



MEDIA CLIPS – April 5, 2018

Gray tosses 7 scoreless, lifts Rox over Padres
By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding_at_mlb
April 5, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- Rockies right-hander **Jon Gray** is not going to be the same guy every time he takes the mound.

Having succeeded in the past by mixing in a somewhat new curveball, and using his slider when he really felt good, Gray mostly utilized his fastball -- especially early -- while pitching seven scoreless innings in the Rockies' 5-2 victory over the Padres at Petco Park on Wednesday night.

Gray needed just 11 pitches, all but one of them four-seam fastballs, in the first inning. The first time through the Padres' order, all but six of his 35 pitches were four-seamers. He decided a few effective sliders were better than always going to them for put-away pitches. Gray held the Padres to four hits, struck out seven and issued no walks, while throwing 93 pitches.

The Rockies are assured at least a split of the four-game set. They can notch a series win and finish their season-opening seven-game road trip with a winning record if they win Thursday afternoon's series finale. 4th, 2018

Gray (1-1), whose torrid second half in 2017 helped the Rockies earn the second National League Wild Card spot, needed to be different from how he pitched Opening Day, when he gave up three runs in the first inning at Arizona and, even though he gave up no further scoring, lasted just four innings.

"We were going right at people, pitching in really well," Gray said. "Establishing the fastball early really helped everything else."

Rockies catcher **Tony Wolters** noted, "His plans are unbelievable." pr. 4th, 2018

Charlie Blackmon celebrated his **new six-year contract** with two singles and two runs in the first two innings -- when the Rockies did all their scoring. The early offense also included an RBI double from **Nolan Arenado**, a two-run double from **Trevor Story** and a two-run single by **Ian Desmond**. All the damage came against Padres starter **Clayton Kershaw** (0-1), who rebounded to pitch five innings and strike out six. 4th, 2018

Rockies manager Bud Black liked the way Gray refused to let the Padres grab momentum after Colorado grabbed the early lead.

"He stayed pretty poised throughout the game in his delivery," Black said. "The fastball had life, good slider. I liked the fact that the curveball came into play as the game went on. The first 25 pitches or so, we didn't see the curveball. Then, it started showing up, and he needs that. We talk a lot about the velocity variance, and that was big for him."

After the struggles in the opener, Gray said he still expected a big season. From his positive bullpen sessions through the matchup with the Padres, there was no hangover.

"It's something that's going to keep rolling if I take the positives from each one of these," Gray said.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

What's the story?: With two men in scoring position in the first, Rockies shortstop Story came to the plate with **Carlos Gonzalez** on deck. The lefty Kershaw opted not to pitch around the right-handed-hitting Story. Instead, Kershaw hung a first-pitch slider to Story who popped a two-run double into the left-field corner, giving the Rockies a 3-0 lead. **Story's two-run double** 00:44Apr. 4th, 2018

Stranded in the sixth: The Padres put two men on base in the bottom of the sixth, the first time they did so. Facing the middle of the Padres' order, Gray responded nicely. He struck out **Eric Hosmer** with a 90-mph slider, then got **Christian Villanueva** -- who homered three times on Tuesday night -- to pop up to the catcher.

GRAY, WOLTERS ESTABLISHING CONNECTION

In his last two Spring Training starts, Gray threw 9 1/3 scoreless innings with seven strikeouts with Wolters catching. In fact, Wolters caught all but one of Gray's Cactus League appearances. Starting catcher **Chris Iannetta** caught Gray on Opening Day, as expected. But those final spring starts and the work Wednesday night suggest that a combo could be in the making, even though Black has never been big on set pairings.

"We were on the same page from the get-go -- we talked about this for a couple of days," Gray said.

Leading up to Wednesday, Wolters noted that the opener didn't affect Gray's demeanor or confidence.

"He's more in the moment," Wolters said. "He's keeping his cool. He's being pitch-to-pitch. He's not thinking too far ahead. He's not thinking what happened in the past.

"Each start, he's building from it. His mechanics are getting so much better, getting to the point where he doesn't have to think about it."

WHAT'S NEXT

Rockies lefty **Tyler Anderson** is out to move past a difficult opener. He threw 71 pitches, while lasting just 2 1/3 innings, in a loss at Arizona, and his frequent pickoff attempts to first base hurt his pace. But he's 1-1 with a 2.00 career ERA vs. the Padres, who he faces Thursday at 1:40 p.m. MT.

Rockies ink Blackmon to 6-year deal
By Thomas Harding MLB.com [@harding_at_mlb](#)
Apr. 4th, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- Center fielder **Charlie Blackmon**'s dedication to his craft has allowed him to improve his game as the years advance. That trait was one of the reasons the Rockies signed him Wednesday to a six-year contract, including two player options, which could keep him in purple pinstripes through the 2023 season.

Colorado Rockies

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Rockies fans, [@Chuck_Nazty](#) has a message for you.

According to Major League sources, the deal is worth \$108 million for six years, but incentives could improve his earnings over that time to \$116 million.

The deal comes after an offseason during which the industry was so leery of contracts extending into players' declining years that many accomplished athletes sat until after Spring Training started, and some are still unsigned. But Blackmon, who turns 32 on July 1, has a performance record that suggests he defies the norm.

"I'm very proud," said Blackmon, an All-Star Game participant in 2014 and last season. "It's really hard to play in the big leagues. It's very hard. For that reason, I think there are a lot of very talented guys that struggle to get the at-bats or the playing time that they need to reach their potential.

"I've been thankful enough to have those at-bats and be able to play enough baseball and keep getting better, and learning more about my body and how to play the game is important. That's part of what drives me."

Blackmon has seen regular jumps in many statistical categories since becoming the Rockies' regular leadoff hitter in 2014, culminating in a National League batting title last season.

2014: .288/.335/.440, 19 home runs

2015: .287/.347/.450, 17 home runs

2016: .324/.381/.552, 29 home runs

2017: .331/.399/.601, 37 home runs

"I'm trying to think of a guy that got so much better as a big leaguer," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "I remember seeing Charlie. He was a fourth outfielder, and he's turned himself into one of the best players in the game.

"Getting to know him like I know him now, there's a reason why this happened. Charlie is a great worker. He's got a great head on his shoulders, all the things you look for in a player, he has."

The Rockies are careful with payroll commitments, having rebuilt with young players. However, signing Blackmon is a statement that they believe not just in the production, but in the person doing the producing.

Colorado Rockies

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Homegrown, and still growing. @Chuck_Nazty

Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich cited "a couple of different reasons" for the Blackmon extension.

"The first, he's one of the elite players in the game now," Bridich said. "He's certainly one of the elite players in the division and in the National League.

"Another fairly obvious reason is that we know him so well. It's a great story to tell. He's been in the organization so long and we've gotten to know him so well. It goes all the way back to scouting and the signing, drafting and signing and developing. And for him performing and becoming the player he's become at the Major League level."

Blackmon signed for \$14 million during the offseason to avoid arbitration, but this deal restructures this year into a \$2 million signing bonus and a \$12 million salary. His salary jumps to \$21 million for each of the next three seasons, and his player option for 2022 is also \$21 million. Blackmon's deal, which includes a \$2 million signing bonus, wraps up with a \$10 million player option for '23.

Blackmon's 2023 salary will increase by \$2 million if he finishes in the top 3 in NL Most Valuable Player Award voting from 2018-22; it will increase by \$1 million if he places fourth or fifth. If Blackmon has between 400 and 575 plate appearances in 2022, he will add \$5 million to his '23 base salary, which can't escalate by more than \$8 million in combined incentives.

Blackmon and the Bridich said the deal was completed before the regular season's opening, which eliminated a potential distraction. Blackmon wanted to find a low-key time to announce it.

Without the contract hanging over his head, Blackmon has hit four home runs, which tied him with the Nationals' **Bryce Harper** for the Major League lead going into Wednesday.

"It was actually not very relaxing leading up to the beginning of the season because there was something of a deadline there," Blackmon said. "But now, with this out of the way, yes, I'm relaxed.

"To be honest, I'm just trying to play baseball, focus on the baseball part. I've been able to do a pretty good job of that."

Blackmon's signing will turn speculation toward third baseman **Nolan Arenado**, who is eligible for free agency after the 2019 season. Blackmon said he talked to Arenado, not in an attempt to negotiate together but "about his future, and how that relates to my future, and I would love for those futures to be together." However, Blackmon said there was no pact, and Bridich said Arenado's potential contract is not connected to Blackmon's.

It has been a long way to come for Blackmon, who was once a struggling, rarely used lefty pitcher at Georgia Tech. He stretched the truth when he told a collegiate summer ball coach, former Major Leaguer Rusty Greer, that he was a hitter as well as a pitcher. Blackmon played well enough as an outfielder for the Rockies to make him a second-round Draft pick in 2008.

"I always felt like I was going to be really good at something," said Blackmon. "I really wanted it to be baseball, and for a long time, I wanted it to be pitching. It turns out, I stink at pitching. Pitchers get hurt a lot. It's hard to pitch in the big leagues. It's hard to pitch in college.

"I'm glad that I was able to make that change and I'm very thankful to be here in this situation."

CarGo makes impressive diving 5-star catch
Rockies right fielder robs hit in third inning Wednesday
By Thomas Harding MLB.com [@harding_at_mlb](#)
April 5, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- At Petco Park, where the late Padres broadcaster Jerry Coleman would see a good play and say, "You can hang a star on that one," Rockies right fielder **Carlos Gonzalez** made a 5-star catch, according to **Statcast™**, in the third inning of Wednesday night's **5-2 win over the Padres**.

Gonzalez dashed inward for **Austin Hedges**' leadoff line drive against Rockies right-hander **Jon Gray** and made a full dive before making an impressive grab. The play had a catch probability of 8 percent, as Gonzalez covered 41 feet in three seconds to rob Hedges.

The Rockies were ahead, 5-0, at the time of Gonzalez's catch.

It was a familiar move by Gonzalez, who has won three National League Gold Glove Awards (2010, '12 and '13).

Gonzalez had three 5-star catches in 2017, per Statcast™.

Jon Gray pitches like an ace as Rockies beat Padres
Manager Bud Black has issued a blunt challenge for his starters to perform better
PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | **The Denver Post**
April 4, 2018

SAN DIEGO — Sometimes, numbers really do tell the story. Well, at least part of it.

In the Rockies' season-opening game at Arizona, Jon Gray needed 30 pitches to escape an unsightly first inning in which the Diamondbacks mugged him for three runs.

Wednesday night, as the Rockies sailed to a 5-2 victory over the Padres at still-chilly Petco Park, the big right-hander needed just 11 pitches in a scoreless first frame — and eight of those were thrown for strikes. By the end of his impressive evening, Colorado's No.1 pitcher had tossed seven scoreless innings, allowing four hits, no walks and striking out seven. He threw 93 pitches, 63 for strikes.

"The difference was aggressiveness," Gray said. "We got a lot more strike ones tonight. We were going at people, going inside, and establishing the fastball early. I think that really helped everything else."

Manager Bud Black has issued a blunt challenge for his starters to perform better. Who could blame him? After all, through the first five games of the season, Colorado starters had a cringe-worthy 6.21 ERA. Gray responded to Black's summons with an ace-like effort as the Rockies improved to 3-3.

"Jon bounced back for sure," Black said. "I was a guy who stayed within his delivery for most of the game. He stayed pretty poised throughout the game within his delivery. His fastball had life, (he had) a good slider. And I liked the fact that the curveball come into play as the game went on."

It helped that the Rockies ambushed San Diego lefty Clayton Richard by scoring five runs in the first two innings, thus providing Gray with a Linus-worthy security blanket from the get-go. Add on a diving catch in right field by Carlos Gonzalez to rob Austin Hedges of extra bases in the third, and a 24-karat play by second DJ LeMahieu on Matt Szczur's liner in the fifth, and Gray was in a comfy place.

“Jon’s a pretty good front-runner, and I like that,” Black said. “Like in a horse race, if you get the lead as a horse, sometimes you finish it. I’ll keep an eye on Jon, but hopefully he’s a good front-runner. He catches the lead and just keeps going.”

Center fielder Charlie Blackmon — he of the freshly-minted, six-year, \$108 million contract — opened the game with a single. LeMahieu followed up with another single and Nolan Arenado drove in Blackmon with a double into the left-field corner. Trevor Story, who’s starting to show that he can be an offensive force in ways he did not early last season, hit a broken-bat double to score LeMahieu and Arenado.

In the second inning, back-to-back two-out singles by Blackmon and LeMahieu, followed by a walk by Arenado, set the table for Ian Desmond. He partially cleared it with a two-run single up the middle. Desmond is batting .421 with a team-high seven RBIs.

Richard, the San Diego veteran, got ripped for five runs on eight hits, and he also walked three.

After his poor performance vs. the D-backs in the opener, Gray vowed that that game would not carry over into his next start, or into the season. He was right.

“I am feeling more comfortable every time out, so I think that has a lot to do with it, ” he said. “It’s just something that is going to keep rolling if I take the positives from each one of these. If we keep taking steps forward, I think things will be looking really good for this season.”

Lefty Jake McGee took over for Gray in the eighth and allowed two runs (one earned) on a hit and a walk and his own miscue covering the first-base bag before Bryan Shaw finished out the frame. Closer Wade Davis finished the game and earned the save, his third of the year.

Colorado’s offense went into hibernation after Desmond’s double, but the early onslaught was more than enough to carry the Rockies to victory.

The Rockies will attempt to win the third game of the four-game series Thursday afternoon at Petco Park, before heading home to Denver for Friday’s possibly snowy home opener at Coors Field.

Kiszla: By signing Charlie Blackmon, Rockies sent a message to Nolan Arenado: Please don't leave. There can be no World Series parade in Denver, unless both Arenado and Blackmon are leading it.
MARK KISZLA | mkiszla@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
April 4, 2018

You can call him Chuck Na\$ty now. You can also call Charlie Blackmon a Rockie for life.

The Rockies on Wednesday proved that their stated goal of winning a World Series is more than cheap talk. They showed Blackmon the love tonight and every night for at least another four seasons, and perhaps all the way through 2023. The best leadoff hitter in the major leagues has agreed to terms of a new contract that will guarantee Blackmon in excess of \$100 million.

Wowza. It's Charlie Blackmon. Yes! He's here.

What does it all mean? Two things:

No offense to quarterback Case Keenum, but our gritty little local baseball club just trumped the Broncos with the biggest, boldest sports deal in Colorado this year.

And the Rockies must really, really want to show superstar third baseman Nolan Arenado that it's worth hanging around Denver to chase a championship, rather than bolt for greener pastures when he's eligible to be a free agent after the 2019 season.

After sending a congratulatory text to Rockies owner Dick Monfort, offering kudos for making a major commitment to his 31-year-old star outfielder, I asked what, if any impact, it might have on contract negotiations with Arenado down the road. "We are hopeful this will help with Nolan wanting to stay," Monfort said.

Well, well, well. Look at the Rockies. They are all grown up, and serious about winning a championship.

For years, I have screamed and stomped my feet, questioning whether the Monfort family ownership had a strong enough appetite or pockets sufficiently deep to compete with the Los Angeles Dodgers for supremacy in the National League West, much less make it back to the World Series without the unexpected blessing of a Rocktober miracle. So it's only fair I salute the franchise for backing its championship dreams with cold, hard cash.

Colorado recently spent \$100 million to add closer Wade Davis and accomplished set-up man Bryan Shaw, as well as retain left-handed veteran Jake McGee, to construct a bullpen built to withstand the rigors of October baseball. And now the Rockies have doubled down, betting another \$100 million that Blackmon can continue playing at an all-star level into his mid-30s.

While money buys no guarantee the Rockies will earn a playoff bid in back-to-back seasons for the first time in team history, general manager Jeff Bridich has obviously convinced Davis and Blackmon, who could get paid anywhere in the big leagues, that they can win in the thin air of Colorado.

"I want to be on a good team, and I think I'm on a good team. Had we not been a good team, or not had the foundation in which I felt like we could be successful in the future, I don't think I would have chosen to stay here in Colorado, as much as I like it," said Blackmon, who was set to become a free agent after this season but decided instead to stay put in Denver.

After being lovable losers for much of the 25 years the Rockies have been in existence, the team is finally getting down to the business of proving it means business, not only to a loyal fan base, but especially to Arenado, who might well be worth \$300 million if he hits the open market in 18 months.

From fortifying the bullpen to bringing back the infectious smile of Carlos Gonzalez to the clubhouse, much of what the Colorado front office has done recently has been a not-so-subtle message to Arenado that the team wants to keep him happy.

When the Rockies announced they had reached terms with Blackmon, there was a brief moment of panic, wondering whether the team had decided to make Chuck Nasty the face of the franchise in preparation for the possibility of losing Arenado to free agency in his prime.

No need to worry.

Signing Blackmon, it appears, was actually another love letter to Arenado, sealed with a \$100 million kiss.

Maybe the Rockies know: There can be no World Series parade in Denver, unless both Arenado and Blackmon are leading it.

Nolan Arenado thrilled about Charlie Blackmon's new deal, not concerned about his own contract
Bud Black: "I'm excited for Charlie. I'm excited for the organization. I'm excited for the fans."
PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | **The Denver Post**
April 4, 2018

SAN DIEGO — Nolan Arenado quickly dismissed the question, and then steered back to Wednesday's hot topic in the Rockies' clubhouse: outfielder Charlie Blackmon's new, six-year, \$108 million contract.

"I'm very happy for Charlie," said the all-star third baseman, who's in the second year of a two-year, \$29.5 million deal

"He's worked extremely hard, both on the field and off the field, and to see that pay off for him with this contract is pretty remarkable. It's a great thing. He's a great person and a great player and it's well deserved."

The looming question, of course, is how Blackmon's signing might affect Arenado's future with the Rockies. Arenado is scheduled to become a free agent after the 2019 season and will likely get a contract much larger than Blackmon's. The question is whether the Rockies can afford to pay both players.

"Honestly, I didn't think about that," Arenado said. "I'm not thinking about that right now, I'm just trying to focus on baseball. That's not my concern right now. I would rather not negotiate during the season.

"I'm happy for Chuck, and it's not about me, it's about him. I didn't really put me and him together with it."

General manager Jeff Bridich echoed Arenado.

"This has nothing to do with Nolan Arenado. This is all about Charlie Blackmon," Bridich said. "They are teammates, but they are obviously different people. So there is no relationship there at all. This is all about Charlie, and we were thrilled that we were able to get this done."

Second baseman DJ LeMahieu, Blackmon's close friend, was also thrilled for his former roommate, but he's aware that their time together as teammates is likely coming to an end. LeMahieu also is a free agent after this season and there have been no indications the Rockies will attempt to re-sign him.

"No, there have been no talks and I don't think there will be," LeMahieu said.

Manager Bud Black can now count on Blackmon being a force in his lineup for the foreseeable future.

“I’m trying to think of a guy that gotten so much better as a big leaguer,” Black said. “I remember seeing Charlie. He was a fourth outfielder, and he’s turned himself into one of the best players in the game.

“Getting to know him like I know him now, there’s a reason why this happened. Charlie is a great worker. He’s got a great head on his shoulders, all the things you look for in a player, he has.”

Negotiations for the new deal with Blackmon began near the end of February and were completed on the final day of spring training. Black kept close tabs, hopeful that a deal would get done.

“I knew it was in the works,” Black said. “I feel great about it. I’m excited for Charlie. I’m excited for the organization. I’m excited for the fans. I think this is where Charlie wanted to be.

“Denver and Charlie go hand-in-hand. With this one, it’s a good one for us as a group — those of us in uniform, down here in the clubhouse. Charlie’s excited, super-happy to be here. So I think it’s a good one.”

Here are the biggest contracts in Rockies history:

SS Troy Tulowitzki: 10 years, \$157.75 million (Nov. 10, 2010)

1B Todd Helton: 11 years, \$151.5 million (April 4, 2003)

LHP Mike Hampton: 8 years, \$121 million (Dec.12, 2000)

OF Charlie Blackmon 6 years, \$108 million (April 4, 2018)

OF Carlos Gonzalez: 7 years, \$80 million (Jan. 3, 2011)

OF Larry Walker: 6 years, \$75 million (extension, prior to 1999 season)

OF/1B Ian Desmond: 5 years, \$70 million (Dec. 7, 2016)

— *Patrick Saunders, The Denver Post*

Looking ahead

Rockies LHP Tyler Anderson (0-0, 27.00 ERA) vs. Padres LHP Joey Lucchesi (0-0, 5.79), 1:40 p.m.

Thursday; ATTRM, 850 AM

After a poor spring training, Anderson came out pitched poorly in his first start, allowing five first-inning runs in a 9-8 loss at Arizona. Ultimately, he never made it out of the third inning, getting tagged with seven runs on five hits, with four walks. Anderson is not an overpowering pitcher, so fastball location is paramount for the left-hander. When he has it, and when he gets ahead in counts, his changeup comes into play and he can be very effective. When his fastball command is off, he becomes much easier to hit. It's fair to say that Anderson needs a solid outing, because he's on a short leash.

Lucchesi, one of the Padres' bright young prospects, struggled through the first inning of his big-league debut last Friday, but then settled down to pitch reasonably well. He gave up three runs on seven hits over 4 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. He's a strikeout artist, who was a surprise addition to the 25-man roster. He posted a 1.79 ERA over 60 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings with Double-A El Paso last season.

Friday: Braves RHP Brandon McCarthy (1-0, 3.38 ERA) vs. Rockies RHP German Marquez (0-0, 0.00), 2:10 p.m., ATTRM

Saturday: Braves TBA vs. Rockies RHP Chad Bettis (1-0, 3.60), 6:10 p.m., ATTRM

Sunday: Braves LHP Sean Newcomb (0-1, 10.38) vs. Rockies Kyle Freeland (0-1, 6.75), 1 p.m., ATTRM

Charlie Blackmon, Colorado Rockies agree to a six-year, \$108M contract
Blackmon, 31, won the National League batting title last season
PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
April 4, 2018

SAN DIEGO — The Rockies are putting their faith in Charles Cobb Blackmon, the wild-bearded, 31-year-old who has forged himself into one of baseball most impactful players.

The club on Wednesday announced it had signed the two-time all-star center fielder to a six-year contract worth \$108 million. It includes two player options, which could keep him with the Rockies through the 2023 season. Negotiations began in February.

“There are so many things to like,” Blackmon said, explaining why he chose to sign with the Rockies now rather than test the free agent market after this season. “I really like the people in the organization. I love my teammates. You can’t pick a better place to play. It’s a beautiful place. And the fan base itself is just super welcoming. It’s a really great group of people.”

And then, of course, there is the money, but don’t expect Blackmon to splurge and replace his beat-up, 2004 Jeep Cherokee Laredo anytime soon.

“I’m going to get some new tires,” he said.

The contract guarantees Blackmon \$108 million through 2023 with potential incentives worth \$8 million more, according to a major-league source. The contract includes two player opt-out clauses, in 2022 and 2023. The deal kicks in immediately, effectively replacing his 2018 contract. He will make \$14 million this season, then \$21 million per year through 2022 and then \$10 million in 2023, according to the source.

For general manager Jeff Bridich, the deal was made with the belief that Blackmon has a lot of quality baseball left.

“There were a lot of different reasons we did this,” Bridich said. “The first, he’s one of the elite players in the game now. He’s certainly one of the elite players in the division and in the National League. Another fairly obvious reason is that we know him so well. It’s a great story to tell. It goes all the way back to scouting and then signing, drafting and developing Charlie.”

A second-round draft choice out of Georgia Tech in 2008, Blackmon battled his way up to the Rockies by 2011, but then he fractured his right foot that summer. He didn't become a full-time Rockies outfielder until the second half of the 2013 season. He became an all-star in 2014.

Bridich said the Rockies invested in Blackmon because of his talent and professionalism.

"It's the way he's gone about his business, the pro that he is, the true professional that he is and his constant search for excellence," Bridich said. "It's about his conviction, his self-control, his discipline, and his ability to put everything he's got into his profession."

Blackmon won the National League batting title last season with a .331 average and finished fifth in MVP voting. He hit 37 home runs and drove in 104 runs. His 103 RBIs and 383 total bases from the leadoff spot were both big-league records.

He turns 32 on July 31, and Bridich admitted that age was a consideration in whether to hand out the huge contract.

"We trust that he is going to continue to do what he is doing and what he has done," Bridich said. "Is there risk involved? Sure. But there is risk involved any time you do a long-term contract, no matter what age it starts and ends."

Now that Blackmon is in the fold, the Rockies face another major contract decision in the near future. Five-time Gold Glove third baseman Nolan Arenado is scheduled to become a free agent after the 2019 season and is expected to command a salary possibly approaching \$300 million, depending on its length. Bridich said signing Blackmon has no bearing on possible negotiations with Arenado.

Blackmon said he and Arenado have talked, a little bit, about a possible future together in Colorado.

"I didn't tell a whole lot of people. I did not want to create distractions," Blackmon said. "I did speak to Nolan a little bit in spring training about his future, and how that relates to my future, and I would love for those futures to be together.

"I think he's a very important part of this team. I would love to see Nolan around for a long time. But we didn't specifically talk about 'Hey, what if I do this, you do that?' We didn't play that game."

The Rockies chose to make Blackmon's contract announcement on the road, without a lot of hoopla. The two sides came to an agreement at the end of spring training.

"It finally got to the point that Charlie was ready to do this and he wanted a little bit more of a subdued announcement," Bridich said. "That was more fitting with his style and what he was comfortable with."

Blackmon was glad to have the negotiations complete before the regular season started so that he could concentrate on baseball. The plan seems to have worked. His four home runs through four games are tied for the most in the National League, and he's batting .316 with a team-high six RBIs.

"It was actually not very relaxing leading up to the beginning of the season because there was something of a deadline there," Blackmon said. "But now with this out of the way, yes, I'm relaxed. To be honest, I'm just trying to play baseball, focus on the baseball part. I've been able to do a pretty good job of that, I think."

Blackmon added that a big factor to signing the long-term deal was the faith the Rockies will be a competitive team going forward.

"I want to be on a good team, and I think I am on a good team," he said. "Had we not been a good team, or not had the foundation in which I felt like we could be successful in the future, I don't think I would have chosen to stay here in Colorado, as much as I like it.

"Or at least it would have been a very tough decision. But I think we have what it takes to be good for years to come."

25 years of (Major League) Baseball in Colorado: How the Rockies forever changed Denver
By Shawn Drotar | Mile High Sports
April 5, 2018

On Friday, the Colorado Rockies are scheduled to open the home portion of their 2018 season at Coors Field... and in Denver, it's expected to snow. To much of the country, snow seemed like reason enough to keep Major League Baseball away from Denver for its first 124 years, but baseball in Colorado actually pre-dates the major leagues, and love for the sport runs deep in the Centennial State.

From the first Colorado sports champion — the 1886 Denver Mountain Lions, who won the Western League — to Broadway Park and the African-American Denver White Elephants, and on to Merchants Park and the barnstorming days of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Satchel Paige, baseball has run through Colorado's blood for almost as long as it's been a state.

The minor-league Denver Bears/Zephyrs counted many of baseball's future stars among its ranks — future Hall of Famers Tim Lincecum, Andre Dawson, Phil Niekro and Barry Larkin, fan favorites Johnny Pesky, “Marvelous” Marv Throneberry and Bob Uecker, future managerial greats Tony LaRussa, Tom Lasorda and Terry Francona (legendary Yankees manager Billy Martin's first job as a skipper came with the Bears in 1968), and even a young string bean named Gary Sheffield, wagging his bat and playing *shortstop* — fans have watched them all come through town, keeping generations involved with the game, even at arm's length from the major leagues.

Children in Colorado have always gone out into parks and fields and thrown the hardball around like kids all over the country; putting 'ghost runners' on base in an imaginary bottom of the ninth where they've become their favorite major leaguer — but only this most recent generation has grown up imagining themselves as players for the *hometown* team.

The Rockies were 'born' in 1991, when Major League Baseball announced expansion franchises in Colorado and Florida, and started play in 1993 (meaning that the Rockies' 25th anniversary will actually celebrate their 26th season), where hometown fans instantly fell in love — Eric Young made sure of that.

The Rockies obliterated attendance records in Mile High Stadium — which, ironically, began its life as Bears Stadium in 1948, 12 years before the Denver Broncos would come into existence. The famed South Stands were originally built in the 1950's as an enticement to lure a big-league team to Denver. The unexpected enthusiasm led to changes in the plans for Coors Field, which added the right-field stands in response — the top of that level is now the popular and unique 'Rooftop'.

At the time, building at 20th and Blake Street sounded ludicrous to Denverites, who couldn't imagine the dilapidated railway area becoming a hot spot for baseball. They couldn't have been more wrong: Coors Field would immediately begin to re-invent Denver from the inside out.

The 1994 season ended on August 12, when baseball's owners locked the players out during a financial squabble, canceling the World Series and accelerating the eventual demise of the Montreal Expos, who were baseball's best team with a 74-40 record and an array of superstars, one of which would factor prominently into Rockies history... more on that later.

Baseball's popularity sank like a stone across the country, and when Coors Field opened to the public in 1995, it was for an exhibition game between the Yankees and the Rockies — both teams used replacement players in a game that's been all but washed away from collective memory. After the Supreme Court stepped in and reversed the owners' lockout on March 31, clubs hastily arranged an abbreviated Spring Training and began the season on April 26. In Coors Field's 'official' debut, the Rockies toppled the Mets 11-9 in a chilly, 14-inning spectacle that ended with Dante Bichette's home run and iconic fist pump.

The Rockies would go on to make their first postseason appearance in the abbreviated season, and give birth to the "Blake Street Bombers" — Bichette, Andres Galarraga, Vinny Castilla and Larry Walker — a nickname that came to symbolize the team itself to this very day. The Expos, who were decimated financially by the lockout, had to slash payroll and allowed Walker to reach free agency. The Rockies signed him to a four-year, \$22.5 million contract — the biggest post-strike contract in baseball at the time. Walker, who's name is still littered across nearly all of the Rockies' all-time

records, went on to become the best all-around player in team history; only longtime first baseman Todd Helton and current third baseman Nolan Arenado even come close.

A cavalcade of talented players and entertaining teams has followed since. The “Rocktober” team of 2007 won the club’s first and only National League pennant in an extraordinary run of play that may never be duplicated in the majors — and no one will ever know for sure if Matt Holliday touched the plate. Another postseason appearance followed in 2009, and it wasn’t until last season that the Rockies would get there again; an all-too-brief, one-game cameo appearance that has led to sky-high expectations for the 2018 campaign.

The nature of baseball — played almost daily thanks to its 162-game schedule, has the benefit of the summer; a powerful enticement to go out to the park for an evening... and out on the town both before and after the game. As the Rockies wove themselves into the fabric of Colorado life after moving into Coors Field, the rebirth of one of Denver’s most historic neighborhoods began, spurred by tens of thousands of fans walking its streets every day — all looking for their own unique, enjoyable experience in ‘Lower Downtown’, which came to be known as ‘LoDo’.

The district’s vibe — upscale and fresh with one eye fixed on the future, and the other dutifully respecting Denver’s pioneer history — became the defining feature of the entire city. In the more than two decades that followed the Rockies’ arrival in ‘LoDo’, dozens of neighborhoods, districts and boroughs have fallen under the spell; each trying (rather successfully) to artfully mimic the historic-but-hip energy.

Today, Denver — one of the most-desired cities in America, and one that struggles with its explosive growth — is characterized almost entirely by the ‘LoDo’ style. Whether it’s the new restaurant you love, the bar you frequent, or even that trendy, retro loft you’re trying to find a way to afford, ‘LoDo’ is Denver now — the offshoot of a baseball team named after Colorado’s rocky crown of ‘fourteeners’, and wearing the purple immortalized by the ‘mountain majesties’ of Katherine Lee Bates’ “America the Beautiful”, penned upon the summit of Pikes Peak in 1893.

In 1893, the troubled Western League didn't finish its season, leaving the 1888 Denver Mountain Lions as its defending champs. On Nov. 20 of that same year, the league reorganized under president Ban Johnson, and still exists today... as Major League Baseball's American League.

Baseball runs through Denver's blood, and for the last 25 years, baseball has reinvented Denver itself. The great Rogers Hornsby famously said, "People ask me what I do in winter when there's no baseball. I'll tell you what I do. I stare out the window and wait for spring." Fortunately for today's residents, there's plenty to do in Colorado during its Currier-and-Ives winters; picturesque days that can be forgiven when they overstay their welcome and intrude upon the spring.

The snow may overstay its welcome on Friday, and if it does, you can expect the same gnashing of teeth and flapping of gums from talking heads around the nation who will poke fun of the weather; trying to find a way to insinuate that Denver — somehow — isn't 'a baseball town'.

But we know better. We've known better for 130 years — and in the last quarter-century that the Rockies have been in Colorado, Denver's done something extraordinary. In a city that has quite literally reshaped itself to fit its team, Denver is now, almost by definition, America's truest 'baseball town'.

Let's play ball.

Jon Gray dominates Padres; Charlie Blackmon delivers on payday
By Casey Light – Mile High Sports
April 4, 2018

Charlie Blackmon said thank you to the Rockies quickly and efficiently (does he know any other way) after announcing a contract extension earlier in the day. Meanwhile, Jon Gray was as efficient as ever at Petco Park, where he's quickly establishing a home away from home dominance. The Rockies cruised to a 5-2 win in game three of a four-game series in San Diego on the backs of those performances.

In Blackmon's first at-bat as a \$100-million man, he logged a base hit and scored a run. Blackmon led off Wednesday's contest with a single, then came around to score after a single by DJ LeMahieu and a double by Nolan Arenado, just hours after news broke that he had signed a contract extension with the Rockies that could keep him in Colorado through 2023. Rockies fans, no doubt, are hoping the first innings of LeMahieu and Arenado — who are free agents in 2019 and 2020 respectively — are harbingers of similar long-term deals to come. After their hits, Trevor Story drove both in with a one-out, ground-rule double off Clayton Richard.

Blackmon and LeMaheiu strung together back-to-back hits again in the top of the second, this time with two outs. Arenado didn't get to drive them in this time, though, as Richard (0-1, 4.50 ERA) offered him a free pass after running the count to 1-1 against the three-time Silver Slugger. Ian Desmond made Richard pay, driving a single to center that scored Blackmon and LeMahieu to run the score to 5-0. Blackmon and LeMahieu each ended the night 2-for-5 with two runs scored.

While Rockies fans were dreaming of a future where Blackmon, LeMahieu and Arenado lead Colorado to multiple World Series, Gray (1-1, 2.45) was quietly reminding them that those offensive stars will need his help to make that happen. The big right-hander on Wednesday aimed to bounce back from a rocky Opening Day start in Arizona and did so by cruising through the first four innings, allowing just one hit over that span — a single by Cory Spangenberg.

Spangenberg also earned San Diego's second hit of the night, a leadoff double in the fifth. LeMahieu gave Gray a big defensive boost in the inning, snaring a sinking Matt Szczur liner in the hole between first and second. The play held Spangenberg at third, after he had advanced on a Freddy Galvis ground out.

After striking out Colorado native Chase Headley to open the sixth, Gray hit Jose Pirela on the elbow. Carlos Asuaje singled to give San Diego their first real threat of the night, but Gray buckled down to strike out Eric Hosmer and get Christian Villanueva to foul out to catcher Tony Wolters. Villanueva was 0-for-3 against Gray after hitting a career-high three home runs and five RBIs one night prior in an 8-4 Padres win.

Gray ended the night with seven shutout innings and seven strikeouts, scattering just four hits and walking none. Gray entered the game with a 40:8 strikeout-to-walk ratio and a 3.21 ERA at Petco Park over his previous 28 innings there.

Reliever Jake McGee spoiled the shutout in the eighth, allowing a one-out walk to Pirela followed by an Asuaje single just past the glove of a diving Story. McGee induced a potential double-play ball on Hosmer, who chopped a ball deep to defensive replacement Ryan McMahon at first base, but the pitcher got crossed up covering first base and Pirela scored as the ball sailed past him. Hosmer then scored on a Hunter Renfroe line-drive single up the middle off Bryan Shaw, who relieved McGee.

San Diego's two runs in the eighth called for Rockies closer Wade Davis in the ninth. Davis walked Galvis to start the inning, but got a flyout and double play to earn his third save of the year.

The win levels Colorado's record at 3-3. San Diego falls to 1-5. Colorado leads the four-game series 2-1 through three.

UP NEXT: Tyler Anderson (0-0, 27.00) will try to secure the series win for Colorado in an afternoon affair. Like Gray, Anderson is seeking redemption from a rough first outing. He will face Joey Lucchesi (0-0, 5.79). First pitch is 1:40 p.m. MDT.

Contract extension could make Charlie Blackmon a Rockies lifer
Immediate reactions to the Rockies signing Chuck Nasty through 2021
By Adam Peterson | Purple Row
Apr 4, 2018

It was just an idle Wednesday with a late-night West Coast game on the schedule. That meant a lot of killing time before actually getting to watch Rockies baseball, still about seven hours in the future. Maybe peruse Twitter a little. Maybe think about which shade of purple to wear this weekend.

But then, out of no where, this came along.

Colorado Rockies

✓ @Rockies

All-Star. Silver Slugger. Batting Champion. Leader. Rockie.

We have agreed to terms with Charlie Blackmon on a six-year contract, including two player options, which could keep him with the club through the 2023 season.

Twitter Ads info and privacy

This wasn't expected at all, but to say it wasn't welcome would be to mischaracterize the Rockies fanbase dramatically. There will be plenty of time to breakdown the terms of the deal and what it means for the roster now and in the future. For now, here are a few thoughts arranged in no particular order.

The Rockies are in win-now mode

Teams don't often give out long contract extensions to pending free agents unless they sincerely believe those pending free agents are crucial to their continued success. The fact that Blackmon is 31 years old and has displayed some Coorsian home-road splits may have caused other teams to balk at a nine-figure deal over six years.

But the Rockies aren't worried about the end of that deal right now. They are coming off their first playoff appearance in nearly a decade and were facing the prospect of having their leadoff man and MVP candidate centerfielder walk away in

free agency. Apparently that wasn't a risk they were willing to take. The Rockies are built to win right now. By securing Blackmon for the next four to six years, they may be able to keep that window open just a little bit longer.

Charlie Blackmon was motivated to make a deal

When Charlie signed a one-year, **\$14 million contract to avoid arbitration** in January, there was an inkling that it might be just the start. Did he see the **slow free agent market this winter** and decide he didn't want to take his chances as an outfielder on the far side of 30? Does he truly love playing in Colorado as much **as he says he does**? Is he thinking this is a team that has the proper reinforcements to contend now and in the future? Probably.

This seems like a good deal for both sides

Taken together, this seems like a classic case of both sides wanting to get a deal done. Maybe that's why, **as Craig Calcaterra hinted**, Blackmon switched to an agency that has been known for "getting good long term deals for players who want to stay with their current clubs (e.g. **David Wright**, **Dustin Pedroia**)." And the terms of the deal don't seem to be so outrageous as to be considered an overpay or underpay—at least at first glance and without the benefit of hindsight.

The Monfort's have been at the center of ire among Rockies fans for a while now. Give them—and GM Jeff Bridich—**credit for getting this deal done**.

The Rockies get to keep a fan favorite and leader around

If we took a poll of everyone's favorite current Rockies player, there's no doubt in my mind that Charlie Blackmon would finish at least in second place. Even as much as we all love watching **Nolan Arenado** do everything awesome, Charlie might even surpass him due to his eccentricities. There are plenty of people across the Rocky Mountain region celebrating this news because it means they get to see Charlie spray baseballs across the Coors Field outfield and rob home runs for the next half-decade plus, but also because they get to root for **their beloved Chuck Nasty**.

This is to say nothing about what Charlie means in the clubhouse. His leadership has been noted by many but played a crucial role for **Jon Gray after last year's Wild Card Game**.

More extensions might be coming

With Charlie now inked to a long-term deal, it begs the question: Who is next? It's no secret that this Rockies clubhouse is a **pretty tight bunch**. Arenado has, like Charlie, made comments about wanting to be in Denver for a long time. Next year is his last year of arbitration before he becomes a free agent. It's difficult to underestimate what this deal says to Nolan. It very well could convince him to sign up for the long haul as well. But you can be sure that if/when that happens, it will come just as expectantly as this one.

Colorado Rockies: The top 25 players under 25 years old
Jake Shapiro | Rox Pile
April 5, 2018

Last season, Drew Creasman, my former colleague at BSN Denver, and I started a 25 Colorado Rockies players under 25-years-old list. You can view last year's list [here](#) and please check out Drew's work because he is a very good follow for Rockies information.

This list was released today in conjunction with Minor League Opening Day. Happy Opening Day!

This list is not a clear prospect list, meaning it operates differently than others, so here are the parameters:

1. The list was created entirely by me and my sources, with some input from Creasman and other media members.
2. While giving credit for overall (or trade) value, there is a priority put on an ability to help the MLB club win immediately.
3. In accordance with this, there is also a priority on players with fewer question marks but potentially lower ceilings.
4. Statistics were considered with a skew towards level and information regarding such statistics with scouting reports in addition to some field reporting being added into the equation.
5. The player must be 25 or younger on Opening Day 2018.

Honorable Mentions

The Rockies have a very young core. Jon Gray and Nolan Arenado just graduated from this list but there are still many players already in the Majors or Major League-ready on this list. That means many good quality prospects who will impact the organization in the coming years.

These are the players that just missed the list and a small piece of information about them (listed alphabetically):

Willie Abreu: Left-handed 23-year-old right fielder with a big 6-foot-4, 225-pound frame. He will start this season with High-A Lancaster. Last season, he slashed .283/.321/.463 with 14 home runs and 78 RBI at Single-A Asheville. The 2016 sixth-round pick from the University of Miami is someone to watch on the farm in 2018.

Ben Bowden: The 2016 second round pick from Vanderbilt was near MLB-ready when drafted from Vanderbilt. The big lefty could be a very good big league reliever if he gets healthy. He missed the entire 2017 season and it's currently unclear where he stands within the organization.

Omar Carrizales: The center fielder's first full season at Double-A Hartford was not terrific or horrible. He was very impressive in 2016 at High-A Modesto. He has played in the Venezuelan Winter League the past two seasons and this could be his make-or-break season with the Rockies as he's Rule Five eligible after the season.

Parker French: He just turned 25 and he is headed back to Hartford for the second straight season. The left-handed throwing French never had an ERA over 3.72 at any level in the minors. That was until last year where he was 8-11 with a 6.37 ERA and a strikeout rate and walk rate that went in the wrong direction. There is still hope for him and his repeat year may go way better, which could push the Longhorn through the system quickly.

Josh Fuentes: The 25-year-old corner infielder is the forgotten part of the Arenado family. In two straight seasons, the right-handed hitting California native has hit .307 as he rose to High-A in 2016 and spent all of 2017 in Double-A. Smacking 15 homers and 72 RBI, Fuentes had a very impressive year which he parlayed to nearly 200 at-bats in the Mexican Winter League. He starts the year in Triple-A Albuquerque but is unlikely to make the Majors this season.

David Hill: The fourth-round pick in 2015 draft out of Cal State Long Beach did not pitch in 2017. His last playing time came with the Tourists in 2016 where he was pretty solid in 14 starts. If he gets healthy, the 23-year-old is someone to watch.

Mike Nikorak: [Rox Pile wrote about him earlier this week.](#) The 27th pick in 2015 draft is only 21 years old and has a ton of high-end potential. He has yet to get out of rookie ball and is currently recovering from Tommy John.

Wes Rogers: The 24-year-old right-handed outfielder is a speed demon. Stealing 70 bases for the High-A playoff-bound Lancaster JetHawks, he also slashed .319/.377/.488 with 82 RBI. He could make the big leagues this year just based on speed but he'll work on his game this year starting in Double-A.

Chad Spanberger: The big Razorback who played first base for Rookie-level Grand Junction last year. He OPS'd .985 with 19 homers and 51 RBI in 60 games. He's a long ways away but it looks like he can hit.

Robert Tyler: Another pitcher with a lot of potential, who did not throw in 2017. The 2016 first-round pick out of Georgia disappointed in his first five pro outings at High-A before being shut down. Tyler will start 2018 at Single-A Asheville.

Forrest Wall: For the third straight year, the 2014 first round pick will start at High-A. It looked like the now 22-year-old second baseman turned outfielder had finally figured it out. He suffered a season-ending shoulder injury. He was once a top 100 prospect in the game and grew up in Florida playing middle infield with Rockies top prospect Brendan Rodgers. This is a huge year for Wall and, if he gets right, the Rockies farm system may have its next top prospect.

Colorado Rockies: Why there's room for error with this team
by Olivia Greene | Mile High Sports
April 4, 2018

Baseball has been back for just a few days or so and we're already starting to see things we didn't see last year. For the Colorado Rockies, the start of the season has been a little rough as shown by a 2-3 record. However, it's still early, and with the way things are looking right now, the Rockies have plenty of room for error.

If you take a look at the National League West right now, you will automatically know something is off. Well, everything besides the San Diego Padres being 1-4. That's actually the only normal thing. The Los Angeles Dodgers are in fourth place ... and it took them **an extremely long time to get just one run**. The San Francisco Giants and Rockies are tied at 2-3 while the Arizona Diamondbacks have won four out of five against the Rockies and Dodgers and lead the division.

What I'm truly getting at is that the Rockies have plenty of time to right their wrongs and focus on the end goal because it feels like the NL West is in the Upside Down (points to you if you get that reference). The starting pitching has struggled a bit with ace **Jon Gray** and second in command **Tyler Anderson**, but there is plenty of time to go over what they did wrong, work on those mistakes and pounce on their next starts (beginning with Gray on Wednesday night in San Diego).

Along with that, the offense has been doing pretty well so far. However, the Rockies have to get ready for the big dogs of the National League later this month (road trips to Washington and the Chicago Cubs). April may be taxing if they continue to play the way they are right now. However, along with room for error, there is room for improvement for the Colorado Rockies.

The outlook of the season for **Trevor Story** is looking like a question mark early on. However, if Rockies hitting coach Duane Espy can spot the flaw with Story, he'll be back on track to have a solid season.

As for the rest of the team, they could follow the strides of **Charlie Blackmon**, who has been nothing short of amazing so far this season.

All I'm saying is this: The way the NL West is looking right now, the Colorado Rockies not only have time to pick up the pieces from the first five games, but to also strike while the oil is hot. It's prime time for them to pick up the pace and grab the early division lead. If the season stays the way it looks right now, the Rockies will have no trouble in contending ... and they can finally prove that they are the team to beat in the NL West.

Chuck Nazty is staying put: What Charlie Blackmon's deal says about free agency

Charlie Blackmon has opted to sign early and potentially remain in Colorado through 2023.

David Schoenfield ESPN Senior Writer

April 4, 2018

Chuck Nazty is staying home.

Charlie Blackmon and the Colorado Rockies have agreed on a six-year contract that will keep him with the Rockies through 2023 if Blackmon exercises two player options. The new deal replaces his 2018 contract, with Ken Rosenthal reporting the first four seasons valued at \$75 million (including the previous 2018 salary of \$12 million). The option years are \$21 million for 2022 and \$10 million for 2023 (with an additional \$8 million in possible escalators).

Three immediate takeaways:

1. The Rockies lock up a valuable asset, although given that Blackmon turns 32 in July, he's probably a center fielder only for 2018 and maybe 2019. Since 2000, only 10 players have played at least 100 games in center field at age 34 or older (and only Andres Torres in 2012 and Coco Crisp in 2014 since 2010).

2. It seems likely this past offseason free-agent market affected Blackmon's willingness to test free agency. Given that the market was not kind to older players, that any Blackmon contract would be affected by a qualifying offer and the resulting draft-pick compensation, and that there may be concern about his ability to remain in center field (corner outfielders are less desirable), it's understandable why he took the long-term contract from the Rockies.

3. I don't think this should have any influence on the team's ability to sign third baseman Nolan Arenado when he hits free agency after the 2019 season. If anything, signing Blackmon is good for the win column and that could help keep Arenado in Colorado. There's enough money in the Rockies' piggy bank to afford both.

Blackmon is a classic late bloomer who didn't reach the majors until he was nearly 25 and didn't get a full-time shot in the lineup until he was 27. He has continued to improve, posting 4.5 WAR in 2016 and 6.0 WAR in 2018, when he finished fifth in the MVP voting. He's off to a great start with four home runs on the road in the Rockies' first five games.

Rockies, CF Charlie Blackmon agree on multiyear extension
ESPN News Services
April 4, 2018

DENVER -- Now that Charlie Blackmon has agreed to a lucrative new deal, he can afford to trade in that Jeep Cherokee he has had forever.

But that's not how he rolls.

"I'm going to get some new tires," he said.

That's just Blackmon being Blackmon, the insightful and quirky leadoff hitter extraordinaire with the ragged beard and impressive mullet who will be patrolling the Colorado Rockies outfield for quite some time.

The NL batting champion made a long-term commitment Wednesday rather than test the free-agent market next offseason. The Rockies did not announce financial terms of the six-year contract, but sources told ESPN's Buster Olney that it could top out at \$116 million if options are exercised and all incentives are met. The deal has been in the works for most of spring training -- and under the radar.

"I didn't want to create distractions," Blackmon said.

In January, the two-time All-Star center fielder agreed to a \$14 million, one-year deal. The new agreement -- which was announced in San Diego, where the Rockies are playing a four-game series with the Padres -- calls for a \$2 million signing bonus payable within 30 days of the deal's approval by the commissioner's office, a \$12 million salary this year and \$21 million in each of the next three seasons.

Blackmon has player options of \$21 million for 2022 and \$10 million for 2023, and his 2023 salary can escalate to \$5 million based on plate appearances in 2022: \$500,000 each for 400, 425, 450, 475, 500 and 525 and \$1 million apiece for 550 and 575.

His 2023 salary would increase by \$2 million if he is among the top three in MVP voting from 2018-22 and by \$1 million if he finishes fourth or fifth. The 2023 salary is capped at \$18 million.

As part of the deal negotiated by agents Sam and Seth Levinson, Blackmon can list 15 teams each season that he cannot be traded to without his consent.

The deal follows an offseason in which many top free agents struggled to find lucrative long-term contracts.

"I knew this was going to be a big year for me, leading into this season, this season and what would happen after the season," Blackmon said. "I weighed all my options and chose what I feel like is the best decision for me and my family, and that's to stay in Colorado."

This could open the door for a rich new deal with Gold Glove third baseman Nolan Arenado, who's eligible to become a free agent after the 2019 season.

"I did speak to Nolan a little bit in spring training about his future and obviously how that relates to my future," Blackmon said. "I'd love for those futures to be together. I think he's a very important part of this team. I'd love to see Nolan around for a long time. We didn't specifically talk about, 'Hey, what if I do this or you do that?' We didn't play that game."

Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich didn't want to go down that road, either.

"This is really all about Charlie and thrilled we were able to get this done," Bridich said. "He's one of the elite players in the game now."

Blackmon is coming off one of the best seasons ever by a leadoff hitter. His 102 RBIs while hitting in the top spot were a major league record, surpassing the mark of 100 set by Darin Erstad of the Angels in 2000. Blackmon's 383 total bases from the leadoff spot in 2017 also were the most all time.

Blackmon, who turns 32 in July, has started this season on a torrid pace, hitting .316 with four homers and six RBIs.

He's known for being goofy, inquisitive and even a tad forgetful. He once tested the limits of the gas gauge on his Cherokee and ran out of fuel in the process, leading teammate DJ LeMahieu to help him out. Arenado once recounted a tale of how they carpooled from the airport after returning from a trip, only for Blackmon to remember his car was there. Few work harder at honing their craft, which is why Blackmon has blossomed into one of the game's top hitters. In his big-league career, he has hit .305 with 115 homers and 361 RBIs.

In high school, Blackmon was a left-handed pitcher. He was picked by the Marlins in the 28th round of the 2004 draft. A year later, he was selected in the 20th round by the Red Sox after a season with Young Harris College in Georgia. He attended Georgia Tech, where he switched from the mound to outfield full-time. Then he was taken by the Rockies in the second round in 2008.

"I always felt like I was going to be really good at something," Blackmon said. "I really wanted it to be baseball. For a long time, I wanted it to be pitching. Turns out, I stink at pitching ... I'm glad I was able to make that change."

Gray, Rockies shut down Villanueva and Padres in 5-2 win
Associated Press | ESPN
April 4, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- Jon Gray bounced back nicely from an opening day loss. He did it crisply, too.

Gray pitched seven scoreless innings, Trevor Story and Ian Desmond each had a big two-run hit and the Colorado Rockies beat the San Diego Padres 5-2 on Wednesday night.

Gray (1-1) shut down the Padres a night after they won 8-4 behind rookie Christian Villanueva's three home runs and five RBI. Gray retired Villanueva in three straight at-bats, including a strikeout. The right-hander struck out seven and walked none before three relievers finished up.

The combined six-hitter took just 2 hours, 41 minutes, and neither team used a mound visit.

Gray got on a roll and worked quickly.

"When things are working really fast, if you're getting guys out on one or two pitches, I mean, the inning can be over like that," he said. "You don't even know it. It's a lot of fresh, good pitches in your mind that you just made, and it's a lot easier to make the next one like that."

Gray allowed only two baserunners through the first five innings.

It was a much better outing than on opening day, when he gave up three runs and six hits in four innings during a loss at Arizona.

"Jon bounced back, for sure," Rockies manager Bud Black. "Stayed pretty poised throughout the game within his delivery. Fastball had life, good slider. I liked the fact that the curveball came into play as the game went on. He needs that. We've talked a lot about the velocity variance. That was big for him."

Cory Spangenberg had two of the Padres' four hits off Gray.

Jake McGee allowed a hit and two San Diego runs in the eighth, one of them unearned due to his error. Bryan Shaw gave up an RBI single to Hunter Renfroe, but Wade Davis closed in the ninth for his third save.

The Rockies hit Clayton Richard (0-1) hard in scoring all their runs in the first two innings. Story's broken-bat, two-run double that bounced over the left-field wall highlighted the three-run first, when the Rockies also got an RBI double from Nolan Arenado.

Desmond's two-run single with the bases loaded highlighted the second. Arenado was thrown out by Matt Szczur trying to go from first to third on the play.

Pitching with the lead helped Gray.

"He's a pretty good front-runner," Black said. "I like that. Like in a horse race, man. If you get the lead as a horse, sometimes you finish it. I'll keep an eye on Jon, but hopefully he's a good front-runner -- catches the lead and keeps going."

Padres manager Andy Green said Gray "didn't create many opportunities to score early on. There's been times when we've gotten to him and times we've had a lot of trouble with him. He's kind of had that history for them where he's out there in some outings and he's absolutely dominant and he's had other outings where we get to him. Today was one of those days we just didn't get pressure on him early."

Richard, who tossed seven strong innings against Milwaukee on opening day, allowed five runs and eight hits in five innings. He struck out six and walked three.

"It wasn't terrible but wasn't great," Richard said. "A little bit of a spray the first couple innings. Then unfortunately the balls that were in play were either hit hard enough on the ground or broken bat that was a double down the line."

QUOTABLE

"You look at those first three guys in their lineup," Green said, referring to Charlie Blackmon, DJ LeMahieu and Arenado.

"They've got two guys who are as good as anybody in baseball at the top and they've got another guy who's won the batting title. You want to beat those guys. You've got to keep those three guys off base and that was our challenge the first two innings. Those three guys did the bulk of the damage and that's usually the case with their offense."

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Padres: OF Wil Myers was placed on the 10-day disabled list with nerve irritation in his right arm. Myers also missed time this season with a sore back. RHP Phil Maton was recalled from Triple-A El Paso to take his roster spot.

UP NEXT

Rockies: LHP Tyler Anderson starts the series finale Thursday afternoon. He allowed seven runs over 2 1/3 innings last Friday, including five in the first inning, but didn't factor into the decision in a 9-8 loss at Arizona.

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Rockies Have Finances, Talent For Long-Term Contention
Tracy Ringolsby | Inside the Seams
April 5, 2018

The Rockies took a glance into the future.

They liked the potential of what they could see.

And their belief in the upward direction of the franchise was underscored with the announcement of a contract extension for center fielder Charlie Blackmon that guarantees he will with the team through 2021 with Blackmon having the option to stay through 2023.

More than that, however, the Rockies sent a message that they believe in the core they have in place. They are encouraged by the prospects on the way. And they are looking to make sure what they have put in place doesn't begin to fragment.

Translation: The good news about Blackmon can be seen as the Rockies way of saying they are serious about finding a way to sign third baseman Nolan Arenado to a long-term deal, too.

Blackmon was more urgent. He could have become a free agent at season's end. The Rockies still have control of Arenado for this season and next season before he can pursue free agency.

Gut feeling? He won't be pursuing free agency.

Arenado knows he is going to be rich when he signs his next contract. What he also has made clear is he is going to be with a team he feels has a chance to win. And the feeling is all things being equal he would like to be one of those players who could spend his entire career with one team.

That would be the Rockies.

And the Rockies have the financial flexibility to make it happen.

With the revised contract for Blackmon they have a payroll commitment for 2018 a tad shy of \$147 million. Next year, with second baseman DJ LeMahieu, right fielder Carlos Gonzalez and Adam Ottavino potential free agents, the Rockies are only committed to \$83.65 million. Gerardo Parra will likely be in that group, too, but the Rockies do have an option on his contract for 2019. And the Rockies payroll commitment drops to \$73.25 million in 2020, creating flexibility in attempting to retain key parts for solving the post-season puzzle.

Get the picture?

The Rockies have a vision, and they have crafted a payroll that has room to make the type of commitment necessary to keep Arenado, who would be just shy of 29 years old when he could become a free agent after the 2019 season.

The Rockies have a young enough roster core that even after the 2019 season, other than Arenado, the only current Rockies who would be in line to become a free agent are catcher Chris Iannetta, Mike Dunn, and Parra (if the Rockies exercise the option or 2019).

The way the Rockies have put their roster together they could sign Arenado to an eye-popping multi-year contract, and still have a reasonable payroll for 2020. They would still have financial flexibility allowing the Rockies to address unexpected needs that could arise.

They have contract commitments to six players for \$73 million, and 11 players who would be arbitration eligible. Chad Bettis and Chris Rusin would be third-year arbitration eligible; Tony Wolters, Tyler Anderson, John Gray, Scott Oberg and Trevor Story would be second-year eligible, and Kyle Freeland, German Marquez,, Antonio Senzatela, Pat Valaika would have the leverage for the first time.

In looking ahead the Rockies can actually envision a 2020 roster in which potential voids could be filled from within. Scouting director Bill Schmidt and senior director player development Zach Wilson have combined to create one of the game's deeper farm systems. It gives general manager Jeff Bridich flexibility in the long-range in being able to address

needs from within. That creates payroll flexibility if the Rockies feel the need to pursue a free agent to fill a void, such as the past off-seasons signings of closer Wade Davis, and right-handed setup reliever Bryan Shaw, and re-signing left-handed set up reliever Jake McGee.

Now, nothing works out as planned. Adjustments have to be made along the way. But there has to be a vision to work off in planning for the future. Bridich plays it close to the vest. Remember that the Blackmon deals was done during spring training and there wasn't even an insinuation of Blackmon being committed long term until a week into the regular season.

But using the current roster, and filling voids from within the organization, the Rockies have an impressive roster potential for 2020. That is what put the Rockies in the position to get the Blackmon situation taken care of, and is what gives the team's fan base reason to feel the Rockies have the ability to address the pending free-agent potential of Arenado.

And there is more talent where that came from. No. 1 ranked Rodgers, and No. 12 Murphy are the only members of the Rockies top 30 prospects, according to Baseball America, on that projected roster, meaning there are reinforcements down on the farm if needs arise.

4 More Years (at least): Blackmon, Rockies Agree on Deal
Tracy Ringolsby | Inside the Seams
April 5, 2018

Charlie Blackmon became an outfielder by chance.

It is paying off.

Blackmon and the Rockies announced Wednesday agreement on a four-year contract that includes Blackmon having options on two additional seasons that could bring him \$108 million in salary over six years. The deal answers the first of three long-term questions that had been looming over the Rockies coming into the 2018 season.

"We reached a basic agreement before the season started," said Blackmon. "I didn't want that going on once the season started. I didn't want any distractions. I am happy it is out of the way and I can just try and win games from here on out."

In addition to Blackmon, second baseman DJ LeMahieu has free-agent possibilities after this season, and third baseman Nolan Arenado could become a free agent after the 2019 season.

Blackmon had declined to discuss his contract situation during the spring, and LeMahieu and Arenado have taken a similar approach. They all said they did not want anything to distract from the focus being on the Rockies winning this season.

Blackmon, who came into the season with a one-year deal worth \$14 million, will instead receive a \$2 million signing bonus and salary of \$12 million this year, and then \$21 million in 2019, 2020 and 2021. Blackmon, who turns 32 on July 1, has options at \$21 million in 2022, and \$10 million in 2023. He's guaranteed at least \$77 million for the next four seasons with his option to add another \$31 million in 2022-23.

"To have a situation where he could potentially finished his career with us is huge," said Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich. "There is a risk on each side. He has to stay healthy. We are confident in Charlie being Charlie and what he does (in taking care of himself) that is possible and it is going to happen."

What a turn of events for Blackmon.

"It is nice to have the Rockies appreciate my hard work," he said. "It's a reward for sacrificing so much in college, high school and the minor leagues."

A year ago, Blackmon became one of only eight players, and the first since 1948, to have more than 130 runs scored, 210 hits, 30 doubles, 10 triples, 35 home runs and 100 RBI in a season. Lou Gehrig, who reached those numbers three times, is the only player to have done it more than once.

Blackmon was a left-handed relief specialist until the summer before his senior year at Georgia Tech. Battling some arm soreness his junior year, he had agreed to play for a collegiate summer league team in the Dallas area, and when he arrived he told the team's manager, former big-league outfielder Rusty Greer, he was an outfielder.

He has proven to be correct. The Rockies were impressed enough with what he did his final year at Georgia Tech that they selected him in the second round of the 2008 draft.

"It is a great story for the team, scouting and drafting and signing him, for the player development people, and for him to perform and become the player he has become," said Bridich. "It involved a lot of people and a lot of work.:"

Blackmon has definitely become an elite outfielder, and one of the premiere lead-off hitters in the game.

Blackmon is coming off a season in which he won the NL batting title with a .331 average to go with 37 home runs and 104 RBI, including a record 103 RBI as a lead-off hitter.

An All-Star reserve in 2014, Blackmon started for the NL in center field in the 2017 All-Star game.

He has hit a Rockies record 28 lead-off home runs in his career, and his 43 stolen bases in 2008 was the fifth highest total in franchise history.

The announcement of signing Blackmon created an overwhelming reaction from Rockies fans, which Bridich said is a bonus, but was not the impetus for getting a deal done.

"You never know how the fans will react, but Charlie is beloved," said Bridich. "That is a nice by-product. We hoped the fans would be excited."

Bridich, however, explained the driving force wasn't marketing.

"In working on a deal like this you do it because you feel he will be a key factor in our success," said Bridich. "We signed this not just for the player, but also the person, the example he sets for so many people. "

It is a role Blackman embraces, particularly in light of what he sees when he looks at the talent not only on the Rockies big-league roster, but in the minor leagues and the commitment that was made during the winter when the Rockies re-signed free agent reliever Jake McGee along with adding free agent relievers Wade Davis and Bryan Shaw, and catcher Chris Iannetta.

"We've come a long ways as an organization," he said. "You can tell by the additions that the Rockies are a competitive team and want to win. We have to stay the course. We have the foundation to be competitive for years to come."

Blackmon, after all, is living proof of what desire, determination and dedication can create.

In his case, it took a sore-armed, college relief pitcher and turned him into an impact big-league center fielder with long-term security.

Charlie Blackmon Decides Not to Deal With Doubt

by [Jeff Sullivan](#) – Fangraphs

April 4, 2018

I don't know if **Charlie Blackmon** is baseball's most underrated player. Probably not. There are a lot of very good players. But just in case you don't know exactly what's up: Last season, Blackmon finished ninth among position players in WAR. Over the past three seasons, Blackmon has ranked 22nd, between **George Springer** and **Kyle Seager**. Blackmon is a center fielder who just finished with **a top-30 expected wOBA**. The year before that, **he was in the top 40**. Charlie Blackmon is very good, and, depending on your own personal thresholds, you might well say that Charlie Blackmon is great. He's been lined up to be a part of the upcoming massive free-agent market.

But Blackmon has decided to take himself off the market entirely. Or, the team and the agency have decided, with Blackmon's final approval. You don't often see premium free agents sign extensions so close to the end of a contract, but Blackmon has agreed to an extra five years with the Rockies, with a \$94-million guarantee. It's more complicated than that, but the take-home point is that Blackmon is going to stick around in Colorado. Clearly, he's fond of it there, and he'd hardly be the first player to decide that free agency appears less appealing than it used to.

Don't get me wrong: Blackmon didn't sign away his free agency for a bargain. Quite the opposite! Blackmon decided to forgo the chance to shop around, but he's come away with a strong deal for himself. As noted, he'll get five years and \$94 million, covering his age 32-36 seasons. **Lorenzo Cain** just got five years and \$80 million from the Brewers, covering *his* age 32-36 seasons. Over the past three years, Cain has been worth 13.1 WAR, with Blackmon at 12.9. Cain came with a qualifying offer, and free-agent Blackmon presumably would've. In the previous offseason, **Dexter Fowler** got five years and \$82.5 million, covering his age 31-35 seasons. Blackmon's contract compares well, especially given that there wasn't competition. He's signing a full seven or so months away from becoming available.

There's also another part to this. Here is Blackmon's year-to-year breakdown:

- **2019:** \$21 million
- **2020:** \$21 million
- **2021:** \$21 million
- **2022:** \$21-million player option

- **2023:** \$10-million player option, with incentives up to \$18 million

We don't get to write "player option" very much. Usually, with extensions, you see club options instead. But all this is is another way of saying "opt-out clause." Blackmon can opt out after 2021, or he can opt out after 2022. It's perfectly fair to wonder how realistic that would be, with Blackmon in his mid-30s by then, but this comes down to being player-friendly language. The player options push more value in Blackmon's direction, just in case he continues to be a 6-win player or whatever, without decline. This contract doesn't cap Blackmon's upside.

It's interesting to see Blackmon's side do so well in negotiation. This is a key player the Rockies will retain for a while. Yet it's no less interesting to think about what Blackmon might have avoided. I don't just mean the possibility of a disappointing year, that would take the rug out from under Blackmon's future contract demands. Let's say Blackmon is good again throughout 2018. He was going to present a fascinating free-agent case. But, given what we just saw in the market, there could've been a case held against him.

We've all heard about how free agency has changed. Anecdotally, at least, free agency now feels more like arbitration, with suitors telling players everything that's wrong with them. There's nothing wrong with teams being critical, of course, because it's their own money they're spending, and they want to spend it wisely, but Blackmon could've faced an uphill battle. Teams could've tried to remind him he's a 30+ year-old outfielder who doesn't rate particularly well in center. And then, more importantly, there's the Coors Field factor. Like all Rockies hitters, Blackmon has had far more success at home. For his career, his wOBA split is 91 points. His wRC+ split is 31 points. Blackmon, in Colorado, has hit for a way higher BABIP, and he's also recorded most of his triples. Yet there are the peripherals, too. Blackmon has walked more at home, and he's made a lot more contact. Since 2015, Blackmon's strikeout rate at home is lower than his rate on the road by 7.5 percentage points. That's the biggest difference in baseball. Home Blackmon has walked twice for every three strikeouts. Road Blackmon has walked once for every three strikeouts.

We know that Coors Field messes with peripherals. Park factors are complicated. We also know that teams are smart — teams know what park factors do, and teams know you can't just look at Colorado hitters' road numbers alone. You have to consider everything that Blackmon has accomplished, on the road and not on the road. But if Blackmon were a free agent, he'd definitely be hearing about how his numbers might be a mirage. Teams would definitely point out the splits

and express their own concern about how he'd perform in another environment. Coors Field does present an irritating variable, sometimes. And teams would use it to try to reduce Blackmon's cost.

I'll bring Fowler back up. His case, I think, is instructive. When he was with the Rockies, he had a 113 wRC+ at home, with 19% strikeouts. On the road, he had a 92 wRC+, with 25% strikeouts. What's happened since then, with Fowler playing in other ballparks? He's posted a 119 wRC+, with 22% strikeouts. Fowler wasn't a mirage. He's sustained his performance, and then some, even as he's gotten later in his career. Fowler is one data point suggesting you *shouldn't* hold Coors Field against Blackmon, but teams would try, anyway. And, in fairness, Fowler is only one player. Blackmon's splits are somewhat extreme.

Charlie Blackmon knows he can hit in Colorado. He knows he can be very good in Colorado. He probably takes a little more advantage of Coors Field than the average player does, but that's not a problem — Blackmon and the Rockies benefit from that. In this case, when there's mutual interest between parties in an extension, I think it only makes sense for Blackmon to re-sign, because all that was facing him was going to be uncertainty. To say nothing of the fact that the coming free-agent market will be loaded. That's another thing that could've kept Blackmon's price down. But Blackmon would've faced uncertainty, and he would've faced concern about his performance, based only on where he's played half his games. Blackmon would've faced a market inclined to doubt how good he really is. Oh, he would've gotten a job somewhere. And maybe he would've ultimately signed for this much, or more. I doubt it. And the process could've easily been unpleasant. Teams might've tried to play Blackmon, **A.J. Pollock**, and **Andrew McCutchen** off of one another. Why deal with that if you don't have to?

Blackmon has made proper use of Coors Field over his career. No need now to make a change, especially with the Rockies looking competitive enough. From an analytical perspective, it would've been nice to have Blackmon's free agency give us a data point. Blackmon didn't want to be a data point. He just wanted to be a Rockie.

Jon Gray, Rockies shut down Padres
By: BERNIE WILSON , AP Sports Writer | Gazette
April 5, 2018

SAN DIEGO — Jon Gray bounced back nicely from an opening day loss. He did it crisply, too.

Gray pitched seven scoreless innings, Trevor Story and Ian Desmond each had a big two-run hit and the Colorado Rockies beat the San Diego Padres 5-2 on Wednesday night.

Gray (1-1) shut down the Padres a night after they won 8-4 behind rookie Christian Villanueva's three home runs and five RBIs. Gray retired Villanueva in three straight at-bats, including a strikeout. The right-hander struck out seven and walked none before three relievers finished up.

The combined six-hitter took just 2 hours, 41 minutes, and neither team used a mound visit.

Gray got on a roll and worked quickly.

"When things are working really fast, if you're getting guys out on one or two pitches, I mean, the inning can be over like that," he said. "You don't even know it. It's a lot of fresh, good pitches in your mind that you just made, and it's a lot easier to make the next one like that."

Gray allowed only two baserunners through the first five innings.

It was a much better outing than on opening day, when he gave up three runs and six hits in four innings during a loss at Arizona.

"Jon bounced back, for sure," Rockies manager Bud Black. "Stayed pretty poised throughout the game within his delivery. Fastball had life, good slider. I liked the fact that the curveball came into play as the game went on. He needs that. We've talked a lot about the velocity variance. That was big for him."

Cory Spangenberg had two of the Padres' four hits off Gray.

Jake McGee allowed a hit and two San Diego runs in the eighth, one of them unearned due to his error. Bryan Shaw gave up an RBI single to Hunter Renfroe, but Wade Davis closed in the ninth for his third save.

The Rockies hit Clayton Richard (0-1) hard in scoring all their runs in the first two innings. Story's broken-bat, two-run double that bounced over the left-field wall highlighted the three-run first, when the Rockies also got an RBI double from Nolan Arenado.

Desmond's two-run single with the bases loaded highlighted the second. Arenado was thrown out by Matt Szczur trying to go from first to third on the play.

Pitching with the lead helped Gray.

"He's a pretty good front-runner," Black said. "I like that. Like in a horse race, man. If you get the lead as a horse, sometimes you finish it. I'll keep an eye on Jon, but hopefully he's a good front-runner — catches the lead and keeps going."

Padres manager Andy Green said Gray "didn't create many opportunities to score early on. There's been times when we've gotten to him and times we've had a lot of trouble with him. He's kind of had that history for them where he's out there in some outings and he's absolutely dominant and he's had other outings where we get to him. Today was one of those days we just didn't get pressure on him early."

Richard, who tossed seven strong innings against Milwaukee on opening day, allowed five runs and eight hits in five innings. He struck out six and walked three.

"It wasn't terrible but wasn't great," Richard said. "A little bit of a spray the first couple innings. Then unfortunately the balls that were in play were either hit hard enough on the ground or broken bat that was a double down the line."

QUOTABLE

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