



MEDIA CLIPS – Nov. 30, 2018

Arenado headlines list of 7 arb-eligible Rockies Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Nov. 29th, 2018

DENVER -- The intrigue on the Rockies' list of arbitration-eligible players begins with whether third baseman Nolan Arenado can be locked to a multi-year deal, but it goes well beyond that as Friday's 6 p.m. MT non-tender deadline approaches.

The club has seven arbitration-eligible players including Arenado, who is in his fourth and final year. Pitcher Chad Bettis is in his second of three years, and shortstop Trevor Story, pitchers Jon Gray, Tyler Anderson and Scott Oberg, and catcher Tony Wolters are in the first of their three years. The Rockies also have a full 40-man roster but are looking to make acquisitions to improve their offense.

Chris Rusin avoided arbitration Thursday by signing a 1-year deal worth \$1,687,500.

Arenado's saga -- whether the Rockies will sign him to a mega-deal, reach a one-year deal and risk him leaving as a free agent or trade him if they can't reach an agreement this winter -- will continue to dominate the offseason headlines. Arenado earned \$17.75 million in 2018 and finished third in the National League Most Valuable Player Award voting.

But there are plenty of other questions while watching Arenado play out.

While the club has given no indication of its plan, here are the situations to consider:

- After Story blossomed in 2018 with an All-Star Game invite, a .291 batting average and 37 homers that put him one below Arenado's National League-leading total, does the club entertain a deal of more than one year? Going into 2017, for example, the Rockies signed Arenado for \$29.5 million and left a year of arbitration -- the one they're dealing with now.

- Starting pitching depth has been a key to the Rockies making postseason appearances the last two years, and general manager Jeff Bridich has said he doesn't anticipate a time when the Rockies have too much in that area. But do the Rockies take a risk here?

MLB Trade Rumors identifies Bettis as a non-tender candidate, but that would be a difficult one for a team that doesn't walk away from starters.

Last year, Bettis (5-2, 5.01 ERA) pitched as well as any starter before recurring right middle finger blister problems forced him to the bullpen. But he posted a 2.38 ERA in seven regular-season relief appearances, and he was trusted out of the bullpen in the NL Wild Card Game and the NL Division Series loss to the Brewers.

- With primary right-handed setup man Adam Ottavino on the free-agent market and no early indication that the Rockies -- who spent big on their bullpen last winter -- will join a bidding war, Oberg figures to receive an increased role. Last year, he went 8-1 with a 2.45 ERA and had a 1.51 ERA and .199 batting average against during his final 46 appearances.

Rusin mostly struggled in 2018 (2-3, 6.09 in 49 games) and did time on the disabled list with an oblique injury and plantar fasciitis. But the club is counting on him bouncing back to something like his 2017 form (5-1, 2.65 in 60 appearances) and is thin on lefty bullpen depth. Rusin's ability to pitch various roles is an asset, and he was trusted at the end of the regular year and in the postseason.

- In two seasons under manager Bud Black, Colorado has sought to protect and increase its numbers behind the plate, but also is perpetually looking for an upgrade. Wolters struggled to a .170 batting average in 74 games while backing Chris Iannetta, but his penchant for athletic defense and work with pitchers (the 3.02 ERA of German Marquez in 23 starts stands out) are factors in his favor. Do the Rockies tender him and protect their numbers, or do they non-tender to have a more flexible roster while looking to upgrade?

Rusin avoids arbitration with 1-year deal
Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Nov. 29th, 2018

DENVER -- Left-handed relief pitcher Chris Rusin and the Rockies have reached a one-year, \$1,687,500 contract to avoid arbitration, the club announced Thursday. MLB Network insider Jon Heyman first reported the dollar amount.

The Rockies are counting on Rusin, 32, to rebound from a difficult 2018 and return to being a versatile and valuable member of the Rockies' bullpen.

Rusin was one of the Majors' top relievers in 2017, when he went 5-1 with a 2.65 ERA in 85 innings and struck out 71 against 19 walks. But in '18, he dealt with disabled list stints for an oblique injury and plantar fasciitis, and struggled to a 2-3 record and 6.09 ERA, spikes in walk rate (26 in 54 2/3 innings) and slugging percentage against (.435, from .358).

"Chris Rusin is a candidate to rebound," Rockies general manager Jeff Bridich said earlier this offseason. "I know he was disappointed by this season. It certainly was frustrating for him after his 2017, but there is better pitching in there. We've seen it out of him, and he can rebound well next year."

To land big fish, Rox must be willing to sacrifice
Teams eyeing Colorado starters, top prospect as potential trade returns
Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Nov. 29th, 2018

DENVER -- The Rockies can envision Carlos Santana, whom the Phillies would like to move, providing big-time offense production at first base. Trades with the Marlins for catcher J.T. Realmuto or Mets pitcher Noah Syndergaard also are attractive ideas, but they're all talk until Colorado answers what it's willing to give up.

For now, the Rockies are one of several teams in the mix for all of them. But the reason Colorado isn't beyond the exploration level is the same reason there isn't a credible, specific trade rumor for any of the players. The Phillies, Marlins and Mets have made clear they're seeking top prospects and impact Major Leaguers under club control.

MLB.com has learned from multiple sources that teams Colorado is talking to often ask for two of the most valuable assets when it comes to big production at a low price -- starting rotation members Kyle Freeland and German Marquez. Infielder Brendan Rodgers, the Rockies' No. 1 prospect according to MLB Pipeline, is also popular on the request line.

General manager Jeff Bridich has said there are no untouchables, but those three would be difficult to move. In the recent past, teams have asked Colorado for starting pitcher Jon Gray and outfielder David Dahl although both face question marks -- Gray because of a rough 2018 that included a move to Triple-A, Dahl because of an injury history.

However, it appears the Rockies -- who have stated a goal to improve the offense but also a want to upgrade catching and collect impact pitchers -- are working the trade market with gusto. Industry sources say the club is playing a waiting game with free agents while working through complicated talks with other clubs to see if trades are possible.

Colorado's interest in Santana, who turns 33 on April 8, as a corner bat is not new. They looked at bidding last offseason, but spent a total of \$106 million on three-year contracts for relief pitchers Wade Davis, Jake McGee and Bryan Shaw. Santana took three years and \$60 million from the Phillies.

Santana started slowly and batted .229, but ended with 24 home runs and 86 RBIs. Philadelphia's problem is that Santana's presence forced power-hitting Rhys Hoskins to play left field, which is outside of his skill set. If the Phils can trade Santana, the plan would be to move Hoskins to first base, his more natural position.

In theory, if Colorado could land Santana, it would free Ian Desmond to move from first base to left field and Ryan McMahon to get his work at second base, where the Rockies feel he could excel. Of course, there are a couple rubs. Santana is due \$35 million over the next two seasons. Also, while the Phillies are in play for the most expensive free agents, they would seek from Colorado either young Major League impact players or prospects.

Even if the more expensive Rockies coming off rough years -- Desmond and Shaw come to mind -- can be moved, the key to whether Colorado could truly obtain a Santana, Syndergaard or Realmuto is the young, controllable talent headed the other way.

Throughout the offseason, the Rockies have been considered a long shot for Realmuto; however, if reports are to be believed, there is no team with an inside shot because of Miami's asking price. But if it's going to trade for a frontline catcher, Colorado is more likely to pursue Realmuto, who is under club control through 2020, than reportedly available receivers at the end of their contracts -- the Blue Jays' Russell Martin (\$20 million) and the Pirates' Francisco Cervelli (\$11.5 million).

Here's how Rockies could land Syndergaard
Colorado surfaces in rumor mill among contenders for Mets righty
Thomas Harding | MLB.com | Nov. 28th, 2018

DENVER -- The Rockies have been mentioned as a team that could land Mets standout right-handed pitcher Noah Syndergaard. And while it isn't clear that the Mets -- hoping to restructure their roster but also hoping to contend -- would part with Syndergaard, the idea of Colorado exploring a deal is not far-fetched.

The Rockies were mentioned in reports in The Athletic and SNY as having some interest. Before Colorado dealt shortstop Troy Tulowitzki to the Blue Jays in 2015, the Rockies tried to deal him to the Mets and Syndergaard was a prominent figure in the rumors. That was before Syndergaard blossomed with a 14-9 record and 2.60 ERA in 31 appearances in an All-Star '16.

Syndergaard missed almost all of 2017 with a right lat injury, but bounced back in '18, with a 10-3 record and a 3.33 ERA in 25 starts. And with the Mets, under new general manager Brodie Van Wagenen, trying to make a quick turnaround (while also beefing up their farm system), Syndergaard seems back in the rumor mill.

How can the Rockies pull off such a deal?

The five-year, \$70 million contract that Ian Desmond signed with Colorado before the 2017 season was negotiated by CAA Baseball, where Van Wagenen was part of the leadership team. The intangibles that have led the Rockies to defend Desmond as a winner, even though he dealt with injuries in '17 and produced sub-par overall numbers in '18, are well-known to Van Wagenen.

New York would love a versatile right-handed bat. The Mets have been connected to a possible trade for the Mariners' Robinson Cano, who has been more productive than Desmond. However, Desmond alone -- especially since he is owed \$38 million over the next two seasons -- would not get a deal done. With Syndergaard expected to make around \$6 million in 2019 with two more years of club control behind this one, he is a valuable asset who would come at a high price.

The Mets are likely to demand at least one more young impact player whose contract is under club control, and maybe even a prospect or two to sweeten the deal. Colorado's drive to playoff spots the past two seasons has been built

precisely on young, controllable players. The Brewers have been mentioned as having more of a chance to come up with an offer that entices the Mets.

Another intriguing piece the Rockies could send is righty relief pitcher Bryan Shaw, who struggled to a 4-6 record and 5.93 ERA in 2018 to open a three-year, \$27 million contract. Mets manager Mickey Callaway worked with Shaw as the Indians' pitching coach during a more successful season. But with \$19.5 million (including a \$2 million buyout on a \$9 million, '21 option) coming Shaw's way after a rough year, the more likely scenario is that he returns to Colorado and tries to bounce back in '19. (Shaw, by the way, can earn the '21 option if he is healthy when that year starts and/or meets incentives tied to the '19 and '20 seasons.)

While the Mets could pivot to a proven free agent to replace Syndergaard in the rotation, it might take more than the Rockies can afford give to pry him away. And the Mets' asking price may make sending Syndergaard anywhere impossible, anyhow, or at least indicate that they don't really want to make a trade.

With Friday's non-tender deadline looming, Nolan Arenado and Trevor Story among eight arbitration-eligible Rockies
Arenado earned \$17.75 million in 2018, and the third baseman is in line for a projected record \$26.1 million arbitration salary
Kyle Newman | DenverPost.com | Nov. 28, 2018

Players not offered a contract prior to the 6 p.m. MT deadline are non-tendered, thereby making them free agents. In addition to Arenado, shortstop Trevor Story, catcher Tony Wolters and pitchers Chad Bettis, Jon Gray, Tyler Anderson and Scott Oberg are also arbitration eligible.

Left-handed reliever Chris Rusin avoided arbitration by signing a one-year contract deal on Thursday. The deal is worth \$1.69 million.

Rusin, 32, was one of baseball most-dependable relievers in 2017, going 5-1 with a 2.65 ERA over a career-high 85 innings. He struck out 71 and walked only 19. But 2018 was an injury-filled disaster. Rusin spent time on the disabled list stints for an oblique injury and plantar fasciitis, and finished with a 2-3 record and a 6.09 ERA. Rusin, however did perform better late in the season.

"Chris Rusin is a candidate to rebound," general manager Jeff Bridich said earlier this month. "I know he was disappointed by this season. It certainly was frustrating for him after his 2017, but there is better pitching in there. We've seen it out of him, and he can rebound well next year."

Arenado made \$17.75 million in 2018 as he led the National League with 38 home runs, finished third in the MVP voting and added another Gold Glove, Silver Slugger and all-star appearance to his resume.

It's a safe bet that Colorado's cornerstone player would earn a bigger arbitration salary than any in history, with MLB Trade Rumors projecting his \$26.1 million arbitration salary to surpass the record \$23 million that Josh Donaldson earned last year.

Whether Colorado will ink the 27-year-old to a long-term mega-deal, re-sign him to a one-year contract with the risk of Arenado walking as a free agent after the 2019 season or trade him this offseason remains to be seen. For now, Bridich must weigh the merits of the six other arbitration-eligible players.

Arenado is in his fourth and final year of arbitration, while Bettis is entering his second second year of arbitration and Story, Wolters, Gray, Anderson and Oberg are all in their first.

Colorado has a full 40-man roster, and Bettis (who battled finger blister issues in 2018 and whose spot in the rotation is questionable) and Wolters (hit a team-low .170) are possible candidates to be non-tendered in order to clear roster space for offseason acquisitions.

Meanwhile, Story's all-star and Silver Slugger season might have the 26-year-old in line for a multi-year deal. A bigger payday is also likely for Scott Oberg (8-1, 2.45 ERA), who emerged as Colorado's best reliever over the final couple months of the season and is projected to fill the bullpen void left by fellow right-hander Adam Ottavino's free agency.

Despite the struggles of Gray and Anderson throughout 2018, indications are each player will be offered a contract. Colorado hopes Gray can pitch better and be mentally tougher in big games, and hope Anderson can pitch a whole season with consistency.

Rockies still quiet as MLB's hot stove season begins to heat up
Colorado has not talked to free agents Adam Ottavino or DJ LeMahieu
Patrick Saunders | DenverPost.com | Nov. 27, 2018

The Hot Stove season is just now beginning to percolate, but between now and Christmas, expect news to start boiling. Whether the Rockies make a major splash remains to be seen.

Thus far, the biggest news has been made by the Braves, who inked veteran third baseman — and former American League MVP — Josh Donaldson to a one-year, \$23 million deal, and also signed veteran catcher Brian McCann to a one-year, \$2 million deal.

Meanwhile, the rumor mill is shifting into a higher gear. Outfielder Bryce Harper and Manny Machado are dominating the headlines, with Philadelphia poised to make a big strike.

As for the Rockies, they have stayed out of the headlines, which is exactly the way general manager Jeff Bridich likes it. What we do know is that Bridich's No. 1 goal this offseason is adding a quality bat to beef up what was a disappointing offense in 2018.

"We'll likely be a little more focused on our offense this season," Bridich said earlier this month. "A lot remains to be seen and learned at the GM meetings, and at the winter meetings (Dec. 10-13 in Las Vegas). There's a lot of conversations still to be had and more information to be gleaned before a real, true course for our offseason is determined."

The Rockies are among at least 14 teams linked to Marwin Gonzalez, the free-agent, super-utility player who helped the Astros win the 2017 World Series. Over his last two seasons, Gonzalez has operated as a multi-purpose starter, with at least 15 starts at five positions — left field, shortstop (his natural spot), second, first and third base.

During the GM meetings this month, Bridich was non-committal about Colorado's possible pursuit of Gonzalez, or other multi-dimensional players.

“We’ve got some guys we can move around, so it’s nice to have that on the team already,” Bridich told MLB.com. “With the way that we’re built in the National League, 13 pitchers, it’s always part of our thought process. I’m not sure how much necessarily we will have that lead the day for us with free agency or trades, but it’s always part of our thought process.”

A number of teams, including Colorado, have been mentioned as a potential trade partner with the Marlins for catcher J.T. Realmuto.

The 2018 all-star, considered the best young catcher in the game, is 27 and under club control for the next two seasons. Rumors around him have swirled since agent Jeff Berry said Realmuto won’t be signed to a long-term deal, and he “definitely” will be traded.

Bridich has given no indication that the Rockies will try to land Realmuto. Indeed when asked about Realmuto, Bridich steered the conversation to how Rockies catchers performed in 2018.

“They were at times really good for us defensively and streaky offensively — at times they struggled as a group,” Bridich said. “We like different elements of what each guy brings. When you put together two or three catchers at a time on your 25-man roster, you’re looking for what they can do as a group, a combination — maybe even more so than any other position on the field.

“The defensive elements of what they bring are really important, and that’s not lost on us. They just fit into everything else. We have an open mind to everything, but it’s not like we’re looking to move guys. But now is the time in the industry to listen and be open-minded, so we’ll see what happens.”

The Rockies’ catching corps consists on Chris Iannetta, Tony Wolters, Tom Murphy and Brett Nicholas, who signed a minor-league deal with the Rockies earlier this month. Nicholas appeared in 36 games with the Rangers in 2016 and ’17.

Nicholas, 30, hit a combined .252 with the Rangers. He spent last season with the Padres’ Triple-A club in El Paso after arriving in an April trade from the Rangers. He batted .291 with a .353 on-base percentage and a .485 slugging percentage, 16 home runs and 83 RBIs for El Paso.

As for the former Rockies who are now free agents, it's appearing more and more doubtful that the Rockies will attempt to retain their most coveted free agents: right-handed reliever Adam Ottavino and Gold Glove, all-star second baseman DJ LeMahieu. The Rockies have not talked to either player about returning to Colorado.

Both the Yankees and Mets have made inquiries about signing Ottavino, but he told The Denver Post that "a good amount of teams have been interested, but nothing is imminent by any means." He added that his main priority for free agency is landing with a club that's dedicated to winning.

The Dodgers, Nationals and Twins have had preliminary talks with LeMahieu, MLB.com reported Monday.

Stark: Five things to watch on this winter's Hall of Fame ballot
Jayson Stark | TheAthletic.com | Nov 29, 2018

My 2019 Hall of Fame ballot arrived the other day. It's sitting on my desk. And it will sit there for a month, because I'm one of those voters who takes a lot of time on this process.

Every name on that ballot deserves my respect and attention. And I give it to every darned one of them. But the more I look over those names, the more convinced I am that this is going to be one of the most interesting Hall of Fame elections in years.

Too many story lines are swirling to zip through them all – for now at least. But there are a few I find especially compelling. So here come are Five Things to Watch on the 2019 Hall Ballot:

Will Halladay be a first-ballot Hall Of Famer?

Why is this a debate? I don't get it. Was Roy Halladay a Hall of Famer? Of course he was. This isn't hard. It's easy. It shouldn't require a wave of emotion generated by Halladay's tragic death in a plane crash. It was all out there for the world to see on a pitcher's mound near you.

Here's the deal: If a player – any player – was clearly among the most dominant players at his position for a decade, he's a Hall of Famer. Case closed. Next.

And if you have any doubt – any – that Halladay was a dominator over those 10 seasons from 2002-11, what the heck were you watching? Let's spell it out for you.

Over those 10 seasons, he went 170-75, with a 2.97 ERA and a 148 ERA-Plus, while averaging over 219 innings a season. He won two Cy Youngs in that time. He also ripped off four top-two-finishes, five top-three finishes and seven top-five finishes – in a span of just 10 Cy Young elections. How much more dominating would you need him to be?

SEVEN TOP-FIVE CY FINISHES IN 10 YEARS: Just five other pitchers have ever done that: Randy Johnson (eight), Greg Maddux (eight), Pedro Martinez (seven), Jim Palmer (seven) and Clayton Kershaw (seven). Kershaw is still going. You can read more about the other four on their Hall of Fame plaques.

FIVE TOP-THREE FINISHES IN 10 YEARS: Halladay is one of just 10 pitchers in this club. Two of them – Kershaw and Justin Verlander – are still active. The other seven: Johnson, Maddux, Pedro, Palmer, Tom Seaver, Tom Glavine and Roger Clemens. All but Clemens sign their autographs “HOF.” And Clemens could still join them, with four elections remaining. (More on that momentarily.)

FOUR TOP-TWO FINISHES IN 10 YEARS: Same list as the one above, except with one more name: Max Scherzer. Get the picture?

10 YEARS OF 2.97 ERA, 1.48 ERA-PLUS, 2100 INNINGS, TWO CY YOUNGS: I went back 50 seasons to 1969, the year baseball lowered the mound. The only pitcher in that half-century with a 10-season stretch that great who isn't in the Hall? You guessed it: just Clemens. If I lower the innings bar to 1800, Johan Santana joins the band – but he did it in over 300 fewer innings.

This is dominance, ladies and gentlemen. This is a Hall of Famer.

It's a big year for Bonds and Clemens

This is the year. No, not the year that Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens actually get elected. But the year we will get the clearest picture yet of whether they're going to get elected someday.

Let's start with this – their year-by-year percentages of the vote since 2014:

YEAR	BONDS%	CLEMENS%
2014	34.7	35.4
2015	36.8	37.5
2016	44.3	45.2
2017	53.8	54.1
2018	56.4	57.3

See a trend there? It sure isn't downward. But it also isn't dramatic. So what makes this such a pivotal year, a year that can serve as a barometer on where their candidacies are heading? I'll give you two reasons.

The first? The ballot logjam is finally lifting. Over those five elections in the chart above, an incredible 16 different players were elected by the writers, the most in any five-election span in history. And still the vote totals for Bonds and Clemens kept inching northward.

Then came last year – when four players got elected and three of them (Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero, Jim Thome) swallowed up at least 90 percent of the votes. So that opens up more than 1,500 slots on ballots across North America, with only one slam-dunk first-time candidate (that Mariano Rivera dude) entering the mix this time around.

So in an age when rigid anti-PED activism seems to be softening and more voters than ever use up all 10 spots on their ballot, don't Bonds and Clemens have to take the big leap above the 60-percent threshold in this election? If they're ever going to get elected, they do.

And that brings us to Reason No. 2: History! This is the seventh spin cycle on the ballot for both men. And history tells us exactly what it means to reach 60 percent of the vote within a player's first seven years on the ballot.

In the 50 elections since 1969, the first year of the modern Hall of Fame voting system, 24 previous players have crossed the 60-percent line, but fell short of election, in their second through seventh year on the ballot. One of those (Mike Mussina) is still in play. You know what the other 23 have in common?

Sure you do. All 23 of them eventually got elected by the writers.

Maybe Bonds and Clemens are completely separate cases, for obvious reasons. But this seems like the year we'll find out exactly how these voters feel about them. They only need to add about a dozen votes or so to reach 60 percent. I'd be surprised if that doesn't happen.

What kind of history will Mariano make?

The greatest closer who ever lived makes his debut on the ballot. And since there are still enough stubborn knuckleheads in our midst who don't think "relief pitcher" is a meaningful job, there's no point in debating whether this will be the first unanimous Hall of Famer.

No. Chance.

But Mariano Rivera is still guaranteed to make Hall of Fame electoral history. What we don't know yet is what kind he'll make.

CAN HE GET THE HIGHEST VOTE PERCENTAGE EVER? Doubtful. George Kenneth Griffey Jr. holds that record, collecting all but three of the 440 votes cast in 2016. Which comes to 99.3 percent. Hard to envision any relief pitcher breaking that record, even a relief pitcher as great as Mariano.

CAN HE SET A RECORD FOR HIGHEST PERCENTAGE BY A PITCHER? Equally dubious. Tom Seaver is the record-holder in this department, reeling in 425 of the 430 ballots submitted back in 1992. That's 98.8 percent. No reliever has ever come within 13 percentage points of Seaver's hefty total.

CAN HE JOIN THE 90-PERCENT CLUB? Believe it or not, only 10 pitchers in history have ever gotten at least 90 percent of the votes in any Hall of Fame election. Among the pitching legends who didn't make that 90-Percent Club: Bob Gibson, Sandy Koufax, Warren Spahn, Walter Johnson and even Cy Young. Tough group, those Hall of Fame voters.

Here are the 10 who did make it:

NAME	YEAR	PERCENT
Tom Seaver	1992	98.8
Nolan Ryan	1999	98.8
Randy Johnson	2015	97.3
Greg Maddux	2014	97.2
Steve Carlton	1994	95.6
Bob Feller	1962	93.8
Jim Palmer	1990	92.6
Tom Glavine	2014	91.9
Pedro Martínez	2015	91.1
Christy Mathewson	1936	90.7

You see any common thread in that list of 10? Right. Not one of them is a relief pitcher. The record for a guy who spent most of his career hanging out in bullpens is 85.8 percent, by Goose Gossage.

Trevor Hoffman didn't even reach 80 percent last year. John Smoltz – who started, closed, won a Cy Young and was one of the great postseason starters of all time – collected just 82.9 percent. So on one hand, there's no case whatsoever for not voting for Mariano Rivera. On the other hand, this is one rough electorate. So nothing should surprise you. Nothing!

Todd Helton versus the Curse of Coors

I know Todd Helton is a first-ballot inductee in the trivia-answer Hall of Fame. But his shot at the Cooperstown branch of the Hall faces a much tougher path – all because it wound through the altitudinous state of Colorado.

If you go by Jay Jaffe's invaluable JAWS leaderboard, he's the 15th greatest first baseman of all time. And except for the PED-tainted Rafael Palmeiro, every eligible player above him is a Hall of Famer.

Or we could go by Bill James' Hall of Fame monitor. The average Hall of Famer has a score of 100 on that monitor.

Helton's score is 175.

But have we mentioned that Todd Helton played in Colorado? He played his entire 17-season career in Colorado, in fact. And you know what that means. It means a huge preponderance of this voting bloc will have the usual knee-jerk reaction – that he can't be a Hall of Famer, because his numbers were so inflated by life at Coors Field.

I'm not here to argue that they weren't inflated, because that would just be dopey. But I am here to point out that Helton played half of his games in ballparks not named Coors Field. And if you look at that portion of his career, you know what you'll find? He was pretty frigging good on the road, too.

I took Helton's 14 seasons from 1998 through 2011 – his years as a full-time player. Then I stacked up his numbers against his peers' road numbers in that same period. Here's what I found:

HIS ROAD OPS: That was .871 – the 12th best among all players with at least 3,500 plate appearances in that span. It was better than...Carlos Beltrán (.869), Scott Rolen (.855), Andruw Jones (.844), Adrián Beltré (.830), Derek Jeter (.806 and Ichiro (.789).

HIS ROAD OBP: That was .391 – ninth-best among the same group. It was better than ... A-Rod (.386), Vlad (.376), Jeter (.372), Ichiro (.369), Rolen (.366), David Ortiz (.358), Beltrán (.358) and Beltré (.338).

HIS ROAD BATTING AVERAGE: It was .291 – 12th in that group. His only peers who hit .300 on the road in that time were these seven men: Ichiro (.326), Albert Pujols (.324), Manny Ramirez (.314), Vlad (.312), Jeter (.305), Chipper (.305) and the under-appreciated Magglio Ordóñez (.300). Which serves as a reminder of just how accomplished a hitter you need to be to hit .300 (or even .291) on the road.

I could keep going here, and tell you stuff like only one player in baseball (Bobby Abreu) hit more doubles on the road than Helton hit over those 14 seasons. But you should get the idea by now.

I read columns speculating about whether Helton will even get 5 percent of the vote in and live to see another election. What? Seriously? At the very least, Todd Helton deserves to have a long ride on this ballot – in the tradition of another victim of the Curse of Coors, Larry Walker. But will he? Who the heck knows anymore?

Fred McGriff's last ride

It's too late for me to lead the charge to get Fred McGriff elected to the Hall of Fame. It's his 10th and final time around on this ballot. And even if 200 people magically decided they're going to vote for him in the next month, for the first time ever, that still wouldn't be enough votes. That's not going to happen.

So he'll be dropped into the Today's Game committee's hands in a few years. And the crazy thing is, I bet they elect him. It wouldn't even shock me if they elected him in his first year on the ballot.

You know why? Because I know, from my own time serving on one of those Veterans Committees, that the first question the ex-players on those committees ask is: How long was this guy a great player? And in the Crime Dog's case, the correct answer is: A really long time.

He played 17 seasons. He had 30-homer seasons 14 years apart (1988-2002). He had .900-OPS seasons 13 years apart (1988-2001). He was hitting cleanup in Toronto when he was 25 and hitting cleanup in Chicago when he was 38.

In fact, here's an amazing tidbit I dug up about McGriff. Did you know he was his team's cleanup hitter in more games (1,826) than all but one hitter in the entire live-ball era? True story. Take a look:

HITTER	GAMES HITTING 4th
Eddie Murray	2,041
Fred McGriff	1,826
Willie McCovey	1,622
Lou Gehrig	1,545
Willie Stargell	1,535

(Source: Baseball-reference.com)

In and of itself, that doesn't prove anything. I know that. But it tells us what McGriff's teams thought of him, almost from the time he arrived in the big leagues to the time he headed out the door.

It's true that somebody has to hit cleanup every night. But not just anybody gets to hit cleanup every night. And six teams thought it was a hell of an idea to let McGriff hit cleanup, over a decade and a half. Pretty cool.

If the PED era hadn't come along to devalue the numbers of a guy the entire planet would vouch for as clean, Fred McGriff would have been an easy Hall of Famer. He hit 493 home runs. He had an .886 career OPS. And every eligible hitter with that many homers and that high an OPS is in the Hall except guys with PED links.

Instead, it's McGriff's final year on the writers' ballot. And he'll be lucky to get 25 percent of the vote. Maybe one day we'll look back on the 10 years we had a chance to vote for this man and say, "What the heck were we thinking?" But for now, I'd just urge every voter to take one last serious look at this guy, in a year where hundreds of ballot slots have opened up.

It's too late to get Fred McGriff elected. But it's not too late to cast a vote for him – and feel remarkably happy that you did.

JAWS and the 2019 Hall of Fame Ballot: Larry Walker
Jay Jaffe | Fangraphs.com | November 30, 2018

2019 BBWAA Ballot

The Ballot's

Big Questions

Mariano Rivera

Edgar Martinez

Mike Mussina

Roy Halladay

Larry Walker

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

Originally written for the 2013 election at SI.com, it has been updated to reflect recent voting results as well as additional research, and was expanded for inclusion in *The Cooperstown Casebook*, published in 2017 by Thomas Dunne Books.

For a detailed introduction to this year's ballot, and other candidates in the series, use the tool above; an introduction to JAWS can be found [here](#). All WAR figures refer to the Baseball-Reference version unless otherwise indicated.

A three-time batting champion, five-time All-Star, and seven-time Gold Glove winner — not to mention an excellent base runner — Larry Walker could do it all on the diamond. Had he done it for longer, there's little question that he'd be en route to a plaque in the Hall of Fame, but his 17 seasons in the majors were marred by numerous injuries as well as the 1994–95 players' strike, all of which cut into his career totals.

Yet another great outfielder developed by the late, lamented Montreal Expos — Hall of Famers Andre Dawson, Vladimir Guerrero, and Tim Lincecum being the most notable — Walker was the only one of that group actually born and raised in Canada, though he spent less time playing for the Montreal faithful than any of them. He starred on the Expos' memorable 1994 team that compiled the best record in baseball before the strike hit, curtailing their championship dreams, then took up residence with the Rockies, putting up eye-popping numbers at high altitude — numbers that, as we'll see, hold up well even once they're brought back to earth.

Walker's relatively short career, high peak, and extreme offensive environment put the JAWS system to the test. His excellence at the plate, in the field, and on the bases compares favorably to the average Hall of Fame right fielder even after all the adjustments are made. But for all of that, he's been lost in the shuffle on overcrowded ballots. After getting 20.3% of the vote in his 2011 debut and adding a smattering of votes over the next two years, his support plummeted as low as 10.2% in 2014. But after three straight years of modest gains, he added 12.2 points last year — the second-largest jump of any candidate — to climb to 34.1%.

Given the Hall's 2014 rule change, which truncated candidates' eligibility periods from 15 years to 10, Walker has only two years remaining on the ballot, and with the slate still overstuffed with strong candidates, he has no plausible path to 75% before time runs out. That said, a push towards 50% would certainly make him stand out as a Today's Game Era Committee candidate, just as Lee Smith does this year.

2019 BBWAA Candidate: Larry Walker

Player	Career WAR	Peak WAR	JAWS
Larry Walker	72.7	44.7	58.7
Avg. HOF RF	72.7	42.9	57.8

H	HR	AVG/OBP/SLG	OPS+
2,160	383	.313/.400/.565	141

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

Walker was born in Maple Ridge, British Columbia in 1966, the offspring of Larry Sr. and Mary, who gave birth to sons Barry, Carey, and Gary — I'm not making this up — before Larry Jr. As a youngster, he was more focused on playing hockey than baseball. In fact, he aspired to be an NHL goalie, and honed his skills by blocking the shots of friend and future Hockey Hall of Famer Cam Neely. Given that his high school didn't even field a baseball team, the sport was a secondary focus, something he'd play for 10-15 games a year, until he was cut from a pair of Junior-A hockey teams.

The deserving Larry Walker faces a difficult road to Hall of Fame election

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Walker wasn't drafted by a major league club, but while playing for the Canadian team at the 1984 World Youth Championships in Saskatchewan, he caught the eye of Expos scouting director Jim Fanning; his impressive home run with a wooden bat stood out among so many aluminum-swinging players. Particularly willing to take a chance on a Canadian kid, the Expos signed Walker in November 1984 with a \$1,500 bonus — paltry but not inappropriate given the rawness of his game. Walker described his background to Jonah Keri for the latter's 2014 history of the Expos, *Up, Up, & Away*:

"I played more fast-pitch [softball] than I did baseball for a little while there [as a teenager] ... My approach to hitting was, 'Guy throws the ball, I try to hit it. If I hit it, I run.' But the hard part was hitting something with a wrinkle in it. I had never seen a forkball before. Sliders and curves killed me."

Walker's outstanding athleticism, freakish hand-eye coordination, and mental approach stood out to his first minor league manager, Ken Brett (older brother of Hall of Famer George Brett), who oversaw him in Utica in 1986. "He was just so tough," recalled Brett in 1993 of the 18-year-old who hit just .223 with two homers in 62 games. He had yet to master basic rules; once he cut across the diamond from third to first after a hit-and-run resulted in a fly out, failing to stop and re-touch touch second. "He was as fast a learner as I've ever seen. He never made the same mistake twice," said third base coach Gene Glynn.

Because of his inexperience, Walker took some time to rise through the minors, and his progress was further slowed by a cartilage tear in his right knee, suffered while playing winter ball in Mexico in the 1987-1988 offseason. Reconstructive surgery cost him all of the 1988 campaign, and even in the final year of his career, the knee still bothered him. After hitting .270/.361/.421 with 12 homers and 36 steals at Triple-A Indianapolis in 1989, he made his major league debut on August 16 of that year, singling off the Giants' Mike LaCoss, walking three times and scoring twice. Walker could have retired with that 1.000 on-base percentage, but instead he pressed on. He hit just .170/.264/.170 in his 56-plate-appearance cup of coffee that season, finishing in a 1-for-22 slump.

Ranked 42nd on Baseball America's top prospects list the following spring, Walker claimed the regular right field job, at times playing in an outfield that featured Raines and Marquis Grissom. His rate stats weren't much to write home about at first glance (.241/.326/.434), but that was good for a 112 OPS+, to which he added 19 homers and 21 steals en route to a 3.4 WAR season. Walker continued to develop into a potent threat, hitting a combined .293/.366/.501 for a 134 OPS+

over the next four seasons while averaging 20 homers and 19 steals. Thanks to excellent defense (+10 runs per year), he averaged 4.5 WAR for that stretch, impressive given that he averaged just 130 games due to DL stints in 1991 and 1993, not to mention the 1994 strike. Playing on Olympic Stadium's notorious artificial turf couldn't have helped, either.

Walker's 1992 season was his most valuable in Montreal; he hit .301/.353/.506 with 23 homers, 5.4 WAR and his first All-Star and Gold Glove honors. He was en route to a similarly fine season in 1994 despite suffering a torn right rotator cuff, which forced him to first base. Before moving from right field, he made one of the season's most memorable gaffes during an April 24 Sunday night game on ESPN. He handed a foul ball caught off the bat of Mike Piazza to a child in the stands, forgetting that there were only two outs; the two-base error became moot after Pedro Martinez yielded a homer on the next pitch. The Expos lost that night, but the team was a major league best 74-40 (.649) when the players strike began on August 11, with Walker batting .322/.394/.587, running eighth in both batting average and slugging percentage.

Alas, that marked the end of his time in Canada. With general manager Kevin Malone under strict orders to cut payroll in the wake of the strike, the Expos didn't even offer Walker arbitration, and traded Grissom, staff ace Ken Hill and closer John Wetteland once the strike ended. The 28-year-old Walker signed a four-year, \$22.5 million deal with the Rockies shortly after the stoppage ended.

In Colorado, Walker stepped into the most favorable hitting environment of the post-World War II era. He hit 36 homers for the wild-card-winning Rockies in 1995, his first season in Denver, to go with a .306/.381/.607 line. Still, in an environment that featured 5.4 runs per game, his OPS+ fell by 20 points, from 151 to 131. After missing over two months of the 1996 season due to a broken collarbone, he returned to full strength in 1997 and hit a staggering .366/.452/.720 for a 178 OPS+, leading the league in on-base and slugging percentages as well as home runs (49). Only Tony Gwynn's NL-best .372 batting average prevented Walker from the rare slash-stat Triple Crown, but his 409 total bases were the most since Stan Musial's 429 in 1948. He also swiped 33 bases in 41 attempts, making him just the 18th player in the 30-30 club to that point; his home run total remains the highest of the 40 players to accomplish the feat.

Even after adjusting for the scoring environment, Walker's 1997 campaign was worth an NL-best 9.8 WAR thanks to the peripheral value he added via defense (+10 runs), baserunning and double play avoidance (+9 runs). In the 21 seasons since, only Barry Bonds (three times), Mike Trout (three times), Mookie Betts, Bryce Harper, Alex Rodriguez, and Sammy Sosa have topped that mark. Walker won the NL MVP award going away, receiving 22 of 28 first-place votes.

That year also produced one of the indelible highlights of Walker's career, and a reminder of his reputation as a cut-up. In his second All-Star appearance, he faced Mariners ace (and former Expos teammate) Randy Johnson, whom he had dodged during a recent road trip, taking an off day against a fierce southpaw and avoiding the Kingdome's artificial turf as well. His absence had made waves; a fan carrying a "WHERE'S WALKER?" sign gained national attention. At the All-Star Game in Cleveland, he stepped in against Johnson, who sailed his first pitch high over Walker's head and to the backstop as Walker flinched, not unlike John Kruk in the 1993 All-Star game. Trying not to crack up, Walker responded by turning his batting helmet backwards and taking the next pitch as a righty before returning to the left-handed batter's box and working a walk, as fans and members of both teams laughed. "It was the funniest thing I've ever seen," said Piazza, an NL All-Star teammate.

Lest anyone think that Walker habitually dodged lefties, it's worth noting that he took 30.1% of his plate appearances against them in his career, a comparable rate to Ken Griffey Jr. (30.9%), Wade Boggs (29.1%) and Jim Thome (28.1%) if not Gwynn (34.4%) — the last four lefty-swinging Hall of Famers elected, all hailing from an age of increased bullpen specialization. Walker didn't exactly struggle against Johnson (.393/.485/.571 in 33 PA) or the southpaw he faced most frequently, Tom Glavine (.301/.370/.506 in 92 PA). Among post-1960 expansion-era lefty hitters with at least 2,000 PA against same-side pitching, his .903 OPS (on .306/.385/.518 hitting) is second only to Bonds' .986, albeit with a push from Coors Field.

Walker's 1997 performance proved impossible for him to top, but he did win batting titles in each of the next two years, hitting .363/.445/.630 (158 OPS+) in 1998 and .379/.458/.710 (164 OPS+) in 1999. All three slash stats led the league in the latter year, putting him in select company as the first league leader in all three categories since 1980 and the first of a new wave of players to do it during the game's high-offense years. Unfortunately, trips to the DL for elbow and rib cage injuries limited him to 257 games and a combined 10.8 WAR for those two seasons — still All-Star caliber, but not good enough to crack the league top 10.

After signing a six-year, \$75 million extension with the Rockies, Walker continued to battle injuries, missing major time in 2000 due to a stress fracture in his elbow. He rebounded in 2001, playing 142 games and hitting .350/.449/.662 (160 OPS+) for his third and final batting title. His 38 homers were the second-highest total of his career, as was his 7.8 WAR, which placed fourth in the league. He played two more relatively full seasons in Denver, but spent the first 11 weeks of the

2004 season on the disabled list with a groin strain; upon returning to play 38 games with Colorado, he was traded to the Cardinals in a waiver-period deal.

Coming down from altitude, Walker hit a robust .280/.393/.560 with 11 homers — including two grand slams in a five-game span — in just 44 games for St. Louis, then hit a combined .293/.379/.707 with a pair of homers in each of the three rounds of the postseason as St. Louis reached the World Series, where they were swept by the Red Sox. He lasted just one more year, battling a herniated disc in his neck but hitting a very respectable .289/.384/.502 in 100 games, though he went 3-for-28 in the postseason. Nonetheless, his teammates spoke of his career in glowing terms, as did manager Tony La Russa, who said, “Most people know the kind of player that he has been his whole career. I mean, just a gifted, all-around everything. In fact, I think he probably would be in the top three of just about every category: base running, defense, handling the bat.”

...

Is that a Hall of Fame career? Undeniably, Walker’s key counting stats (2,160 hits, 383 home runs) are low for the hitter-friendly era, even without considering the advantages that came with spending a chunk of his career in Coors Field (more on that in a moment). Due to injuries and the strike, he played more than 143 games just once, and averaged just 123 games a year, excluding his September 1988 callup. Of the 25 right fielders in the Hall of Fame, only seven played fewer games, four of whom began their careers in the 19th century; the last of those who didn’t, Chuck Klein, finished his career in 1944. Likewise only six enshrined right fielders had fewer hits, including the same 19th-century quartet and Klein.

More on Klein in a moment, but first Coors Field. Walker took 31% of his plate appearances at the park with the 5,200-foot elevation and posted video-game numbers: .381/.462/.710 with 154 homers in 2,501 PA. Elsewhere, he hit .282/.372/.501, still very respectable. In other words, his performance at Coors added 28 points of on-base percentage and 64 points of slugging percentage en route to his lifetime batting line of .313/.400/.565.

Looking at it a different way, Walker owns the third-largest gap between his home OPS (including his time with the Expos and Cardinals as well as the Rockies) and his road OPS among players with at least 7,000 PA:

Largest Home/Road OPS Differentials

Player	Years	Home OPS	Road OPS	Diff
Chuck Klein+	1928-1944	1.027	.813	.214

Bobby Doerr+	1937-1951	.929	.716	.213
Larry Walker	1989-2005	1.068	.865	.203
Cy Williams	1912-1930	.934	.735	.199
Todd Helton	1997-2013	1.048	.855	.193
Earl Averill+	1929-1941	1.009	.846	.163
Ron Santo+	1960-1975	.905	.747	.158
Wade Boggs+	1982-1999	.934	.781	.153
Jimmie Foxx+	1925-1945	1.116	.966	.150
Kirby Puckett+	1984-1995	.909	.761	.148

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference

Minimum 7,000 plate appearances. + = Hall of Famer

Coors Field isn't the only venue that's contributed to historically large home-field advantages. Klein and Williams spent the majority of their careers calling the Phillies' Baker Bowl — where the right field foul pole was 272 to 280 feet away — home, while Boggs, Doerr, and Foxx all spent at least part of their careers hitting in Fenway Park, with its short foul lines and inviting Green Monster in left field. The majority of those on that list are Hall of Famers, and later in this series I'll be arguing on Helton's behalf, just as I am Walker's. Even after adjusting for their environmental advantages using more all-encompassing stats such as OPS+ and WAR, they compare favorably to those in the Hall.

Again using that 7,000 PA cutoff, Walker's 141 OPS+ is tied for 43rd all-time with David Ortiz and Hall of Famers Chipper Jones and Slidin' Billy Hamilton. That's certainly Cooperstown caliber in and of itself; one point below that group are Hall of Famers Guerrero, Jesse Burkett, and Duke Snider, plus ballot-mate Gary Sheffield and future candidate Alex Rodriguez, while two points below is Reggie Jackson. The problem is that many of the players on that list accumulated around 30% more plate appearances over the course of their careers than Walker.

Moving from a rate stat to a counting stat, batting runs — the component of WAR that measures a player relative to the average hitter in his league — upholds Walker's elite standing. Walker's total of 420 ranks 60th, slightly ahead of four players with 3,000 hits (Dave Winfield, Eddie Murray, Gwynn and Rod Carew), the first two with over 400 homers, the last two with a combined 15 batting titles. Let's set this next line off in its own paragraph, because it's the crux of his case:

In less playing time, Larry Walker created more value with his bat than several first-ballot Hall of Famers routinely lauded for their major milestones.

Batting runs is included within WAR, and so are all of the other things that Walker did — and did well. He stole 230 bases in his career at a 75.2% success rate, reaching double digits 11 times. Factoring in advancements and avoidance of running into outs, he was 40 runs above average in baserunning, plus another 10 in double play avoidance. That extra 50 runs — roughly five wins — ranks 53rd among players in the post-1960 expansion period (chosen for its completeness of data in these department), sandwiched between Rodriguez and Bonds, and within 10 runs of five players who stole at least twice as many bases as Walker, namely Bonds, Cesar Cedeno, Roberto Alomar, Omar Moreno, and Delino DeShields. Those players all had more apparent speed, but scouts saw above-average baserunning potential in Walker as early as 1984, and two scouting reports from the 1993-94 period in the Hall of Fame's Diamond Mines database graded him as a 6 ("plus") in both speed and baserunning. On the defensive side, according to Total Zone and (from 2003 onward) Defensive Runs Saved, Walker was 94 runs above average for his career thanks to his strong arm, range and instincts, a total that ranks seventh all-time among right fielders.

Add it all up, and Walker's 72.7 career WAR ranks 11th among right fielders, the highest of any currently outside the Hall of Fame and ahead of 15 out of the 25 enshrined, including 2018 honoree Guerrero. The total matches the average enshrined right fielder because the top-heavy list includes Musial, Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, Mel Ott, and Frank Robinson, all of whom surpassed 100 WAR; the right field standard is the highest in my system, 1.5 wins higher than the next-highest position (center field, 71.2) and nearly seven wins higher than left field (65.4). Walker's peak WAR of 44.7 is also 11th, the highest of any right fielder outside the Hall except Shoeless Joe Jackson and 1.8 wins above the standard. He's 10th in JAWS, again the highest you-know-what and 0.9 points above the standard.

The Bill James Hall of Fame Monitor metric, which dishes out credit for things like seasons or careers with batting averages above .300, league leads in key stats and playoff appearances (Walker hit .230/.350/.510 in 121 postseason plate appearances, good but hardly exceptional), places Walker above the bar of the average Hall of Famer; he scores 148 ("a virtual cinch"). But the Monitor wasn't designed with Coors Field or the sustained scoring levels of the 1993–2009 period in mind. That alone is a major reason why JAWS came into being: I wanted a tool that could adjust accordingly.

Initially, I came down on the side of a “definite maybe” on Walker, but with further study I’ve become increasingly convinced that he is worthy of a spot in Cooperstown. Circa 2015 and 2016, the 10-slot ballot was so crowded that I left him off my virtual one (I don’t get a real one until the 2021 cycle, the first after his eligibility lapses), before finding room again. Even virtually, those were agonizing cuts, because I’m convinced Walker belongs.

Actual BBWAA voters have struggled to find room as well. Walker debuted at 20.3% in 2011, and slipped into the low teens from 2014-2016, but he’s gradually gained ground, helped by the elections of players such as Piazza, Raines, Jeff Bagwell and Craig Biggio, all of whom the voters took longer to elect than they should have. But even at 34.1%, he’s in no-man’s land as voting history goes. Since 1966, the lowest percentage any candidate has received in year eight while still being elected by the writers is Bert Blylven (40.8%), who needed 14 years to gain entry, time that Walker doesn’t have. Jim Rice had the lowest such percentage by any writer-elected candidate in his third-to-last year of eligibility, 63.5%. Walker is even further off that pace.

Why so much resistance? Beyond the crowded ballot and the injuries, Walker’s candidacy is something of a perfect storm. As a great all-around player, a significant chunk of his value — the part stemming from on-base percentage, base running, and defense — isn’t reflected in his traditional counting stats, and even in this day and age, some voters never get beyond those. Candidates as varied as Santo, Bobby Grich, Kenny Lofton, and Jim Edmonds have struggled for voters’ attention to an even greater degree, falling off the ballot with less than 5% in their first years of eligibility. To be fair, offense is more easily measured than defense, which helps to explain why Edgar Martinez, who spent 72% of his career as a DH, has gotten two or three times as much support as Walker and is poised for election this year.

Then there’s the Coors effect, which adds its own unique wrinkle. Voters — particularly those on the Veterans Committee — used to be easily suckered by shiny offensive stats from the 1920s and -30s, but today they’re more wary, in part because of the inflated offensive levels throughout the game during Walker’s time as well as the presumption that PEDs had something to do with it. Walker, it should be noted, has never been connected to such allegations, but his numbers may not pop next to contemporaries who have.

While 75% is beyond his reach via the writers, getting to 50% — gaining eight points a year over the next two — could make his candidacy stand out among those eligible for the Today’s Game Era Committee ballot, particularly given that the pool of eligible players will largely consist of those who received single-digit support during short stays on the ballot. Last

year's Modern Baseball Era Committee election of Jack Morris (who peaked at 67.7%) and Trammell (who peaked at 40.9% in his final year) marked the first living former players elected by the small-committee process since Bill Mazerowski in 2001; the latter spent his first 14 years on the ballot with support ranging from 13.4% to 36.8%, a similar ballpark as Walker. Thus there's hope that in time Walker gets his due. But even on a Today's Game ballot, so long as the Hall insists upon considering executives and managers side-by-side with players, the danger is that the voters' focus will always fall there first. In other words, any road Walker travels to Cooperstown is likely to be a rocky one.

Rockies fans know it, and the evidence suggests it: Helton's a Hall of Famer
Eric Garcia | PurpleRow.com | Nov 30, 2018

Hall of Fame ballots are out, and completed ballots are beginning to trickle in. And, for the first time, we'll be tracking the ups and downs of Todd Helton's vote, who is eligible for the first time. Thanks to Ryan Thibodeaux's public ballot tracker, we can heap praise on those who vote for Helton — you're the best, Adam Rubin! And we can also cry "of course a guy who voted for Omar Vizquel and not Todd Helton is named Assenheimer."

I'm going to assume that most readers here want to see Helton in the Hall of Fame. Even "small hall" folks with Bench-ian standards probably recognize that the Hall is not, in fact, small, and that a club that includes Bill Mazerowski should most definitely also include Helton. So let's not start with the question: Should Todd Helton be in the Hall of Fame? And instead get that "YES!" answer out of the way and lay out the unapologetic, emotionally driven but still backed up by evidence case for Todd Helton's Hall of Fame bona fides.

The stats

Hall of Fame cases involve more than a dissection of numbers, but this is where they generally begin. Helton's unadjusted slash line has typically meant automatic inclusion. There have only been 22 players to have played more than 1,000 games and maintained a slash line of at least .300/.400/.500. Of those 22 players, 15 of them are in the Hall of Fame. The seven who are not are either active or have special circumstances surrounding their exclusion. The six other than Helton are:

Manny Ramírez

Larry Walker

Edgar Martínez

Joey Votto

Mike Trout

Shoeless Joe Jackson

Martínez will likely be elected this round, while Votto and Trout are shoe-ins once they retire. I'm confident Walker will make it in by way of a Veteran's Committee vote, and the only that could keep Ramírez out is a history of PED use, and

even he may make it in. The only one here who's extremely unlikely to ever make it in is Shoeless Joe, and that's because he was banned from baseball.

Helton's raw slash line, however, is double damned not only because part of his peak was in pre-humidor Coors Field, but also because it was the height of the steroids era. But, we can say to the detractors that his adjusted stats are also Hall of Fame worthy.

Helton's career OPS+, which adjusts for park and era, was 133. Unlike his unadjusted stats, his OPS+ doesn't find him in a group with mostly Hall of Famers. But it also does not find him in a group with some Hall of Famers. There have been 27 first basemen with a career OPS+ of at least 130, and 12 of them are in the Hall of Fame. This includes players like Jeff Bagwell and Willie McCovey, even though their adjusted lines were in the upper 140s rather than the lower 130s. Helton's career OPS+ matches that of Hall of Famer Orlando Cepeda.

Of the 15 first baseman with an OPS+ over 130 who are not in the Hall of Fame, three are active (Votto, Paul Goldschmidt, and Freddie Freeman), one isn't yet eligible for a vote (Prince Fielder), two are PED cases (Mark McGwire and Rafael Palmeiro), and one is named Dolph (Camilli). The point is: There may be more non-Hall of Famers with with a 130-ish career OPS+, but it's not an exclusionary point.

Finally, there's the Hall of Fame specific stat. Jay Jaffe's JAWS system remains the gold standard for evaluating Hall-worthiness. It looks at career Wins Above Replacement (Baseball-Reference's model), WAR during a 7-year peak, and uses those figures to identify a JAWS score. Players on the ballot can then be compared to others who played their position using era adjusted figures.

Helton's 53.9 JAWS score ranks 15th among first baseman and is negligibly short of the 54.7 average among 21 Hall of Fame first baseman. Of the 14 players ahead of him on the list, 12 are Hall of Famers, two are future Hall of Famers (Albert Pujols and Miguel Cabrera) and one is named Rafael (Palmeiro). Helton's JAWS score is higher than Hall of Fame first baseman like Cepeda, Harmon Killebrew, and Tony Pérez.

How Helton put together his JAWS score is usually used as a mark against him, but it can also be put to his advantage. Helton's career WAR falls short of average, but his peak was above average among Hall of Fame first baseman. His

peak, in fact, is 10th best among first basemen in baseball history. Eight of the nine players ahead of him are in the Hall of Fame, and the ninth is future Hall of Famer Albert Pujols. Helton's 7-year peak was better than Frank Thomas's. It was better than Willie McCovey's. His peak should be reason enough to cast a vote for Helton.

The narrative

Hall of Fame cases may begin with numbers, but that's not where they end. There are narrative elements involved as well — how meaningful was the player to his team, city, and baseball? Were there any standout moments that elevate him above other players with similar stats? The story-side of things is exactly why the mentioned-above Bill Mazeroski has his faced bronzed in the Hall of Fame.

Here, Helton has an edge. Nearly three years ago I made the case that while Larry Walker had a better career than Helton, Helton had the Hall of Fame advantage because he has the better story. I stand by it. Helton was homegrown and played his entire 17-year career in Colorado; he was a key part of the most memorable run in Rockies history; his pose when recording the final out of the 2007 NLCS is his indelible moment; and his number 17 is the first, and thus far only, number the Rockies have retired to sit next to Jackie Robinson's 42. If elected, there will be no question about which hat will be on his plaque, and that matters.

The Conclusion

Don't be an Assenheimer — vote for Todd Helton. As Rockies fans know, and as the evidence supports, he deserves it.

Colorado Rockies: They may be able to get rid of some bad contracts in a trade for Syndergaard
Noah Yingling | RoxPile.com | Nov. 30, 2018

Patrick Saunders of the Denver Post and Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic reported on Twitter recently that the Colorado Rockies may be a suitor for New York Mets starting pitcher Noah Syndergaard. Thomas Harding on MLB.com speculated on some people that the Rockies could try to send to the Mets in this article from Wednesday but not particularly on the prospects. We joined in the speculation as well a few days ago as our own Tyson Crocker also examined some potential packages to get Syndergaard but the Rockies could, perhaps, unload some of their bad contracts while still getting Syndergaard...but they may have to pay in another way.

There is no question that the Rockies have more than their fair share of bad contracts (at least based on some player's 2018 seasons). They include Ian Desmond, Bryan Shaw, Jake McGee, and Mike Dunn.

Combined, the four of them will be awarded at least \$87.5 million (including buyouts but it could be more depending if the Rockies exercise their team options, which they almost certainly will not) over the next two to four seasons.

Obviously, the Rockies would not be able to unload all four players and all of their contracts for Syndergaard but, perhaps, as Harding speculated in his article, the Rockies could get rid of two of them.

The two that he speculated that could be included in a deal are Ian Desmond and Bryan Shaw.

Desmond, who is owed the most of the four players with bad contracts as he is owed \$38 million between 2019 and 2021 plus at least \$2 million in 2022 for a buyout of the contract, would provide the Mets with a versatile bat either off the bench or everyday. Given the Mets current depth chart, which mainly has one person at each position, that is some depth they could really use.

It should also be noted that Ian Desmond's agency is CAA Sports and his specific agent was Brodie Van Wagenen, who is, coincidentally, the Mets new GM.

For Shaw, he is owed \$19.5 million over the next two seasons including the buyout for \$2 million for the 2021 season.

Harding mentions Shaw as a potential piece in the deal because of his relationship with Mets manager, Mickey Callaway.

Callaway is entering his second season as Mets manager but from 2013 through 2017, he was the pitching coach of the Cleveland Indians.

For all of those seasons, Shaw was in the Indians bullpen, where he pitched 3 times and pitched to a 3.11 ERA. For comparison, his ERA was nearly doubled that in 2018 as his ERA was 5.93 in 60 appearances.

With being at a lower altitude and with his former pitching coach that he was successful under, Shaw could show that he could rebound for the Metropolitans.

The Rockies dilemma, though, is that they would also have to include some major league ready talent in a deal for Syndergaard, especially if the Mets were to assume all or the vast majority of Desmond's and Shaw's contracts.

Harding doesn't mention anybody in particular but he does say that the Mets "are likely to demand at least one more young impact player whose contract is under club control, and maybe even a prospect or two to sweeten the deal." In my mind, that means two to three young, major league ready (or very close to major league ready) players. The players that would fit that bill include Brendan Rodgers, Peter Lambert, Ryan McMahon, Garrett Hampson, Raimel Tapia, Tom Murphy, Jeff Hoffman, and Josh Fuentes.

As Patrick Saunders noted, however, Rodgers would be "untouchable" so the Rockies would have to give up more quantity than quality. I think that at least one of McMahon or Hampson would have to be in the deal and either one or two of the others, depending on if both McMahon and Hampson were in the deal and if Lambert was in the deal.

But it should definitely be something for them to consider. If the Rockies can pull off a trade for Syndergaard that a) keep Brendan Rodgers with the Rockies; b) gets rid of some of the bad contracts; and c) keep one of McMahon and Hampson, with the priorities being in that order, it should be something that they should pull the trigger on.

Colorado Rockies rumors: Yankees preparing for a run at Nolan Arenado? Kevin Henry | RoxPile.com | Nov. 29, 2018

It is no secret that the Colorado Rockies are going to do everything they can to keep Nolan Arenado at Coors Field throughout the prime of his career. However, Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic is wondering if the New York Yankees are already thinking ahead to how they can bring the All-Star third baseman to the Big Apple.

In this article (subscription required), Rosenthal wonders if the Yankees will pass on Manny Machado and Bryce Harper this offseason in order to save their resources and land Arenado, the Colorado Rockies' six-time Gold Glove winner and four-time All-Star, when his contract expires after this season. Arenado heads into the 2019 campaign in the final year of arbitration and his final year under Colorado control.

Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich has discussed in prior media conferences this offseason how the Rockies and Arenado's camp have already had preliminary talks about extending his contract. However, it is a distinct possibility that an extension will not happen before the start of the regular season. If that is the case, Arenado and the Rockies will enter the final year of Colorado control with a lot of questions hanging over the team and what will happen with Arenado.

It has been estimated that some of the contract pricing being discussed in regard with Harper this season (roughly 10 years and \$300 million) could be a barometer for what the Rockies will face if they want to keep the 27-year-old Arenado in purple for years to come.

Arenado has put together four consecutive seasons with 110 or more RBI and paced the National League with 38 home runs last season on his way to earning his fourth consecutive Silver Slugger Award and his first-ever finish in the top three in voting for the National League Most Valuable Player.

Statistics like that (and Arenado's well-known work ethic and ability to make amazing plays (like these top 10) make it no surprise that any team would want Arenado manning the hot corner. How much will a team be willing to have him there? That may be one of the defining questions that will decide where Arenado spends the majority of the rest of his career.

Colorado Rockies: Could Ian Desmond really be part of a trade package?
Kevin Henry | RoxPile.com | Nov. 29, 2018

Another day and another article with a proposed trade involving the Colorado Rockies. This one is certainly interesting ... and involves Colorado's biggest offseason signing from two offseasons ago.

In this MLB.com article exploring five wild trades that just might work, Mark Feinsand put together a trade that would send Ian Desmond and prospect Grant Lavigne to the Houston Astros in exchange for Josh Reddick. The trade assumes that the Astros won't resign Marwin Gonzalez (who has been linked to the Colorado Rockies and almost every other Major League team) and that the Astros and Desmond would OK the fact that he has a "no trade clause" that kicks in if the Rockies were to trade him. That means he would be in Houston for the rest of his contract.

That could be a sticking point for any team interested in obtaining Desmond. He has \$38 million left on his contract he signed before the 2017 campaign along with a \$15 million club option for the 2022 season. There is plenty of money left on the table for a player who will turn 34 during the upcoming season and has put together a slash line of .251/.314/.404 in his two seasons in a Rockies uniform.

For his part, Reddick had a down season last year, logging a .242/.318/.400 slash line. The soon-to-be-32-year-old is being pushed by a prospect (Kyle Tucker) at his position, just like Desmond is being pushed by Ryan McMahon at first base.

Regarding Desmond, the problem is this: We know manager Bud Black likes having Desmond's versatility in the lineup and likes to put veteran players in positions to impact his team's chances of winning. We also know that sending Desmond to another team not even halfway through his contract would signal that the five-year, \$70 million deal was truly a mistake by Colorado general manager Jeff Bridich. It's unlikely either Black or Bridich would budge on this deal.

While Rockies fans may not love Desmond (and let him know that at times last season), it would be an absolute shocker if he left Denver before the end of his contract. Desmond changing uniforms would signal failure and, at a time when the Rockies are looking for their third consecutive postseason appearance, keeping the status quo is much easier and less complicated.

When Desmond inked that contract, there was little doubt he wouldn't see the end of it in a Rockies uniform. That won't change this offseason, no matter how much some Rockies fans may want it or how tempting a trade package might be on paper.

Way-too-early 2019-20 MLB free-agent rankings

Colorado's Nolan Arenado is among the big names who could be part of a loaded free agent class in 2019-20.
David Schoenfeld | ESPN.com | Nov 29, 2018

This offseason's free-agent class didn't end up as glamorous as projected a couple of years ago. Yes, we have Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, but Harper isn't coming off a great season. Clayton Kershaw decided to stay with the Dodgers rather than opt out. Andrew McCutchen is no longer an MVP candidate. Josh Donaldson and Andrew Miller are coming off injury-plagued seasons.

Donaldson was the first big signing of the offseason, and as we wait to see what else unfolds, it's always important to note next year's free agents because that can influence what a team does now and how it spends its money. Players in their final year also are potential trade bait -- either in the offseason or during the season.

So keep this in your back pocket -- my top-30 free agents for the 2019-20 offseason (the player's seasonal age for 2020 is included in parentheses):

1. Nolan Arenado, Colorado Rockies (29)

2018 stats: .297/.374/.561, 38 HR, 5.6 WAR

The Rockies would obviously love to extend their franchise player, a six-time Gold Glove winner who has finished eighth, fifth, fourth and third in the MVP balloting the past four seasons. If the season begins with Arenado unsigned, the odds are he hits free agency -- and once that happens, the player almost always signs with a new team. Arenado, however, probably will want to wait to see what Harper and Machado get in free agency before he talks extension. The Rockies aren't going to trade him, but his situation complicates their offseason: Do they try to improve the team for one last run with Arenado without knowing whether he'll be on the roster beyond 2019?

Trade bait? Unlikely, unless the Rockies fall out of the race in July.

2. Gerrit Cole, Houston Astros (29)

2018 stats: 15-5, 2.88 ERA, 200.1 IP, 276 SO, 5.3 WAR

Cole went to the Astros, started throwing his four-seam fastball up in the zone more often and had the season everyone dreamed he could put together after the Pirates drafted him No. 1 overall in 2011. He fanned 34.5 percent of the batters he faced -- the eighth-highest single-season rate for a starter in major league history -- and if he does that again, he could be looking at a \$200 million-plus deal.

Trade bait? No.

3. Chris Sale, Boston Red Sox (31)

2018 stats: 12-4, 2.11 ERA, 158 IP, 237 SO, 6.9 WAR

I rate Cole ahead of Sale because he's two years younger and Sale's shoulder problems that sidelined him much of the final two months of 2018 are a concern heading into 2019. The Red Sox would love to extend Sale, but they also need to find out if he's healthy before making a large commitment, so he probably heads into the 2019-20 offseason as a free agent.

Trade bait? No.

4. Xander Bogaerts, Boston Red Sox (27)

2018 stats: .288/.360/.522, 23 HR, 3.8 WAR

The Red Sox could have four impact free agents after the 2019 season if J.D. Martinez opts out, and you could argue that re-signing Bogaerts should be the top priority. No, he's not in the Francisco Lindor or Carlos Correa class, but he'll be reaching free agency at 27, is coming off a 135 OPS+ season and has averaged 3.6 WAR the past four years. His defense took a hit in 2018 (minus-19 defensive runs saved), so the only red flag is that he might have to move off shortstop in a few years.

Trade bait? No.

5. Anthony Rendon, Washington Nationals (30)

2018 stats: .308/.374/.535, 24 HR, 4.2 WAR

Always Late w/ Katie Nolan

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FanGraphs liked Rendon's season even more than Baseball-Reference did, crediting him with 6.3 WAR, second to Christian Yelich among National League position players. Baseball-Reference WAR totals since 2014, Rendon's first full season with the Nationals:

Rendon: 21.1

Harper: 18.6

Rendon holds a similar edge in FanGraphs WAR. He won't get \$300 million because of his age, but he has been the Nationals' best player the past five seasons, not Harper.

Trade bait? Only if the Nationals fall out of the race.

6. J.D. Martinez, Boston Red Sox (32)

2018 stats: .330/.402/.629, 43 HR, 6.4 WAR

If Martinez has another monster season, he'll almost certainly exercise his opt-out clause and forgo the remaining three years and \$62.5 million on his contract. Edwin Encarnacion got three years and \$60 million from the Indians for his age-34-to-36 seasons, and Martinez is better.

Trade bait? No.

7. Paul Goldschmidt, Arizona Diamondbacks (32)

2018 stats: .290/.389/.533, 33 HR, 5.4 WAR

He hasn't been as good the past three seasons (138 OPS+, 15.9 WAR) as during his 2013-15 peak (162 OPS+, 20.4 WAR), but he was still good enough to finish third and sixth in the MVP balloting the past two seasons. There are some small red flags here: His strikeout rate this year was his highest since his rookie season, and he has gone from 32 steals in 2016 to seven in 2018. He has hit just as well on the road as at home in his career, so changing parks shouldn't be an issue.

Trade bait? Yes, maybe the most likely guy on this list to be dealt (the Cardinals and Astros are possible landing spots).

8. Justin Verlander, Houston Astros (37)

2018 stats: 16-9, 2.52 ERA, 214 IP, 290 SO, 6.2 WAR

If you didn't know his age, you'd be willing to give Verlander a long-term deal at a mega-millions amount. He has finished second, fifth and second in the past three Cy Young votes and just recorded a career-high 290 strikeouts. He'll be 37 in 2020, but he has posted 30 starts and 200 innings every season of his career except 2015.

Trade bait? No.

9. Josh Donaldson, Atlanta Braves (34)

2018 stats: .246/.352/.449, 8 HR, 1.2 WAR

He has already signed a one-year deal with the Braves for \$23 million. If he's healthy and productive, he'll get a longer-term deal next offseason even though he'll be 34.

Trade bait? No.

10. Madison Bumgarner, San Francisco Giants (30)

2018 stats: 6-7, 3.26 ERA, 129.1 IP, 109 SO, 2.4 WAR

He could rise much higher or fall even further on this list based on his 2019 performance. He still had a solid ERA in 2018, but his strikeout rate was the lowest since his rookie season, and his swing-and-miss rate is down more than 5 percent from 2015, suggesting an overall decline in stuff.

Trade bait? It might seem anathema to trade Bumgarner, but new GM Farhan Zaidi doesn't have the emotional ties to the franchise. A trade is possible, although the return might not be enough to warrant one.

11. Didi Gregorius, New York Yankees (30)

2018 stats: .268/.335/.494, 27 HR, 4.2 WAR

EDITOR'S PICKS

Keith Law's top 50 free agents: Superstars, southpaws and relief studs

Bryce Harper and Manny Machado clearly are at the head of the class, but there are plenty of big names available beyond the star duo.

Buster's Buzz: Here's why other teams still want Sonny Gray

He couldn't cut it at Yankee Stadium. But insiders believe the Bombers will find a decent deal for the right-hander this winter.

MLB offseason: Complete coverage of free agency and more

From the free agents set to cash in to the big-name stars sure to come up in trade rumors all winter long, keep up with all of the latest action.

He'll miss at least the first half of 2019 after Tommy John surgery. He has topped 20 home runs three seasons in a row, and he's a better defensive shortstop than Bogaerts. He has been helped by Yankee Stadium -- 42 of his 72 home runs the past three seasons have come at home -- and he'll hit free agency at an age when many shortstops start to lose their range.

Trade bait? Not while he's injured. He's expected to earn about \$12.4 million in arbitration (via MLB Trade Rumors), and there's a chance the Yankees decide to nontender him. (The deadline to offer players a 2019 contract is Friday.)

12. Zack Wheeler, New York Mets (30)

2018 stats: 12-7, 3.31 ERA, 182.1 IP, 179 SO, 3.9 WAR

After missing two full seasons and struggling with a 5.21 ERA in 2017, Wheeler finished strong in 2018 with a 1.68 ERA over his final 11 starts. He always has had premium stuff and averaged 96.5 mph with his fastball, but he threw more strikes than ever in that stretch. If he does it again, he'll get a handsome reward.

Trade bait? The rumors are swirling around Noah Syndergaard, but those might be media-created fetishes more than anything. Wheeler certainly becomes trade bait at the July deadline if the Mets haven't signed him and they're out of the race.

13. Marcell Ozuna, St. Louis Cardinals (29)

2018 stats: .280/.325/.433, 23 HR, 2.9 WAR

Who is the real Ozuna? He had a monster first half in 2016 but struggled in the second half. He had a huge 2017, hitting .312/.376/.548 with 37 home runs. Traded to the Cardinals, his slugging percentage fell off 125 points in 2018 as he had only 40 extra-base hits in 582 at-bats. A nagging shoulder injury certainly might have affected his production -- he finally received a cortisone injection in late August, and had a short stint on the DL. His 2019 season will determine what type of

long-term offers he'll get, but he'll be an interesting gamble regardless. While he's a good defensive left fielder right now, he's not particularly fast, he doesn't walk much (career .329 OBP) and he's topped 23 home runs only once.

Trade bait? No. The Cardinals are looking to add, not subtract.

14. Rick Porcello, Boston Red Sox (31)

2018 stats: 17-7, 4.28 ERA, 191.1 IP, 190 SO, 3.1 WAR

He has been extremely durable, and he's no longer just the groundball specialist he was with the Tigers. Nothing too fancy here, but he projects as a dependable mid-rotation starter.

Trade bait? No.

15. Aaron Hicks, New York Yankees (30)

2018 stats: .248/.366/.467, 27 HR, 4.7 WAR

The former first-round pick has blossomed with the Yankees after failing to break through with the Twins, and I could be underrating him here, given his power numbers and walk rate (90 walks). His defensive metrics were outstanding in 2017 but less so in 2018 (minus-3 DRS), and he's kind of a thick-bodied guy, so I'm thinking he moves to right field in his early 30s.

Trade bait? No.

16. Miles Mikolas, St. Louis Cardinals (31)

2018 stats: 18-4, 2.83 ERA, 200.2 IP, 146 SO, 4.1 WAR

The command specialist who discovered himself in Japan signed with the Cardinals and led the NL with 18 wins and a sub-3.00 ERA. Like all pitchers who don't throw hard, he'll have to prove he can do it again, and the low strikeout rate suggests he'll be hard-pressed to match that 2.83 ERA.

Trade bait? No.

17. Scooter Gennett, Cincinnati Reds (30)

2018 stats: .310/.357/.490, 23 HR, 4.2 WAR

That's two good seasons in a row at the plate, and he hit better on the road in 2018, so the home run numbers aren't all park-inflated. He doesn't walk much, and he's limited to second base on defense, where he's not exactly a Gold Glove candidate, so all his value resides in his ability to keep hitting.

Trade bait? Yes. The Reds have prospect Nick Senzel on the cusp of the majors. The trouble is Gennett's trade value is limited because there is a glut of second basemen in free agency (Jed Lowrie, Daniel Murphy, DJ LeMahieu, Brian Dozier, Ian Kinsler, Josh Harrison, Asdrubal Cabrera). With Gregorius injured, the Yankees could be interested, with Gleyber Torres sliding over to shortstop.

18. Yasiel Puig, Los Angeles Dodgers (29)

2018 stats: .267/.327/.494, 23 HR, 2.7 WAR

More flash than substance, Puig was better at 22 and 23 (9.8 WAR) than he has been at 26 and 27 (6.4 WAR). He's very good in right field, but for whatever reason has struggled two years in a row against lefties (.197/.292/.320).

Trade bait? Yes. Trade Puig to clear room for Harper?

19. Khris Davis, Oakland Athletics (32)

2018 stats: .247/.326/.549, 48 HR, 2.9 WAR

Davis is a one-dimensional slugger who is limited to DH, but at least he's really good at it, with three straight 40-homer seasons and an MLB-best 48 in 2018. He also has hit exactly .247 four straight seasons, which is maybe the greatest baseball oddity of all time. How about a two-year contract for \$24.7 million? (He'll get a lot more than that if he hits 40 again.)

Trade bait? No, unless the A's are struggling at the July deadline.

20. Francisco Cervelli, Pittsburgh Pirates (34)

2018 stats: .259/.378/.431, 12 HR, 2.6 WAR

He has a .368 OBP in his four seasons with the Pirates and even added a little power for the first time. He even had his best season throwing out runners (39 percent vs. a career rate of 23 percent). Nothing about him blows you away, but about 25 teams could use him behind the plate.

Trade bait? Not yet. But the Pirates have one of the best backups in the league in Elias Diaz, so Cervelli could be available in July.

21. Dellin Betances, New York Yankees (32)

2018 stats: 4-6, 2.70 ERA, 66.2 IP, 115 SO, 1.7 WAR

He's older than you might think since it took him so long to reach the majors, but the four-time All-Star is still one of the most intimidating relievers in the majors with his size, fastball and occasional pitch that gets away (he has hit 16 batters the past two seasons). The control problems that plagued him down the stretch in 2017 weren't an issue in 2018, however, and he dominated with 15.5 K's per nine. Even given his age, he seems to be a safe bet to remain productive on a multiyear contract.

Trade bait? No.

22. Cole Hamels, Chicago Cubs (36)

2018 stats: 9-12, 3.78 ERA, 190.2 IP, 188 SO, 3.7 WAR

He'll be on the wrong side of 35 when he hits free agency, but he has made 30 starts every season since 2008, except 2017, when he had only 24 because of an oblique injury. His strikeout rate jumped back up in 2018 after a big dip in 2017 (maybe related to the injury), and he was extremely homer-prone with the Rangers before posting a 2.36 ERA with the Cubs (he also hit 19 batters). Still, he's the type of veteran presence clubs love to have, and while he's on the downturn, he hasn't had a bad season yet.

Trade bait? No.

23. Jonathan Schoop, Milwaukee Brewers (28)

2018 stats: .233/.266/.416, 21 HR, 1.4 WAR

Offseason overviews

As the offseason gets rolling, we're taking a look at the biggest question facing every team.

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So far, it has been one big season (5.2 WAR in 2017) and a whole lot of meh. He's solid at second base but not good enough that he's helping much with a .266 OBP. As a free agent, he'll be young enough to attract some interest if he bounces back, but the 2017 season looks more like a fluke to me.

Trade bait: Not much trade value after his poor season, although it will be interesting to see if the Brewers nontender him and find a more reliable second baseman via trade (how about Gennett?) or free agency.

24. Jhoulys Chacin, Milwaukee Brewers (32)

2018 stats: 15-8, 3.50 ERA, 192.1 IP, 156 SO, 2.0 WAR

He has had two solid years in a row, and while the peripheral numbers aren't exciting (the walks are a little high, the strikeouts a little low), his slider has become a big weapon. He projects as a solid back-end starter for a few more years if he stays healthy.

Trade bait? Not with the Brewers looking to defend their NL Central title.

25. Nicholas Castellanos, Detroit Tigers (28)

2018 stats: .298/.354/.500, 23 HR, 2.9 WAR

He was a bad third baseman and now is a bad right fielder, so all his value is with the bat. He won't be an old free agent, however, so there should interest from AL teams who want to use him primarily as a DH. The strikeout-to-walk ratio (151 to 49) is a little disconcerting. I'd be wary about a heavy investment here.

Trade bait: Yes. The Tigers aren't going anywhere in 2018, and Miguel Cabrera needs to move to DH, so I don't see a long-term home for Castellanos in Detroit.

26. Sonny Gray, New York Yankees (30)

2018 stats: 11-9, 4.90 ERA, 130.1 IP, 123 SO, 0.6 WAR

Gray was good on the road (3.17 ERA) but lousy at Yankee Stadium (6.98 ERA), and Buster Olney wrote the other day that the Yankees believe he's one of those guys who just couldn't handle New York. His fastball velocity was the same as always, although as Olney pointed out, he threw it a lot less (35 percent) than he has in the past. He needs a change of scenery, and if he bounces back, he'll move up this list.

Trade bait: Yes. Pretty much a sure thing the Yankees find a taker for him (Reds or A's are good bets).

27. Starlin Castro, Miami Marlins (30)

2018 stats: .278/.329/.400, 12 HR, 3.3 WAR

I can't imagine the Marlins picking up his \$16 million option for 2019. No, he has never lived up to that Sports Illustrated cover hype, but he has rebounded from a couple of sub-.300 OBP seasons earlier in his career to hit .288/.333/.423 the past two seasons. The 3.3 WAR was his best since 2012, and he'll still be only 30 when he hits free agency.

Trade bait: Yes. As with Gennett, however, there might not be much of a trade market for second basemen.

28. Corey Dickerson, Pittsburgh Pirates (31)

2018 stats: .300/.330/.474, 13 HR, 3.8 WAR

He was a totally different player with the Pirates, sacrificing power for a higher average by cutting down his strikeouts and suddenly transforming from a below-average left fielder to a Gold Glove winner. Still, he never walks, and I'm not sure I'm buying the defense.

Trade bait: Like Cervelli, he'll be available if the Pirates are floundering in July.

29. Jose Abreu, Chicago White Sox (33)

2018 stats: .265/.325/.473, 22 HR, 1.7 WAR

The White Sox probably should have traded him after a strong 2017, but they kept him in part because of his status as a mentor to Yoan Moncada. Unfortunately, he just produced the C.J. Cron starter kit, and that got Cron designated for assignment (and claimed on waivers by the Twins).

Trade bait: In theory, yes, but there isn't a lot of demand for the 2018 version of Abreu.

30. Hyun-Jin Ryu, Los Angeles Dodgers (33)

2018 stats: 7-3, 1.97 ERA, 82.1 IP, 89 SO, 2.2 WAR

The 1.97 ERA was a stone-cold fluke, but he did have a 3.00 FIP and a career-high strikeout rate. He has had a sizable reverse platoon split over his career, which I always like from a lefty, and owns a 3.20 career ERA. Health and conditioning make him a risk, but he has been a good pitcher.

Trade bait: No. The Dodgers were probably a little surprised he accepted their qualifying offer.

Chris Rusin, Rockies agree to deal, avoid salary arbitration
Associated Press | ESPN.com | Nov. 30, 2018

DENVER -- Left-handed reliever Chris Rusin and the Colorado Rockies have agreed to one-year contract worth \$1,687,500, a deal with a \$400,000 raise that avoided salary arbitration.

Under the terms of the deal announced Thursday, Rusin would earn an additional \$25,000 each for 40 and 50 games pitched and \$50,000 should he make the All-Star Game.

The 32-year-old was 2/3 with a 6.09 ERA in 49 appearances last season. In the postseason, Rusin threw four scoreless innings.

Rusin had a phenomenal 2017 season when he went 5-1 with a 2.65 ERA.