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MEDIA CLIPS – January 8, 2018

***Powerful returning lineup projected for Rox***

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb | 8:00 AM ET**

DENVER -- With still a month before pitchers and catchers begin working out in Scottsdale, Ariz., the Rockies theoretically could put a lineup on the field based on what the roster already looks like.

High-pedigree players Charlie Blackmon, DJ LeMahieu and Nolan Arenado return at key spots in the order, Ian Desmond and Gerardo Parra have proven track records and Trevor Story has flashed power and run production.

But there is still time to inject a little more production, whether it's a Major League free agent or a veteran on a Minor League contract.

MLB.com is taking a look at the projected lineup of all 30 teams ahead of Spring Training. Here's how the Rockies might stack up:

**LINEUP IF SEASON STARTED TODAY**

Charlie Blackmon, CF

DJ LeMahieu, 2B

Ian Desmond, LF

Nolan Arenado, 3B

Gerardo Parra, RF

Trevor Story, SS

Ryan McMahon, 1B

Chris Iannetta, C

## **STRENGTH**

Arenado, Blackmon and Desmond have a history of power. Blackmon, LeMahieu and Parra have had big years with batting average, and Arenado cracked .300 for the first time last season. Story and Iannetta are known to hit balls hard. One idea is to find an experienced first baseman, but McMahon is coming off a strong Minor League season and has run-production potential.

## **QUESTION MARK**

With Carlos Gonzalez and Mark Reynolds testing free agency, there is a need for one more big bat. It could be either of them. Or another experienced hitter on the market. Or possibly a Rockies product like McMahon. Or one of two outfielders -- David Dahl and Raimel Tapia. Or the answer could be in-house, should Desmond -- who is listed here in left field but could play first base -- catch fire after dealing with injuries for much of 2017.

## **WHAT MIGHT CHANGE**

Combining players under contract and what is expected via arbitration, the Rockies have a payroll of about \$130 million. General manager Jeff Bridich said last month he anticipated the 2018 payroll to be about where the Rockies finished '17, somewhere around \$146 million. Officially, however, that payroll included \$22 million (plus a \$4 million '18 option) for shortstop Jose Reyes, who had long since ended up with the Mets. Bridich hasn't determined whether to go into the free-agent market for a corner bat, or let players the Rockies have developed have their shot.

## ***Bettis ready to block noise, rediscover calm***

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb | Jan. 5th, 2018**

DENVER -- Rockies right-hander Chad Bettis can appreciate the cheers. He certainly felt them at Coors Field when he returned on Aug. 14 from testicular cancer. But whether the cheers are for him, or against him on the road, he's at his best when he doesn't actually hear the crowd -- or much else.

"It can be as quiet as if you put your head underwater and you can hear everything that's going on," Bettis said. "That's what it feels like. Or if you have headphones or earphones on -- there's nothing on, but you can see everything that's going on. That's what I mean. You can still hear the background noise, but it's not necessarily to the extent of us having a conversation.

"It would be much more muted than that, almost to the extent where all you're listening to or all you're hearing is your heartbeat. All you're seeing and whatever you want to let in is happening."

Last year was turbulent, but Bettis believes he found serenity in some of his nine starts (2-4, 5.05 ERA), with three games of seven innings and three or fewer runs. He went 2-0 with a 3.00 ERA in two starts against the eventual National League champion Dodgers, and he likely would have faced them in the postseason had the Rockies not lost to the D-backs in the NL Wild Card Game.

With a full offseason of health and preparation, Bettis wants to return to the consistent calm he developed in 2015 and '16, when he compiled a 22-14 record with a 4.57 ERA while establishing himself as a staff leader.

"Hopefully I'll be able to explain that to our other starters, and try to get everybody to essentially pitch collectively as a group with a very, very quiet mind," said Bettis, who is giving thanks for support during his crisis by teaming with the Testicular Cancer Society to host the Chad Bettis Charity Classic golf tournament at Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale, Ariz., Thursday and Friday.

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Bettis turns 29 on April 26 and has made 98 appearances (69 starts) over parts of five seasons, by far the Rockies' most experienced starter on a team that is spending most of its dollars in the bullpen. The rotation will have to derive leadership from what's in Bettis' head and heart.

"When you let your killer instinct take over, when you do what comes natural to you throughout your life and you're able to do it at your highest level, you cut all that minutiae," pitching coach Steve Foster said. "That's what he is describing."

Bettis cherishes the times he has captured the desired level of quiet. One was on Sept. 5, 2016, when he struck out seven and held the visiting Giants to two hits in his only career shutout, a 6-0 victory.

"Even from the first pitch that got whacked up the middle to the last out the whole game was quiet," Bettis said.

Smooth games, however, are aberrations. Bettis derives confidence from his stressful five-inning performance at Dodger Stadium on Sept. 9, a 6-5 Rockies victory. He had a 5-3 lead when Andre Ethier opened the fifth with a home run to set off a screaming crowd and the park's booming sound system.

"You hear that crowd and you're like, 'OK, now it's a one-run ballgame. Now, let's get this quiet back, and let's continue to make our pitches and let's get out of here,'" Bettis said.

Despite a one-out Corey Seager single and wild pitch, Bettis held the lead and ended the inning by freezing Cody Bellinger on a 1-2 fastball on the inside corner.

"He experiences that home run and I don't flicker," Foster said. "I don't hesitate, knowing preparation prevents panic and there's no strength without struggle. And Chad Bettis has been through some struggle."

Bettis' health ordeal began with a diagnosis and surgery in November 2016, then nine weeks of chemotherapy when doctors discovered in March -- just before he and his wife, Kristina, experienced the birth of their first child, a girl -- that the disease had spread to his lymph nodes. He drew strength from his comeback.

"That was a very big teaching: We don't get to control everything that happens to us; we have to just roll with what's going on," Bettis said. "Without my family and my support system and my wife, with Everleigh coming along, it would have been a completely different experience. That being said, I wouldn't have changed anything."

## ***Ottavino eyes more strikes on borderline calls***

### **Rockies righty plans to attack zone earlier to sway umpires**

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb | Jan. 4th, 2018**

DENVER -- Rockies right-hander Adam Ottavino believes being a little more convincing to umpires could be one of the keys to an improved 2018.

Ottavino earned a reputation as one of the game's toughest righty relievers by fashioning a club-record run of 37 scoreless appearances from Sept. 7, 2014, to Aug 23, 2016, with a lengthy absence due to Tommy John surgery. But after posting a solid 2.67 ERA in 34 appearances in 2016, Ottavino saw his ERA rise to 5.06 and his walk rate inflate to a career-high 6.6 per nine innings last year.

An advanced metric suggests Ottavino wasn't quite as bad as the results. Among pitchers with at least 300 pitches thrown at the strike-ball borderline in 2017, no reliever had a higher rate of those that were called balls than Ottavino -- 40.55 percent, according to Statcast™. Second in the category was the Yankees' Dellin Betances at 37.65 percent. Before last season, Ottavino's highest rate of lost borderline strikes was 30.55 percent in 2012 -- his first year with the Rockies after being claimed off waivers from the Cardinals.

Ottavino, 32, didn't put the onus solely on umpires. He made appearances Thursday on Hot Stove and MLB Now on MLB Network, detailing how his crossfire delivery was exaggerated to the point that he didn't command pitches as well, and he could stand to be more aggressive earlier in counts. Asked by MLB.com about the aggression early in counts, Ottavino said it could help him earn strikes when he needs them.

"If I throw more over the plate rather than on the corners early, then that should translate into more called strikes," Ottavino said. "I have to be a little less perfect early in the count, and trust that I am tough to hit."

A rebound by Ottavino would boost a bullpen the Rockies -- who made the postseason in 2017 for the first time since '09 -- have been fortifying this offseason. They signed closer Wade Davis for three years and \$52 million guaranteed, and lefty Jake McGee and righty Bryan Shaw to three-year, \$27 million contracts. Lefty Mike Dunn, who led the team with 68 appearances last year, will earn \$7 million in 2018 in the second season of a three-year, \$19 million deal, and Ottavino is due \$7 million to complete a three-year, \$10.4 million pact.

The graphic below suggests Ottavino was especially hurt by not receiving borderline pitches in even counts, counts with three balls and counts with two strikes -- pitches that can turn any plate appearance:

"We've looked at the same stuff or similar stuff," Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich said. "The action sometimes on his breaking balls -- he's got a couple different ones -- but especially that sweeping slider, he did not last year get that pitch called in the zone like it could've been and should've been. Now, in terms of his struggles, there was more to it than that. [But] there were times where he made pitches and sometimes he made pitches in succession that in our minds were strikes that didn't get called."

Still, the Rockies like that Ottavino is putting the onus on himself. Although he lost many possible strikes, he didn't exactly live on the borders of the zone. Just 37.5 percent of his pitches were in borderline areas, meaning others were clearly in or out of the zone. Pitching coach Steve Foster acknowledged the command issues, calling 2017 "a very challenging year," but he didn't point the finger totally at the pitcher.

"Some of that is due to his deception and how his ball moves late -- it's been a part of who 'Otto' is," Foster said. "That's what made him so successful -- getting ahead, swing and miss. Nasty stuff."

Ottavino also spent May 30-June 9 on the disabled list with right shoulder inflammation, and by the end of the season pitched in less-crucial roles after the club acquired righty Pat Neshek (now with the Phillies). But Ottavino kept pushing for improvement, which the Rockies hope will show this year.

"He wants it for the team," Rockies bullpen coach Darren Holmes said. "He's very selfless. Even when we got other guys last year, he looked at me and 'Fostie' and said, 'I'll pitch anywhere you want me to. I just want to win.' That's the type of guy that you want. That's the type of guy you need."

***Outfielder Dahl (rib/back) cleared to swing bat***

**23-year-old outfielder looking to make impact for Rockies in 2018**

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb | Jan. 4th, 2018**

DENVER -- Rockies outfielder David Dahl has stayed busy the past several months lifting, pulling and pushing weights. But the real test, which begins Thursday in Scottsdale, Ariz., is his body's ability to handle swinging a 33 1/2-inch, 31 1/2-ounce piece of lumber.

Dahl suffered a stress reaction -- or the beginning of a stress fracture -- at the tip of the sixth rib (where it curls around the back) early last Spring Training. Patterns of rest, workouts and baseball activity came and went. But each time, the nagging pain returned when he ramped up his swing -- the motion that made him a first-round MLB Draft pick in 2012 and a promising rookie for the Rockies in 2016. After dealing with back spasms while trying to return in July 2017, Dahl was shut down for the year.

Without the lure of big league games, Dahl rested until the pain disappeared. An MRI in November confirmed that the injury was healed, and he has been on a strengthening program since. Finally, Dahl has been cleared to show up at the Rockies' training center at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick and swing a bat.

"I feel great. I don't have any issues," Dahl said Wednesday upon arriving in Scottsdale, after spending the holidays in Houston. "I'm completely healed. I feel strong. I'm ready for Spring Training to get here so I can prove to everyone that I'm ready."

He'll likely be limited to "dry" swings initially, followed by hitting off a tee then soft-toss. If all goes well, Dahl will be swinging with full force when Spring Training opens.

Dahl's increased activity comes at a time the Rockies have a big decision to make. The lineup calls for one more impact hitter at first base or in the outfield, and general manager Jeff Bridich is evaluating the options at both spots.

With Dahl and 2017 rookie Raimel Tapia, who hit .278 in 70 games last year and displayed the potential for game-breaking speed, in the outfield, and 2017 Minor League standout Ryan McMahon at first base, the answers may be in-house. But coming off a postseason appearance in 2017, Bridich could opt for a more proven player.

"I see what the team is doing, but I try not to look too much into it, as far as who we're signing outfield-wise or anything like that," Dahl said. "I just need to prove to everybody that I'm healthy and the same player that I was."

Dahl, who can play all three outfield positions, likely is pleased 2017 is behind him.

In 2016, Dahl debuted in July, batting .315 -- hits in 50 of his 63 games -- with seven home runs, 12 doubles, four triples and 24 RBIs. Last year he was expected to challenge Gerardo Parra, whose injuries and struggles in 2016 opened the door for Dahl. But the injury led to his rib becoming irritated by his scapula (shoulder blade) during his swing.

"The more activity I would start doing, I would start feeling it a little," Dahl said. "If I would take 2-3 weeks off, I'd feel good or I wouldn't feel it anymore. I was like, 'OK, I feel good. Let's ramp it up. I'm ready.' Then we'd start doing more stuff again and I'd feel it a bit. Once I started swinging, it would flare up again."

The difference this time around is Dahl ramped up rotational exercises and leg strengthening after receiving the November MRI and hasn't experienced a setback. In addition to the swing progression, Dahl said the plan is to increase the workload.

Dahl also is paying renewed attention to maintaining muscle. He is at 190 pounds and plans to report to camp at 195, though maintaining weight has been an issue for him. He dropped to 178 during his rookie season, and when he was struggling last year, his weight dropped into the low 180s. To maintain weight, he said he is eating "super clean," meaning he has eliminated breads and absorbing carbs through brown rice, sweet potatoes and oatmeal, and is logging chicken, fish and meat consumption to stay on schedule.

"I was getting more violent upper body-wise instead of getting into my legs, and that was putting a lot of stress on me," Dahl said. "Getting back to being strong in my legs and having a good base will help me a lot."

Dahl hopes the quiet, lonely work leads to much excitement when he's back on the field.

"I do see all the stuff on Twitter," Dahl said. "It motivates me to keep working hard to come out and show everybody that I'm the same player I was before this rough injury I had last year."



## ***Rox would be wise to lock up Arenado long term***

**By Tracy Ringolsby MLB.com @TracyRingolsby | Jan. 5th, 2018**

With an eye on the present, Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich has taken care of the pressing matters in the past month. He brought back a Rockies original, catcher Chris Iannetta, and he revamped the bullpen by not only retaining lefty Jake McGee, but also by luring right-hander Bryan Shaw and closer Wade Davis off the free-agent market.

Now comes the challenge of deciding if the time has arrived for Colorado to do some serious soul-searching about the long-term picture, with the focus on Nolan Arenado.

Arenado is the personification of the Rockies. He's the underdog who keeps coming out on top. Playing in what Curt Gowdy referred to as the "forgotten time zone," (Mountain time), Arenado might not get the hype of a Mike Trout or a Bryce Harper, but he has earned the attention.

And Colorado is well aware of that. That's why the Rockies have to be asking themselves if the time is right to sit down and work out a multiyear deal that would keep Arenado in a Colorado uniform for seven, eight, nine, maybe even 10 more years.

Why now? Because the Rockies have a bit of leverage. They have control of him for two more years. He's in the second year of a two-year deal signed last January, which will pay him \$17.75 million for the coming season, and then he will be arbitration-eligible one last time a year from now.

Here's what sets Arenado apart from so many others: He will play this season at the age of 27.

So if the Rockies were to put together an eight-year offer, he would be 34 in its final year. Now, that doesn't guarantee anything. Injuries can happen at any age. But it does reduce the odds. The contract would cover years very much in the big-picture prime of an athlete's career.

So you take the \$17.75 million Arenado already will earn in 2018 and wrap it into a package that would earn him, say, \$160 million or so, and a decision would come down to how much being with the Rockies and being financially set for life would mean to him.

Arenado has said more than once the most important thing for him is being with an organization that has a chance to win a World Series. Based off a year ago and given the youth of the roster, the Rockies would seem in prime position to have that opportunity for more than a year or two.

OK, Colorado was the second National League Wild Card team in 2017, and it was eliminated by the D-Backs in the NL Wild Card Game. But what gets lost in the analysis from afar is that this is a team that enjoyed success despite early-season challenges that could have crippled the Rockies on the field.

Before Opening Day had even been played, the Rockies were without:

- Their projected veteran of the rotation, Chad Bettis, who was battling testicular cancer.
- Their projected starting catcher, Tom Murphy, who fractured his right forearm when, in attempt to throw out a runner at second base, the forearm collided with Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo's bat.
- Their projected first baseman, Ian Desmond, who broke his left hand when he was hit by a pitch during a Spring Training game.
- Their projected left fielder, David Dahl, who had a stress reaction in a rib after two Spring Training games, which limited him to 19 Minor League games last year. He swung a bat for the first time since July 31 on Thursday at the Rockies' Spring Training complex in Scottsdale, Ariz.

And if that wasn't not enough, Colorado's Opening Day starting pitcher, Jon Gray, missed time after trying to ignore a fracture in his left foot during his first three starts of the season, and he wound up on the disabled list for two months.

The Rox had four rookies combine to make 93 starts to help lead them to the postseason. The quartet was a combined 38-28 in games started by German Marquez(11-7), Kyle Freeland (11-11), Antonio Senzatela (10-5) and Jeff Hoffman (6-5).

And then there was the continuing rise of Arenado.

Think about it. Having spent the first three weeks of the 2013 season at Triple-A, Arenado has four years, 155 days of big league service time, and in that stretch, he has won five NL Gold Glove Awards and three NL Silver Slugger Awards, and he is a three-time All-Star.

And Arenado keeps getting better. He leads MLB in RBIs over the past three seasons.

Those are the kind of stats that translate into eye-popping numbers in negotiations. The price, however, doesn't figure to go down in the next two years. And the Rockies are aware of that.

***Davis' career changed by 2014 move to 'pen***

**New Rockies closer has 1.45 ERA over last four seasons in relief**

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb | Jan. 3rd, 2018**

DENVER -- The decision to turn Wade Davis -- the Rockies' new closer, thanks to a three-year, \$52 million contract -- from a talented but inconsistent starting pitcher to a reliever in 2014 will go down as a stroke of genius.

But in Davis' mind, he was just following instructions.

"I didn't really get to make any of those choices, actually," Davis said. "It was, 'Hey, go do this, and you really don't have any choices.'"

Since the Royals made the switch permanent, with current Rockies pitching coach Steve Foster a part of that process, Davis has a 1.45 ERA, 79 saves and 313 strikeouts across 244 relief appearances. He pitched in the World Series for the Royals in 2014 and '15, the latter of which brought a championship, and turned in an All-Star season for the Cubs this past year (32 saves in 33 chances and a 2.30 ERA).

Davis' future success may have been foreshadowed in 2012 with the Rays, his original team. He lost out to Jeff Niemann for a rotation spot but made 54 relief appearances and had a 2.43 ERA and 1.09 WHIP with 87 strikeouts and 29 walks over 70 1/3 innings. After Davis registered a 5.32 ERA in 2013 for Kansas City in 31 appearances, 24 of which were starts, the bullpen again emerged as an option.

Davis' reputation is as a cool-headed, confident guy whose aura radiates throughout a bullpen and a clubhouse. By taking to relief so well, the 32-year-old has earned a contract that carries the highest annual salary for a reliever in Major League history.

Davis didn't see the Royals' decision to move him into relief as a big deal. He carried the confidence that his fastball, cutter and curveball would eventually lead to success. Foster, at the time a special assistant to the general manager and pitching coordinator for the Royals, along with GM Dayton Moore and then-pitching coach Dave Eiland believed they were onto something.

"It's that pitch mix and demeanor," Foster said. "It's what makes a closer a closer. It's that sixth sense, that extra element. You can talk about stuff. You can talk about demeanor, but there's something within that human being that separates them from the fold.

"They swim upstream. Everybody else is downstream. They think differently. It's all about winning. It's not about how nasty their stuff is. It's just about the 'W' and getting those last three outs or four or five outs, whatever it takes."

Turns out they were right.

"I don't know if it's that just personality-type thing," Davis said. "But once you get that belief that you can do that, you tend to do it more often than not."

For the second time in his career, Davis is replacing Greg Holland. In 2015, the right elbow injury Holland battled through during the regular season finally became bad enough that he needed surgery that October. Davis handled the closer's role through the Royals' World Series triumph and did it at an All-Star level for the Royals in 2016 and for the Cubs in '17.

Davis reunites with lefty Jake McGee, who re-signed with Colorado for three years and \$27 million in December. Davis and McGee took their physicals together as teenage Rays Draft picks in 2004. Davis was taken in the third round and McGee in the fifth. They were teammates and roommates at two Class A stops and saved money with postgame meals at Waffle House. This winter, McGee told Davis about why he wanted to return to the Rockies.

"I relayed to him that [Rockies manager] Bud Black is very good at using the bullpen pitchers," McGee said. "He's not going to overuse you. Plus he's really good at communicating. I told him from a position-player standpoint to a pitcher standpoint, Bud is awesome at that. Bud reached out to him, too, talked to him about every aspect. And I know Wade wanted to go to a team where they have a winning culture and to play with a manager like that."

Davis was impressed with the Rockies' interest in him, as well as the bullpen group that surrounds him: McGee, former Indians right-hander Bryan Shaw and two holdovers from 2017 in righty Adam Ottavino and lefty Mike Dunn.

"It seems like it's a group that fits well," Davis said. "I don't think we'll have any problems taking care of business and helping our team win some ballgames."

**Rockies' Wade Davis: Former starter is the thinking man's closer**  
*Transition to full-time reliever with Kansas City in 2014 was career turning point*  
By PATRICK SAUNDERS | [psaunders@denverpost.com](mailto:psaunders@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post  
PUBLISHED: January 5, 2018 at 4:38 pm | UPDATED: January 7, 2018 at 8:53 pm

Wade Davis' repertoire is devastatingly effective.

The Rockies' new \$52 million closer can grip it and rip it when he needs to because his 95 mph four-seam fastball generates plenty of swings and misses. His 91-93 mph cutter, with its deceptive, late-breaking action, leaves frustrated batters shaking their heads. His 83 mph breaking ball, thrown with a knuckle-curve grip, buckles knees.

All of that has made Davis one of baseball's premier relievers. Over the past four seasons, the right-hander has an ERA of 1.45, with just nine home runs allowed and 313 strikeouts in 241  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings. Pitching for the Cubs last season, his strikeout rate of 12.1 per nine innings was the second-best of his career. That's why the Rockies opened the vault for Davis, paying him \$17.33 million annually for the next three years, the most ever for a relief pitcher.

But there are other compelling reasons why the Rockies believe the 32-year-old, three-time all-star can thrive in Colorado's thin air. Not only is Davis tough minded, he's also a student of pitching, always looking for an edge.

Rockies pitching coach Steve Foster, who got to know Davis when Foster was Kansas City's pitching coordinator in 2013-14, calls Davis "a cerebral, silent assassin."

"Wade does all of his research," said Rockies left-hander Jake McGee, who recently signed a three-year, \$27 million contract to rejoin the Rockies. "Even being out there in the bullpen, he prepares just like a starter, which is how he started out. He does his research and he studies hitters.

"He knows who to pitch around and who to go after. And, of course, his stuff's really good, so that helps out a lot."

McGee was a wide-eyed, 17-year-old kid when he met Davis in 2004 as teammates for the Princeton (WV) Devil Rays of the Appalachian (rookie) League. Davis, a third-round pick by Tampa Bay out of Florida's Lake Wales High School, was just 18.

"Even back then, Wade was quiet and professional, focused," McGee said. "We kind of pushed each other. When one of us had a good start, that made the other one work even harder."

Davis, who's the type of man of tends to credit others for his success, points to many former teammates as the source of his baseball education.

"I was around some pretty great minds in Tampa," he said. "Whether it was James Shields or Matt Garza, I learned plenty of stuff. I remember watching Kyle Farnsworth pitching, asking him things, having him point things out. So, I was around a lot of good minds and I think that leads you in the right direction. You learn a little bit about hitters and that helps you find a couple of go-tos when you need them."

Davis, came out high school wanting to be a major-league starter. But as his career advanced, the results were less than impressive. So the Rays ended up trying him as both a reliever and a starter.

"I didn't really get to make any of those choices, actually," Davis said. "It was, 'Hey, go do this, and you really don't have any choice.'"

In December 2012, Tampa Bay traded him to Kansas City. He pitched in 31 games for the Royals in 2013, 24 of which were starts. The results were not good: a 5.32 ERA, lower average velocity, and 58 walks and 15 home runs allowed in just 135  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings. The following season, when set-up man Luke Hochevar needed Tommy John surgery, the Royals converted Davis into a full-time reliever. It was a turning point.

Utilizing his starter's knowledge, combined with a new role that allowed him to cut loose, Davis blossomed. For the 2014-15 seasons, Davis posted a 0.97 ERA in 140 games and helped lead the Royals to two World Series, and one world title. It was the first time in major-league history that a reliever who logged more than 100 innings across two seasons posted an ERA under 1.00. As a reliever, Davis' fastball heated up, and his curveball and cutter made him nearly invincible.

His work in the 2015 playoffs was a masterpiece, concluding with a K.C.'s World Series victory over the Mets in five games. Davis appeared in eight of the Royals 11 playoff wins, not allowing a run over 10  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings. He pitched more than one inning three times, and struck out 18 batters while walking only three.

Davis' reputation as a late-game enforcer was cast that October.

“(He’s) a guy who’s taken very seriously when he comes into the game,” Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich said. “If you’re the opposition and you see Wade Davis coming in, just like Greg Holland and other top closers, those guys are taken seriously. The other team knows that they have it in for them to try to win that game that night.

“It’s a big thing for a team with playoff aspirations, and hopefully it’s a good thing for the organization for a number of years with Wade.”

But it’s not just pitching acumen that convinced the Rockies to invest so much faith and money in Davis, it was also his toughness and resilience. In the Cubs’ 9-8 victory over Washington in Game 5 of the National League Division Series last fall, Davis finished the game with a seven-out save — the first seven-out save of his career.

Yes, Davis allowed a run, two hits and two walks, but he worked a 1-2-3 ninth inning against the top of the Nationals lineup to preserve the series. And he struck out slugger Bryce Harper to finish the job.

“I was sitting there watching the game with my wife, and I remember thinking, ‘This is just like in Kansas City,’ ” Foster said. “He comes to the mound and teams know that chances are, the game is over.”

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## Road to the Rockies

*A snapshot of the career of new Rockies closer Wade Davis:*

- 2004: Drafted out of Lake Wales (Fla.) High School, at age 18, in the fourth round by Tampa Bay.
- 2004-2009: Climbed the minor-league ladder in the Rays organization, evolving from a fastball-slider pitcher to a fastball-cutter-curveball pitcher.
- Sept. 6, 2009: Made his major-league debut vs. Detroit, one day shy of his 24th birthday. Allowed one run on three hits and struck out nine over seven innings.
- 2010-11: Started 58 games for the Rays, going 23-20 with a 4.27 ERA.
- 2012: Converted to a reliever and posted a 2.43 ERA over 70  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings.
- Dec. 9, 2012: Traded, with James Shields and a player to be named later, to Kansas City for minor-leaguer Patrick Leonard, Mike Montgomery, Wil Myers and Jake Odorizzi.
- 2013: Used mostly as a starter by the Royals, went 8-11 with a 5.32 ERA in 31 games (24 starts).



- 2014-15: Becomes a full-time starter but then moved to closer for Royals, posting an 0.97 ERA. Appears in two World Series.
  - 2016: Suffered a right forearm injury and spent time on the disabled list, limiting him to a career-low 43 ⅓ innings. Posted a 1.87 ERA.
  - December 7, 2016: Traded from Kansas to the Chicago Cubs for outfielder Jorge Soler.
  - 2017: As closer for Cubs, saved 32 games in 33 chances, posting a 2.32 ERA over 58 ⅔ innings.
  - Dec. 29, 2017: Signed a three-year, free-agent contract with the Rockies for \$52 million.
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### **Closing time**

*Wade Davis made big-league history when he signed a three-year, \$52 million deal with Colorado. The average of \$17.33 million per season is a record a reliever. Here is how the contract breaks down:*

- 2018: \$16 million
- 2019: \$19 million
- 2020: \$17 million
- Davis' contract also included a \$1 million buyout and a \$15 million vesting option for 2021

— Source: Cot's Baseball Contracts

**Rockies' David Dahl takes swings — and a big step forward — in return from injury**  
***Outfielder could provide bat Colorado's offense needs***  
**By PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post**  
**January 4, 2018 at 6:26 pm**

David Dahl joined a slew of teammates Thursday morning at the Rockies' spring training complex at Salt River Fields for an offseason session that included stretching, sprinting, throwing and lifting weights. Then Dahl grabbed a bat and began hitting baseballs off a tee.

No big deal, right? Wrong.

It was the first time Dahl had swung a bat since July 31 when a painful and persistent injury shut down his season.

"That was nice, just being a ballplayer again," the outfielder said from his home in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Last spring, Dahl suffered a stress-reaction injury to a rib and played in just two Cactus League games before he was shut down. The pain and tenderness in his upper back, near where the rib connects with the spine, flared up whenever he started swinging a bat.

However, an MRI in November confirmed that the injury had finally healed, so he felt pretty confident that he was good to go.

"It was great, I felt really good," Dahl said. "I wasn't really nervous. I felt that with the time off and the work that I have put in, that I would be pretty strong. This time, I felt like I was really, really ready to go. I wasn't hesitant or worried. That's different than in the past, because last season I would swing and begin to feel it."

If Dahl stays healthy and plays well in the spring, he could provide a big boost to a Colorado offense that last season was at times powerful, and at times maddeningly inconsistent.

Dahl made his big-league debut on July, 25, 2016 and made an immediate impact. He batted .315 — banging out 50 hits in 63 games for a .315 average — with seven home runs, 12 doubles, four triples and 24 RBIs.

But 2017 was a lost season. Dahl played in only 19 minor league games, batting .260 with three home runs in 82 plate appearances.

## **Rockies' Double-A affiliate Yard Goats offering yoga with goats**

*Talk about a farm team.*

**By PAT EATON-ROBB | The Associated Press**

**PUBLISHED: January 6, 2018 at 10:30 am | UPDATED: January 6, 2018 at 3:40 pm**

HARTFORD, Conn. — What to do with a new \$71 million minor league baseball stadium during the winter?

If you're the Hartford Yard Goats, the Double-A affiliate of the Colorado Rockies, you turn to real goats. Time for goat yoga class.

Talk about a farm team.

The national phenomenon of goat yoga began in Oregon just over a year ago when students would assume poses such as downward dog while small goats would crawl around — and often on top of — the participants.

"You're really connecting with the animals," said Tracy Longoria, who partnered with the baseball team and also offers the classes on her Aussakita Acres farm in nearby Manchester, Connecticut. "The goats are just so therapeutic. It's such a great stress reliever. Many of the people who do it have never done yoga before. They are just there for the interaction with the animals."

Mike Abramson, the team's general manager, said the club was looking for marketing opportunities. Yard Goat Yoga seemed the perfect match.

"It was an easy yes," he said. "My expectation is that this is going to become a regular thing. Hey, if it's popular enough, maybe we'll just ditch the baseball and run a goat yoga park."

The 6,100-seat Dunkin' Donuts Park, which opened last spring, has a large indoor batting facility, which will be converted into a studio for the monthly classes. If things work out, Abramson said, and the team can persuade the groundskeepers to go along, classes will move to the outfield during the summer.

For now, four classes are scheduled to get an idea of what is involved in terms of commitment, interest and, yes, cleanup.

"Accidents happen," s Longoria said. "But we're as sanitary as possible. If someone has a little poopy accident, we're right there to clean it up. We have all the disinfectants and anti-bacterial sprays and soaps and all of that."

The classes have already sold out. The team is charging \$40 per person.

There are 40 students in a class and the farm will bring about 15 goats for each session. The sessions will be led by certified instructor Danuta Wolk-Laniewski, who owns YogaPerk, a yoga studio in Manchester and also teaches the classes on Longoria's farm.

She said the classes are designed for children as young as 8 but will include serious, if basic, yoga. She hopes that some human Yard Goats might get involved as part of their health regimen.

"Yoga is definitely good for everybody's bodies, especially athletes," she said. "Hopefully some of the players take the class as well, take some yoga, have some fun with us and do some core training where we put the goats on the back. Because, it's always more fun to plank with a goat on your back."

**Rockies Mailbag: Should Colorado pursue a veteran pitcher to shore up the starting rotation?  
And is Chris Iannetta the solution at catcher?**

By PATRICK SAUNDERS | [psaunders@denverpost.com](mailto:psaunders@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: January 4, 2018 at 8:40 am | UPDATED: January 4, 2018 at 9:23 am

**Patrick:** The following are two questions with a common theme, so I'll provide one answer.

**With the multiple second-year pitchers in the Rockies' rotation, are the Rockies making a mistake by not going after a middle-of-the-rotation veteran in case there happens to be some sophomore slumps by the young starters?**

— *Aaron Hurt, Omaha, Nebraska*

**I love the young Rockies pitchers, but if they want to take the next step as an organization should they pursue a veteran to solidify things? I don't put (Chad) Bettis in that category.**

— *Robb, Durango*

**Patrick:** I get this question every winter. Let me start off by saying that, yes, it is possible that the Rockies will add a second-tier starter, but it is not a priority. It's clear that the team prefers a homegrown rotation.

I was just looking a list of free-agent starters out there, and aside from the stars such as Jake Arrieta and Yu Darvish, Lance Lynn or Alex Cobb, I don't see many starters that I like in a Rockies uniform.

Perhaps I'm missing someone, but guys like Dillon Gee or Chris Tillman don't do much for me.

The one pitcher I think still has an upside and could be in for a rebound after a so-so 2017 season is lefty Jaime Garcia. But I have not heard anything about him coming to Colorado.

As for Bettis, I think he's an important piece of the puzzle. Is he an ace? No, not in my opinion. He's more like a No. 4 starter, but Bettis has the respect of his teammates and he's bulldog tough.

Please remember that the four rookies — German Marquez, Kyle Freeland, Antonio Senzatela and Jeff Hoffman — combined for 93 starts last season. I expect improvement in 2018, but there are also bound to be struggles. That said, this has a real chance to be the best rotation in Rockies history.

And also keep in mind that the Rockies also have long reliever Chris Rusin on their roster, and he could be converted to a starter if need be.

Of course, if I'm wrong about all of this, I'm sure you guys will remind me!

**Patrick, Manny Machado reportedly wants to play shortstop. He is arbitration eligible and will be a free agent in 2019. Trevor Story has three years of team control left. The Orioles are supposedly linked to the Cubs in discussions on Addison Russell. Could the Rockies make a competitive bid for a one-year rental on Machado by packaging Story with a second-tier prospect or two? Hurts 2019, but would make 2018 a wild fun in our last season with Nolan (Arenado) and Chuck (Charlie Blackmon). Any possibility the Rockies get in on Machado?**

— *Andrew Turner, Denver*

**Patrick:** Andrew, that's pretty creative idea ... but I just don't see it, for a variety of reasons.

1. I think the package for Machado is going to be more than you suggest.

2. The Rockies, and Jeff Bridich in particular, really like Story. He was excellent on defense last year and is getting better every time he steps on the field. Does he need to improve at the plate and cut down the strikeouts? Absolutely. But there were signs in September that Story will rebound. Don't give up on him yet.

3. In top prospect Brendan Rodgers, the Rockies might have their next power-hitting shortstop (or second baseman). Rodgers could make his debut in the second half of 2018.

4. It's rare that the Rockies ever get a one-season rental.

5. Bottom line, I just don't see it.

**Hey Patrick, here's a question about relative value without a real answer, but hey, it's winter and hot stove time to ponder.**

**As the Rox just signed Wade Davis, here's the question: Is he REALLY worth almost TWICE as much as McGee and Shaw? C'mon, man!**

— *Jim, Denver*

**Patrick:** Jim, c'mon man! You're trying to look at free agency and the hot stove using logic. Sorry, it doesn't work that way.

In the real world, of course, no relief pitcher is worth \$52 million over three years. But baseball isn't the real world, and free agency is another galaxy, altogether.

But I'm sure you know that the reason Davis commanded such a big contract is that he's a proven closer. McGee and Shaw are not, hence the disparity.

ESPN's Buster Olney, a baseball writer I respect and read religiously, just ranked Davis as the fourth-best reliever in the majors. Here is what Olney wrote:

*In a winter in which bullpen guys have been well-paid, (Davis) was paid the highest salary ever for a reliever, at \$17.33 million annually, when he got a three-year, \$52 million deal, with a vesting option for a fourth year that's very makeable if he stays healthy. The difference between Davis and the rest of the relievers in the market? He has proven his dominance in the role of closer. Over the past four seasons, Davis has an ERA of 1.45, with nine homers and 313 strikeouts in 241½ innings. His strikeout rate of 12.1 last season was the second-best of his career.*

I applaud the move by Bridich. Could it blow up if Davis gets hurt or it turns out he can't handle Coors Field? Sure, but every signing has risks. With a young, talented starting rotation in place, I think it makes sense to spend big bucks on the 'pen.

**Hey Patrick, we're less than two months away from pitchers and catchers reporting. After last season's strides, I cannot wait! I am encouraged by the bullpen signings (although I really would have liked to see Pat Neshek stay.) My question is regarding the offense: I know that power is expensive, but it seems like we could really use some protection for Nolan (Arenado) in the lineup. I would really like to see opponents pay for pitching around Nolan a little more, it seems like they came up short quite a few times with runners in scoring position and lost some close games in the second half of the season. Is there anyone out there that could fit the bill, price-/contract-/position-wise?**

— Scott, Lakewood

**Patrick:** Scott, this is the big, unanswered question of the Rockies' winter. After spending \$106 million over the next three years for relievers Wade Davis (\$52 million), Bryan Shaw (\$27 million) and Jake McGee (\$27 million), I simply don't think the Rockies will spend big bucks for another big bat.

I think that's a mistake, because I think the offense needs another piece to make it truly formidable. I'm sure Bridich and Company are counting on rebound performances from Ian Desmond and Trevor Story, and a healthy David Dahl, but that's not enough.

The Rockies could simply re-sign Mark Reynolds and combine him with rookie Ryan McMahon as their first baseman.

That would not shock me if that's how it this all comes down.

I've seen reports that the Rockies are interested in Logan Morrison, who hit 38 homers for the Rays last year. He'd cost at least \$15 million a year and I don't see the Rockies paying that much. Besides, during the winter meetings, general manager Jeff Bridich, flat out rejected rumors that the Rockies were chasing Morrison. But that was then, this is now.

Although I'd be surprised if Carlos Gonzalez returned to Colorado, it's certainly a possibility. In this strange and slow-to-develop offseason, it's hard to predict what's going to happen.

**Which young starters do you project to start the year in the bullpen?**

— *James House, Littleton*

**Patrick:** James, I've asked this question of both Bridich and manager Bud Black and they insisted that they will head to spring training with all of their young starters competing for big-league rotation jobs.

Now, with the signings of Davis, Shaw and McGee, that's truer than ever. The bullpen probably won't need to be shored up by young starters. Colorado also has some promising young relievers in Carlos Estevez, Scott Oberg and Jairo Diaz. Adam Ottovino also hopes to bounce back.

However, if I had to pick one young starter who profiles as a reliever, I would go with Antonio Senzatela. But that's just my opinion and it's not in the Rockies' current blueprint.

**Do you have any thoughts on why the Rockies have not looked to extend Nolan Arenado long term? This seems like a really good time as they are paying nothing to their starting rotation, shortstop and possibly first base ... along with Gerardo Parra coming off the books next year and Ian Desmond's contract starts to go down after this year. The longer Rockies wait the more expensive he will be.**

— *Kolby, Johnstown*

**Patrick:** Kolby, from what I have been told, those discussions could heat up this spring. But keep in mind that a new contract is not simply up to the Rockies. It's a two-way street.

Arenado has to want to stay in Colorado for the long haul, and as I have repeatedly said, I think he wants to make sure the Rockies are a true contender for years to come. They have not proven that yet. Perhaps the 2018 season will entice Arenado to stay.

However, you do make a good point when you say that now might be the best time to try and lock up the third baseman, because next year's free-agent market is going to be crazy. According to The Washington Post, executives around baseball think that Nationals star Bryce Harper will command a deal worth more than \$400 million — perhaps even as high as \$500 million.

Arenado — who'll make \$17.75 million in 2018 — is scheduled to become a free agent after the 2019 season, and he's going to command a king's ransom. Maybe not Harper-like money, but he'll command a huge deal, nonetheless. So maybe now is the time for the Rockies to make a move.



That being said, I don't know if the Rockies under Bridich are willing to give out long-term contracts as they did for Todd Helton, Troy Tulowitzki and Carlos Gonzalez.

It's a huge decision, for both the Rockies and Arenado.

**I appreciate all of your in-depth Rockies knowledge. Living in California, I rely on yourself and the Denver Post for extensive coverage and up-to-date info year-round, and you guys never disappoint. Onto the questions: I really like the young rotation and how the bullpen is shaping up. However, do you feel they need to add at least another bat to the middle of the order, whether in the form of a first baseman or corner outfielder, to solidify the lineup?**

**Also, how do you think the catcher situation plays out to start the regular season? Will Chris Iannetta be the every-day catcher, will Tom Murphy or Tony Wolters become the No. 1 option, or is it possible they may still resign Jonathan Lucroy?**

— *Elk Grove, Calif.*

**Patrick:** Thanks for the compliment, and thanks for reading. I've already addressed the need for another bat in the lineup, so I will field your question about the catchers.

Yes, Iannetta was signed to be the everyday catcher. But that means he will catch about 100 games, tops. So the No. 2 catcher will be very important. Right now, I would peg Wolters as the primary backup, but Murphy will certainly get a shot at the job.

Is it possible the Rockies will sign a veteran catcher during spring training, or early in the season? Yes, it is, but we'll have to see how things shake out in spring training.

As for Lucroy — someone I incorrectly pegged as the Rockies' No. 1 offseason priority — there is no chance he signs with Colorado now. It's clear to me that the Rockies think that Iannetta is close to Lucroy's equal as a catcher, at a much cheaper cost. Iannetta's two-year, \$8.5 million deal freed up money to bolster the bullpen.

**Hi Patrick, when will the new scoreboard installation be completed at Coors Field? It sounds amazing, I'm anxious to get a look at it — even if it is only from the Diamond Dry Goods store.**

— *John Murphy, Centennial*

**Patrick:** John, I checked on the scoreboard and I'm told that it will certainly be ready by opening day, but I don't have an exact completion date for you.

When I was down at Coors Field last month, I could see construction going on and workers were taking down the old scoreboard, but I don't know where the project sits right now.

I'm told the new board will be amazing. If you are interested to learn more about the new video board, my colleague, Nick Groke, wrote an excellent story in September.

**Buster Olney's top 10 third basemen: Stars sizzle at the hot corner**  
**Buster Olney ESPN Senior Writer | Jan. 7**

This will be a memorable year in the life of Manny Machado. Sometime in 2018, the Baltimore Orioles will probably trade him to a World Series contender and give him the same opportunity that Justin Verlander had after landing with the Houston Astros. Then Machado will become a free agent in November and sometime before the new year, he will begin to field offers for tens of millions of dollars -- or maybe even hundreds of millions. He will be rewarded for all of the work that he put in as a kid and in his years with the Orioles, all of that time he spent in rehabilitation from two serious knee injuries.

But the return on his investment in himself may not max out unless Machado digs in and performs more consistently. In order to get the sort of record-setting contract he could pursue, Machado needs to have a strong launch year into the open market, as an on-field response to some of the questions that executives have about him -- heard as we prepared our top-10 list of third basemen.

"To be honest, he looks bored sometimes," said one evaluator.

Said another: "I think he needs a different challenge."

Alex Rodriguez was Machado's idol when he was growing up as a kid in Miami, and the comparisons between the two as players are natural because they were raised in the same area, as wildly talented, thriving power-hitting infielders. But there seems to be one enormous and important difference between Alex Rodriguez and Machado.

Throughout A-Rod's career, nobody ever questioned his focus. Ever. Potential investors viewed Rodriguez as someone of superlative skill and total commitment, someone who would do whatever he needed to do daily to be great. That helped him land two record-setting contracts -- his \$252 million deal with the Rangers, which he opted out of to negotiate a \$275 million monster with the Yankees.

Last year was a challenge for Machado, for sure. Early in the year, he was at the center of the Orioles' beanball stuff with the Red Sox after colliding with Dustin Pedroia on a slide. The Orioles had the worst rotation in the majors and for the Baltimore position players, there must've been a Groundhog Day feel to the season: By the fourth or fifth inning on most days, Machado and the other position players would be staring at an early deficit of three or four runs. By September, the Orioles sometimes looked like the walking dead, Machado among them.

This was reflected in the feedback of evaluators solicited for their rankings of the top 10 third basemen. For some, Machado was listed fourth or fifth or even sixth, with caveats. At his best, they believe, he is the most talented defender at the position, and capable of big offensive numbers -- but that he sometimes will drift through days or weeks, particularly in the way he works through his plate appearances. His production in 2017 was remarkably erratic.

Machado's OPS by month

April .767

May .629

June .759

July .870

August 1.039

September .537

He finished with a .259 average and a .310 on-base percentage, and as ESPN Researcher Paul Hembekides notes, his performance outside of hitter-friendly Camden Yards was flat-out awful last season -- a .268 on-base percentage in 336 plate appearances, with an Adjusted OPS+ of 80, well below major league average.

He's going to get a great contract and make more money than almost all of his peers, because of how special a defender he is, whether he's at shortstop (where the Orioles are expected to play him this year) or at third base. But Machado could help himself by being more consistent, in a sport that probably values that trait -- and compensates for it -- more than any other.

Our top-10 list of third basemen, which is based on the input of evaluators and the insight and data generated by ESPN's Paul Hembekides, Sarah Langs and Mark Simon. And of all the tasks in this series, trying to rank the third basemen is the most impossible.

## **1. Nolan Arenado, Colorado Rockies**

When position players are compared, the Rockies' players are always assigned demerits because, almost without exception, their numbers at home are markedly better than on the road. For hitters, there is a clear statistical advantage to playing half of their games in Coors Field. But Rockies' officials made a fair point about this dynamic: the performance of pitchers who work in ballparks clearly favorable to them -- like the pitchers of the Dodgers, Giants or Padres -- isn't dissected in the same way.

So sure, Nolan Arenado does do a lot of damage in his home games, but he's a great player no matter where he is. He generated 87 extra-base hits and drove in at least 130 runs for the third consecutive season, and had a career-high .959 OPS. He has won a Gold Glove in each of his five seasons in the big leagues and finished in the top 10 in the MVP voting in each of the past three seasons, and he plays ferociously -- he's like a middle linebacker at third base, attacking and intercepting ground balls.

From Sarah Langs: He has 104 Defensive Runs Saved at third base since his 2013 debut. The next-most at third base is Manny Machado, with 74.

Another: In 2017, he joined Hall of Famers Mike Schmidt and Wade Boggs as the only third basemen to win at least three straight Silver Slugger Awards. (Schmidt won five straight, Boggs four straight.)

**Buster Olney's top 10 second basemen: Trust us, it's not just Jose Altuve 10 times**  
**Buster Olney | ESPN Senior Writer | Jan. 7**

Jose Altuve endured the Astros' worst years, which were some of the worst in baseball history. In his first four years in the big leagues (2011-2014), Houston was a cumulative 184 games under .500. It was fitting, then, that the best of times for the franchise -- the last out in the last inning of the Astros' World Series clincher -- was a ground ball to the guy who lived through the worst of times. Altuve threw out Corey Seager and then went nuts, like the rest of his teammates.

His circumstances may also present the first serious challenge to the Astros' reign as one of baseball's pre-eminent teams, because only two years remain before Altuve will be eligible for free agency -- and you wouldn't blame baseball's best second baseman if he went for the big money, because his contract has been incredibly team-friendly.

Altuve signed a four-year deal with fifth- and sixth-year options in the midst of the 2013 season. The Astros bet that Altuve would remain productive and guaranteed him \$12.5 million, and their return on investment has been staggering. Houston picked up the 2018 option for \$6 million. Assuming that Altuve's 2019 option is also exercised (at \$6.5 million), he'll make \$23.75 million over the six years of his contract. Altuve has averaged six wins above replacement (WAR) over the past four seasons, and for the sake of argument, let's say he does that for a couple of more years.

If you figure that each win above replacement is worth about \$8 million to the Astros, that means that during the six years of his deal, he will have provided \$288 million in value to the organization.

He is a legacy player for all that he has accomplished in what has been a Hall of Fame career trajectory thus far, so you would assume the Astros will do all they can to re-sign him.

Altuve heads the list of the top 10 second basemen, of course. The rankings are based on input from MLB evaluators, with input from ESPN researchers Sarah Langs and Paul Hembekides.

**6. DJ LeMahieu, Colorado Rockies**

He has evolved from something of a surprise -- certainly to the Cubs, who traded him to the Rockies -- to one of baseball's most consistent middle infielders. He has hit over .300 in three straight seasons, won a couple of Gold Gloves and can be penciled in for about 150 games. He tied for the MLB lead (with Yolmer Sanchez) in defensive runs saved (DRS) last season.

## **Buster Olney's top 10 relievers: Aroldis Chapman falls, even as Yankees' bullpen rises**

### **Buster Olney | ESPN Senior Writer | Jan. 3**

The amateur draft might be the last safe haven of the starting pitcher, the last area of the game where they possess pre-eminence over relief pitchers. When given a choice, teams will almost always prefer the starting pitcher, a small reminder of those times -- not long ago -- when bullpen guys were mostly viewed as pitchers who couldn't cut it in a rotation.

But now relievers get more respect, more innings and, most importantly, more money. In the offseason of 2011-2012, starters got about 60 percent of the money doled out to free-agent pitchers -- \$299.4 million of the \$465 million spent. This has changed dramatically in recent seasons. Last winter, free-agent relievers got \$421.2 million and starters \$194.6 million, or 68 percent to relievers. So far this winter, relievers have been paid two-thirds of the dollars devoted to pitching: \$274.8 million, compared to \$142 million spent on starting pitching.

### **Buster Olney's Top 10s**

When Andrew Miller signed his four-year, \$36 million contract with the Yankees prior to the 2015 season, that contract was considered a shocking luxury to rival executives, the kind of deal that only a big-market team could consider. Just a few years later, a \$9 million annual salary is the going rate for a good reliever, paid this winter by the Phillies to Tommy Hunter (two years, \$18 million), by the Rockies to Jake McGee and Bryan Shaw (both signing for three years, \$27 million) and by the Rangers to Mike Minor (three years, \$28 million, with an opportunity to start).

There has been a lot of focus on the high-end position players and starting pitchers who figure to be free agents next fall: Bryce Harper, Manny Machado, Josh Donaldson and perhaps Clayton Kershaw, who can opt out of his contract. But the market of free-agent relievers might be where the big-market teams such as the Yankees and Dodgers invest their money, with Craig Kimbrel, Andrew Miller, Zach Britton, Cody Allen and David Robertson, among others, available.

Here is our list of the top 10 relievers, based on the input of evaluators, with help from Sarah Langs, Paul Hembekides and Mark Simon of ESPN Stats & Information:

#### **4. Wade Davis, Colorado Rockies**

In a winter in which bullpen guys have been well-paid, he was paid the highest salary ever for a reliever, at \$17.33 million annually, when he got a three-year, \$52 million deal, with a vesting option for a fourth year that's very makeable if he stays healthy. The difference between Davis and the rest of the relievers in the market? He has proven his dominance in the role of closer. Over the past four seasons, Davis has an ERA of 1.45, with nine homers and 313 strikeouts in 241⅓ innings. His strikeout rate of 12.1 last season was the second-best of his career.

## Colorado Rockies hoping Ryan McMahon follows Cody Bellinger's path?

by Kevin Henry 2 days ago | Roxpile

**Are the Colorado Rockies looking to acquire another bat for their lineup or are they counting on youngsters to make a big splash alongside seasoned veterans for the 2018 season? That is the question currently being debated in Rockies circles.**

The Rockies have been linked to numerous free agents throughout the offseason. However, the vast majority of the money spent so far by the Colorado offense has come in the bullpen, thanks to the signings of **Bryan Shaw**, **Wade Davis** and **Jake McGee**. Only the inking of **Chris Iannetta** behind the plate has kept this offseason from being all about Rockies pitching.

It has been reported that **Ryan McMahon** has been “**penciled in**” to **start at first base** for the Rockies in 2018. If that report is true, it frees up **Ian Desmond** for the outfield, joining **Gerardo Parra** and **Charlie Blackmon** as the likely Opening Day starters.

Handing the first base reins over to McMahon makes sense in some respects. The Rockies have been looking for their next franchise first baseman since **Todd Helton** retired. They thought they might have found him when they signed Desmond to a lucrative deal last season. However, injuries and a hot start by **Mark Reynolds** changed Colorado's plans. Now, the 23-year-old McMahon may be the next in line to try to grab the position and hold onto it for the long term. It may seem like a risky move but it worked well for the National League champion Los Angeles Dodgers last season.

After being called up in late April, Bellinger blasted 39 homers and drove in 97 runs on his way to earning an All-Star nod and Rookie of the Year honors, playing 93 games at first base. He gave a huge boost to the Dodgers as they captured Major League Baseball's best regular-season record. However, he struggled to a .219 average in the postseason as the Dodgers eventually fell to the Houston Astros in a seven-game World Series.

Could how well things worked for the Dodgers and their rookie first baseman last season provide a bit of a nudge for the Rockies and their plans in 2018? McMahon has the tools to make it happen. He batted .300 or better at Class A, Double-A and Triple-A. He also has totaled double-digit homers every year in the minors since being drafted by the Rockies in the second round of the 2013 draft.



He hit just .158 in 17 games last season with the Rockies, but that covered just 19 at-bats **after being called up in mid-August** and being called up again on September 1. Getting consistent playing time wasn't a priority last season it seems at the Major League level. This year, McMahon could likely be on the field when it matters most for Colorado.

Last season, Bellinger put together a slash line of .267/.352/.581 with an OPS of .933 in 132 MLB games. In 70 Triple-A games, McMahon logged .374/.411/.612 with an OPS of 1.023. The numbers show that McMahon has the skills to step in at first and produce for the Rockies at a position where offensive production is certainly needed. Is Major League pitching comparable to Triple-A? On the whole, no. However, McMahon produced last season at a high level when given regular at-bats, no matter at what level.

As an aside, Bellinger hit .343/.429/.627 in 18 games (67 at-bats) at Triple-A Oklahoma City before being called up last season.

Even if McMahon doesn't produce in 2018 what Bellinger did in 2017, a solid bat with the ability to drive in runners on a consistent basis will be a plus for a Rockies lineup that needed a jumpstart at times in 2017 and has yet to add much offensive spark in the offseason leading up to the 2018 campaign.

## The Unrelenting Growth of Charlie Blackmon

By Daniel R. Epstein | Offthebenchbaseball.com | Jan. 5

Never trust anyone over 30.

-Jack Weinberg

The man responsible for the above quote, a rallying cry for young progressives in the 1960s, turns 78 this year. The context of the phrase has nothing to do with baseball, but perhaps baseball is where it's most applicable.

The late **Ron Santo** would also have turned 78 in 2018; he was born just a few weeks before Weinberg. Through 1970- his age-30 season- Santo accumulated 61.8 bWAR, the second most in history by a third baseman through that age (**Eddie Mathews** had 73.8 bWAR through age 30). However, Santo's career dwindled considerably in his thirties. He produced only 8.7 more bWAR before retiring at age 34. His precipitous decline kept him out of the Hall of Fame until 2012, a little more than a year after his death.

**Charlie Blackmon** was born on July 1, 1986. The first of July is the cutoff date for determining the age of a player's season, so even though he was 31 for much of 2017, last year is considered his age-30 season. And what a season it was! The Rockies' star center fielder led the National League in BA (.331), TB (387), H (213), R (137), 3B (14), and PA (725). He won a Silver Slugger and finished 5th in the MVP voting.

From a historical perspective, Blackmon's age 30 season was very good, but not particularly special. The best age 30 season ever was **Cal Ripken's**, an 11.5 bWAR mark in 1991 earned him that honor. Blackmon's 6.0 bWAR is tied for the 70th best among position players at his age.

However, Blackmon has an advantage that neither Cal Ripken nor Ron Santo had at the precipice of their thirties: upward momentum. Blackmon has played 7 seasons in the major leagues. Remarkably, his bWAR has increased every single year.

### MAKING PROGRESS

The Rockies drafted Blackmon in the 2nd round out of Georgia Tech in 2008. He progressed quickly through the system despite a lack of top prospect heraldry and debuted in the majors in 2011 at age 24. His first season didn't go well; he slashed .255/.277/.296 through 102 PA. The following year was only marginally better with an 84 wRC+ in 121 PA.

He played about half a season in 2013 with roughly league average offense (adjusted for Coors Field). In 2014, he won the starting job and made his first All-Star team, despite still being only an average player. He stole a career-best 43 bases in 2015 and made marginal improvements to his OBP and SLG. In 2016, his power really developed for the first time and he posted a 130 wRC+. In 2017, he was one of the top players in the National League.

What's missing from his curriculum vitae is any kind of setback. There's no "sophomore slump," "adjusting to the league," or "down season." What's even more impressive is that Blackmon was a pitcher up until 2007, when, as the legend goes, **he bluffed his way into an outfield job** in summer ball due to a sore pitching arm. Is it really that ridiculous to think he could continue to get better? Here is a chart of his year-to-year bWAR:

Year	Age	season #	Season bWAR	Increase	Career bWAR
2011	24	1	-0.7		-0.7
2012	25	2	0.2	0.9	-0.5
2013	26	3	0.8	0.6	0.3
2014	27	4	2.1	1.3	2.4
2015	28	5	2.4	0.3	4.8
2016	29	6	4.5	2.1	9.3
2017	30	7	6.0	1.5	15.3

On average, his bWAR increases by 1.1 every year, without any decline whatsoever. Whereas Santo was winding down at 30, Blackmon is just heating up.

## THE GREAT BEYOND

There are only two possible paths for Blackmon's future:

1. He can age like a normal athlete, and at some point in the near future he will start to decline. This may happen gradually or dramatically, and it could begin as soon as 2018.
2. He can progress mathematically, gaining an approximately 1.1 bWAR every year without decline, for the rest of eternity.

The first possibility is no fun for anyone. It certainly won't be enjoyable for Blackmon and it's a boring thought experiment. Every baseball fan knows what an aging player looks like physically and statistically.

As for the second possibility...

Year	Age	season #	Season bWAR	Increase	Career bWAR	
2018		31	8	7.1	1.1	22.4
2019		32	9	8.2	1.1	30.7
2020		33	10	9.4	1.1	40.0
2021		34	11	10.5	1.1	50.5

By 2021, he will eclipse 10 bWAR for the first time. Only 56 times in baseball history has a player achieved double-digit bWAR (though **Mike Trout** might do it a few more times by then). He'll almost certainly have won at least one MVP award. It's unusual to become the best player in baseball at age 34 (or maybe he's still second to Trout), but not completely suspicious.

Year	Age	season #	Season bWAR	Increase	Career bWAR	
2022		35	12	11.6	1.1	62.1
2023		36	13	12.7	1.1	74.8
2024		37	14	13.8	1.1	88.6
2025		38	15	14.9	1.1	103.5

Blackmon achieves two milestones in 2025. At the age of 38, he breaks **Babe Ruth's** record for highest single-season bWAR by a position player: 14.1 in 1923. He also surpasses 100 bWAR in his career, becoming only the 20th position player to do so (or 21st, again Trout is really good).

For comparison, only 5 players ever have had at least 6 bWAR in their age 38 season: **Ted Williams** (9.7), **Barry Bonds**(9.2), **Honus Wagner** (8.1), Babe Ruth (6.4), and the legendary **Bob Johnson** (6.3, it was 1944 and most of baseball's best talent was serving in World War II). Blackmon is now as better than Ruth and Wagner combined at the same age.

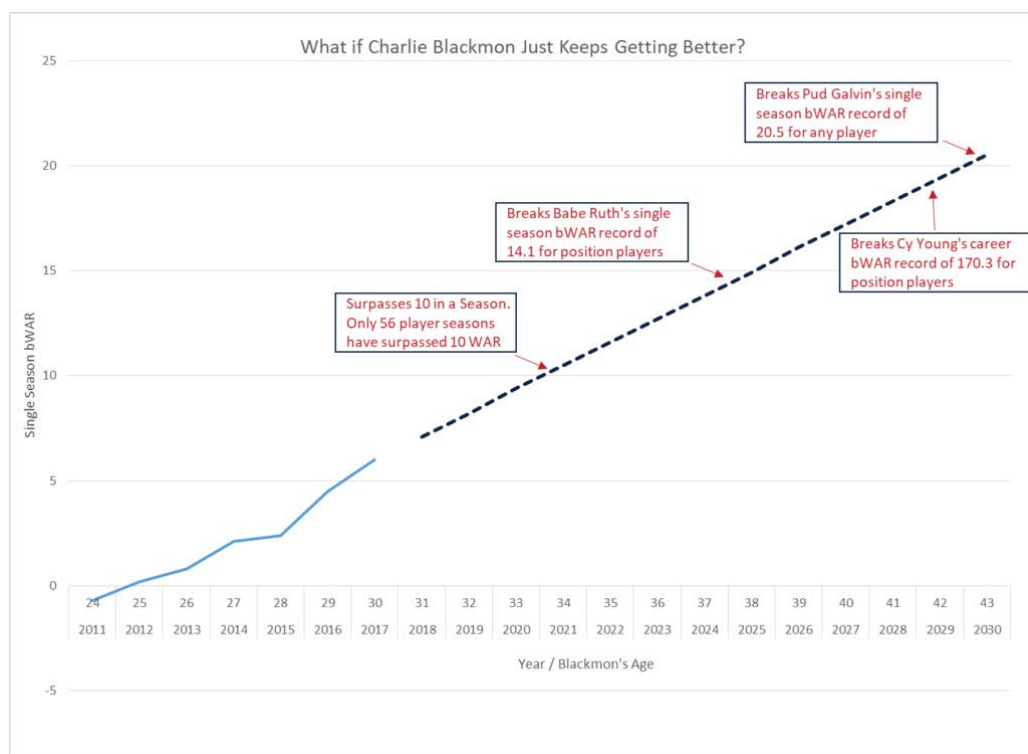
Year	Age	season #	Season bWAR	Increase	Career bWAR	
2026		39	16	16.1	1.1	119.6
2027		40	17	17.2	1.1	136.7

2028	41	18	18.3	1.1	155.0
2029	42	19	19.4	1.1	174.4
2030	43	20	20.5	1.1	194.9

The 1884 Buffalo Bisons played 115 games in the National League. Hall of Famer **Pud Galvin** started 72 of them, completing 71. He had a 1.99 ERA over 636.1 IP with a 46-22 record. Remarkably, none of these stats led the league! He did, however, set a single-season record with 20.5 bWAR that still stands to this day.

Blackmon will tie Galvin's record in 2030 as a 43-year-old. The preceding season, he will break Babe Ruth's record for career bWAR by a position player of 163.1 and **Cy Young's** overall career record of 170.3 (of course, the Trout disclaimer still applies).

Maybe you're more of a chart person. Well, we have something of a present for making it this far.



## RETURNING TO REALITY

As a 34-year-old writer, I can attest that the human body's inevitable decay seems to accelerate after 30. The metabolism slows down, joints start to ache, and hair turns gray. (If you've seen Blackmon's mane, you'll understand the importance

of hair color). Of course, it's been more than 20 years since I was any sort of athlete, but every living creature is susceptible to the ravages of time.

Nevertheless, if Blackmon can maintain his streak of improvement for even two more seasons he'll be among the greatest players in baseball. But can we trust his progression to continue into his age-31 season? Ask Jack Weinberg.