLB Network at 12 PM MT.

Cold Takes: Rarefied Air
Patrick Dubuque | BaseballProspectus.com | December 6, 2018

This article is part of the launch for Baseball Prospectus' new hitting statistic, Deserved Runs Created, which you can learn much more about here.

The most exciting part of receiving any new statistic is opening up the leaderboards for the first time. It's a little like getting introduced to really good criticism about a favorite novel or band: Suddenly, everything is slightly recontextualized. You're looking at this familiar, beloved creation from someone else's point of view. There's a cognitive upheaval as these new ideas combine with your old ones, and you have to sort through them, take some in and discard others.

There's a temptation to think that this act of evaluation, this taking and leaving, discredits the exercise entirely. After all, they're numbers: They're either right or they're wrong, like all math. Anything more complicated than that would be obfuscation, the trope of lies, damn lies, etc. It's the same mentality that makes people upset that there are different types of WAR(P) metrics: a number, especially one with a decimal, promises certainty. If there are multiple different numbers, there must be a lie.

It doesn't work that way, really; numbers are just as artistic and opinionated as words. They are words, just with handy single-digit codes. This is evident when you see a two-digit Metacritic score slapped on an art film, or a seven handed down by a Russian judge. Numbers like WARP are reflective of values, and values are individual. Baseball-Reference values a player differently than FanGraphs, in turn differently from Baseball Prospectus. We're all on different paths, usually running side by side, toward the same goal. The development of DRC+ is not an alteration of that value, but an evolution in how we assess the offensive contribution of baseball players, the weights we apply to what happened.

That's the important message, I think. Statistics can represent facts. They don't have to, though; they also represent values. Statistics often tell us how to feel, have always done so. The phrase ".300 hitter" is fairly meaningless as a literal description, but it carries an undying positive connotation. The 3,000-hit club. The four-win player. And, as Hall of Fame voters are now forced to consider, the 15-home run first baseman.

With that in mind, returning to our new leaderboard, the first step is to see what changed, and how we feel about it. Sorting by the new WARP against the old, we find a lot of lightweight shortstops who never struck out and put the ball in play, evidence of DRC+'s more conservative overall distribution curve. On the other end there's Carl Yastrzemski and his 40 years of service in an extreme hitter's park, and a bunch of Colorado Rockies.

Colorado has been the bane of baseball statistics for a quarter century. The offensive numbers that sprung from Coors Field, so shocking when they first appeared, wrapped its first core of hitters in fame: Galarraga, Bichette, Walker, and Castilla all enjoyed multiple All-Star games and earned MVP votes. Then the rest of the world followed suit, and it felt for a time as if Coors Field were everywhere that Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa and Barry Bonds stepped foot. By the time Larry Walker waited his five years to have his career judged, people were sick of the lies, the road splits, and the disastrous pitcher acquisitions, at least subconsciously; his ballot total has peaked at 34.1 percent, with only two years to build momentum.

We thought we'd fixed the Coors Field problem, from an analytical standpoint. Sabermetrics provided us with league- and park-adjusted statistics. They were supposed to pierce through the mirage of Coors Field, and their return: that Walker and Todd Helton are, by numerical standards, perfectly acceptable Hall of Fame candidates. WAR and JAWS both agree. And yet the statistics failed to do their job, not through some error in their formula (though wRC+ has been unduly harsh on Coors Field), but in their charisma. They couldn't shake the common perception of the two sluggers as recipients of thin-air steroids. "Coors" was enough, in one word, to banish all further discussion.

It might be time, with the release of DRC+, to reconsider these deep-set beliefs. Not just about the mile-high air, although park factors are certainly one of the most drastic differences between BP's model of offense and others. But it isn't the only one; low strikeout totals are also rewarded, because unlike conventional statistics, DRC+ awards the batter a small fraction of the benefit of reaching on error by putting the ball in play to be erred on. This benefits both Walker and Helton, who struck out less often than their peers. But there are two major tenets, commonly held among baseball fans and experts alike, that hold fairly well as rough shorthand but lose their value when evaluating careers of 10,000 plate appearances.

They are:

1. A walk is as good as a hit.

It's a little strange for a site like BP to attack this pearl of wisdom, given that the value of walks were for so long a battle cry in baseball analytics. But though for much of baseball history batting average was overrated and on-base percentage conversely underrated, the walk has become so celebrated that the base hit has almost become the underdog. A walk is very nearly as good as a hit, in the sense that both acts accomplish the primary goal of a hitter, which is to avoid making outs. But singles obviously do more than walks: they advance unforced runners, create possibilities for extra bases and errors on the play.

Given two players with .340 on-base percentage, you want the guy batting .310 over the guy hitting .280.

2. Slugging percentage and on-base percentage are basically equal.

This is the sin of OPS, and the result of the number being the first "advanced stat" to reach the mainstream in the modern era. The idea that OBP was the more valuable of the two numbers is hardly new; Bill James decried the problem of OPS decades ago, and also decried it earlier this year.

Bill James Online

@billjamesonline

To a certain extent, the modern game has fallen victim to the OPS delusion, the belief that one point of slugging percentage is equal to one point of on base percentage. It isn't. A good sequential offense is much stronger than a let's-all-hit-homers offense.

It's interesting how we've dealt with this concept. It seems like we understand it most of the time, in most situations: Certainly, we can handle it when we talk about Joey Votto. But Votto has "enough" power that he squeaks past criticism (most of the time ... OK, some of the time in Cincinnati) with his .400 OBP; there seems to be a threshold where a lack of power is no longer acceptable for a first baseman no matter what he's hitting, and post-peak Helton appears to be firmly beneath it.

Again, it comes down to perception. When it comes to the Hall of Fame, most people don't engage in a lot of intellectual rigor; they decide how they feel, and then they hunt for statistics—and the underlying value judgments of those statistics—that support their case. For Helton in particular, this is a problem, because he absolutely needs statistics to make his case. He doesn't feel like a Hall of Famer, in the sense that he lacked the postseason glory or the physique or the power from the first base position to qualify (even though, five minutes later, we'll remember that power is overrated). Helton doesn't look like Harmon Killebrew, even though it turns out he's very nearly as good as Killebrew.

In fact, Killebrew and Helton are almost next to each other on the new WARP leaderboards, near, of all people, Jeff Bagwell:

Name	PA	AVG	OBP	SLG	BRR	FRAA	DRC+	WARP	
Killebrew		9831	.256	.376	.509	-51.4	-77.7	150	76.0
Helton	9450	.316	.414	.539	-31.1	92.9	146	75.0	
Bagwell	9431	.297	.408	.540	+12.0	61.4	145	73.0	

It's illuminating to see how these three different players arrived at the same destination. Killebrew's raw numbers pale, but of course he spent his prime in the inhospitable hitting environment of the 1960s. Helton and Bagwell were almost identical hitters; Helton had the better glove, and Bagwell had the better legs. The Coors Effect still applies, in diminished form, to Helton, but is effectively negated in the slightly better batting average and on-base percentage.

Ultimately, if neither Larry Walker nor Todd Helton make the Hall of Fame, it won't be because of their statistics; it'll be because neither matches the archetypes that we've created for what a great player looks like. Most players, at first glance, don't. This is why the process takes 10 (or, until recently, 15) years for some: their careers don't change, but we evolve our definition of greatness to encompass what they are.

But Coors Field acts like an inhibitor, blocking the signal; it halts the process of consideration before it can even begin. It explains why there's been very little discussion of Helton, even as we begin the evaluation process for other players early, sometimes before they even retire. We don't want to think about Helton, or that purple-tinged jersey. This is, in another

way, a virtue of index stats like DRC+; by covering all of its mechanical parts under the hood, it denies us the opportunity to trigger our own biases. Suddenly it's not about how the player did it, and whether it was the right way. Instead, it just comes down to what he contributed.

DRC+ (and the WARP metric that now encapsulates it) is not a definitive assessment of any ballplayer. It's our best approximation of what a hitter contributes to his team's success, assembled out of weights and measures. But regardless of whether you agree with our conclusions, it should be clear that it's time to stop just saying "Coors." Park factors aren't the only factor. Baseball players can be great in many places, and in so many ways. Sometimes it's our own sense of greatness that requires the adjustment.