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## MEDIA CLIPS – March 12, 2018

### ***Marquez banking on revamped changeup***

**Rockies right-hander struggles against Dodgers; Parra returns to action; McMahon continues hot hitting**

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb**

**Mar. 11th, 2018**

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Recently, by his locker in the Rockies' clubhouse, right-hander **German Marquez** revealed that he doesn't want to be just a name to fill out the starting rotation.

"That's my goal, be a No. 1 pitcher," Marquez said. "Do it right, help the team win."

To do that, he can't have many performances like Sunday's, when the Dodgers tagged him for nine hits and eight runs in 2 2/3 innings of a 13-7 Cactus League loss at Salt River Fields at Talking Stick.

After a Major League rookie-best 11 wins last season, an encouraged Marquez devoted the offseason to developing a changeup to go with his fastball, curveball and slider.

"I worked really hard on the changeup," Marquez said. "I need to be able to use that pitch in a game. When I got here, my changeup was located well. Every bullpen, every outing, it's getting better."

Before Sunday, he had a 1.80 ERA in five Cactus League innings. But he gave up five extra-base hits -- three doubles and **Matt Kemp's** leadoff homer in the third. And because he couldn't locate the fastball down in the zone, the changeup never really came into play.

"From the beginning, I felt like my fastball was a little up, and I was being quick [in the delivery] from the front," Marquez said.

But soon, all that happened in Spring Training will be forgotten, and Marquez will be looking to carry the lessons of 2017 into a new season and beyond.

"My long-term visual is longtime starter, and successful in the big leagues," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "I can see it in his delivery and work habits. I see it in his aptitude. You combine all this with his stuff -- mid-90s fastball, really good breaking ball, developing change -- it definitely plays as a top-of-the-rotation pitcher."

Black saw Marquez developing from a thrower to a pitcher last season.

"There was more poise as the season went along, in the dugout, on the mound," Black said. "First half, maybe at times a little emotional. That might've affected some pitches in some outings. He's come a long way in a short period of time."

### **Iannetta solid**

Catcher **Chris Iannetta**'s two-run shot in the second was his third spring homer.

"His swing path looks great, his timing looks on, he looks very comfortable at the plate," Black said.

### **Parra is back**

Outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, who has recovered from Feb. 9 right hand hamate surgery, went 0-for-1 with a walk and reached on an error in his Cactus League debut.

### **Position competition**

**Ryan McMahon**, trying to make the Opening Day roster and make regular starts at first base, did not start Sunday, but he doubled in the sixth off righty **Wilmer Font**. McMahon is hitting .375 this spring and his hard contact is increasing.

With right fielder **Carlos Gonzalez**'s signing going official at any moment, McMahon has gone from a clear opportunity at first base to, most likely, sharing spring at-bats with **Ian Desmond**. McMahon can earn his chance by performing well against Major League pitching.

### **To the backfields**

The arrival of Minor Leaguers means more opportunity for Major League players to use their games for extra work, since they can bat in each inning should they choose. Desmond, who is 1-for-22 with eight strikeouts in eight games, plans to take advantage as he works on his hand positioning in his stance.

"Every year is different," Desmond said. "This year, I plan on doing it. Last year I didn't do it. I've done it in the past. It's a nice thing to have."

### Prospect look

Lefty **Sam Howard** (the Rockies' **No. 17 prospect**, per MLB Pipeline) fanned four and held the Dodgers to two hits in three scoreless innings.

### Up top

With Gonzalez set to return to a run-producing spot in the lineup when he's ready, **Charlie Blackmon** moved to his old spot -- leadoff -- and went 0-for-3 with a strikeout.

### Injury update

- Infielder **Pat Valaika** (left oblique), the team's main righty pinch-hitter last year, has a chance to return for the Opening Day roster, but Black said he is not near game ready. Valaika set a Major League rookie record (since the rookie rule became official in 1958) with 16 pinch-hit RBIs last year.
- Black said righty **Carlos Estevez** (left oblique) is making progress and could soon return to Cactus League games. He has made just one appearance so far this spring.
- Reliever **Ryan Gonzalez**, a prospect who underwent Tommy John surgery last spring, has had one bullpen session off a mound. The athletic training staff will monitor him closely.

### Up next

Righty **Chad Bettis**, whose last outing was three innings in a B game against the Angels, will face the D-backs -- for the second time this spring -- on Monday at 2:10 p.m. MT. Righty **Antonio Senzatela**, trying to win a rotation spot, is also scheduled to pitch.

***Story following Arenado's example***

**Rockies shortstop looking to improve situational hitting by emulating teammate**

**By Thomas Harding MLB.com @harding\_at\_mlb**

**Mar. 11th, 2018**

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. -- Rockies shortstop **Trevor Story** doubled in two runs in Sunday's 13-7 loss to the Dodgers, and carries a .450 Cactus League batting average with five doubles, two triples and a homer in 20 at-bats. But what has made his spring special is not swinging.

Story has always hit balls hard, evidenced by his 51 home runs in 242 career games. He also has 321 strikeouts, averaging a little more than three K's for every 10 at-bats. Whether Story reaches stardom -- something always possible with a guy who is powerful and fast, and rivals the game's best shortstops in ability to turn tough plays into outs -- could depend on how well he can match his approach to the situation.

It's an improvement teammate **Nolan Arenado** has made, and one Story wants to emulate.

"He's pretty incredible in that aspect," Story said. "It feels like every time somebody's in scoring position, they end up scoring when he comes up to the plate. Watching him and taking some things from him has been big for me."

It didn't happen overnight. Here are Arenado's early-career slash lines with men on base:

2013: .270 batting average/.304 on-base percentage/.392 slugging percentage

2014: .308/.364/.492

Now, dig this:

2017: .345/.413/.651

Here are Story's numbers in his first two seasons. Keep in mind, he had a torrid beginning to his rookie year, and his opportunities to hit were reduced when he suffered a season-ending right thumb injury:

2016: .304/.400/.620

2017: .245/.306/.455

Story fought swing mechanics for much of last season and was hitting .220 as late as Aug. 13. But in his final 45 games, he batted .278/.330/.580 with nine home runs, 33 RBIs, 18 doubles and two triples. Included were many smart at-bats, which have continued into this spring.

"You look at Trevor earlier in the year and there were some at-bats where we had a guy on third base and less than two outs, and sort of expanded the zone out of aggressiveness and wanting to get the job done and knock in that run," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "He came out of his at-bat.

"As the year went on, he did much better. He's an aggressive hitter by nature, which is great. It's what all good hitters are. But he's seeing the ball well and making pitchers throw strikes. That's a great sign."

Story still will lean toward taking his best power swing, especially if he is feeling confident against the pitcher he is facing. But Story also is trusting his eyes.

"You just look out to the field, know what the scoreboard is telling you, and it tells you what to do," Story said. "See where the runners are. The game will tell you."

**Rockies think German Marquez has right stuff, despite ugly start vs. Dodgers**  
*Right-hander serves up eight runs on nine hits, including three doubles and a solo home run*  
By PATRICK SAUNDERS | psaunders@denverpost.com | The Denver Post  
March 11, 2018 at 6:40 pm

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — German Marquez, just 23, is aiming for the top. His manager thinks he can get there.

“It definitely plays as a top-of-the-rotation pitcher,” Rockies manager Bud Black said.

“It” refers to the right-hander’s 95 mph fastball, a baffling curve and a mound presence beyond his years. If Marquez can harness an effective and consistent third pitch — in this case a changeup — he could give the Rockies a huge boost this season.

None of that, however, was even remotely on display Sunday afternoon at Salt River Fields. The Dodgers brought their A lineup across town for the Cactus League game and it ripped into Marquez.

“I think it was about location,” said Marquez, who added that he was excited to face the defending National League champions. “I felt good, but I couldn’t find my location.’

In 2  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings, Marquez gave up eight runs on nine hits, including three doubles, as well as a solo home run by Matt Kemp to lead off the third.

“Hey, it’s spring training,” manager Bud Black said, before noting that Marquez’s pitch location was “terrible.”

“But his delivery looked good and the breaking ball to (strike out Cody Bellinger in the first inning) was really good,” Black said. “But the fastball was up and the pitch to Kemp was a hanger, so he hung a lot of pitches today.”

Black has keenly watched every small step, big leap, and major stumble of Marquez’s evolution. Last season, Marquez finished 11-7 with a 4.39 ERA and his 11 victories tied with teammate Kyle Freeland for the most by a rookie in the majors. His curveball was the real deal, inducing 20 percent more whiffs than the major-league average, according to Brooks Baseball.

“When I look back to last spring, I saw a fella with a good arm and a really nice breaking ball,” Black said before Sunday’s game. “He could spin the ball very well. But I sensed that he was throwing, he wasn’t pitching. His delivery would come out of sync a little bit, but he got by with stuff, and he was throwing enough strikes to warrant making the team.”

And now?

“He’s turning himself into a pitcher, and there is a difference between a thrower and a pitcher,” Black said. “He’s thinking about location, he’s thinking about delivery, he’s thinking about the game situation. He’s thinking about keeping the ball down, and what down is. Mid-thigh is not down, knees are down. He’s come a long way in a short period of time, which is good to see.”

Black also praised Marquez’s mound demeanor.

“I watched him (unravel) a couple of times, but overall, as the season went along, he was much better in that regard,” Black said. “He was able to keep things mentally in check and he was able to slow the game down.

“He didn’t get over emotional. He relied on principles: good mechanics and good pitch location. He was able to throw breaking ball for a strike in tough counts. All of those little things are indicators of growth.”

After Sunday’s rough outing, Marquez will have to rebound and get back to those principles.

**Rockies injured utility man Pat Valaika makes progress, aims for opening day**  
*Carlos Gonzalez still waiting for contract to be finalized*  
By PATRICK SAUNDERS | [psaunders@denverpost.com](mailto:psaunders@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post  
March 11, 2018 at 5:23 pm

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Pat Valaika has been taking infield at third, second, short and first, scooping grounders and throwing without pain. He projects as the Rockies' super-utility player — when he gets healthy. That's going to take a while longer.

"I think (opening day) is a realistic goal and that's what I'm shooting for," he said. "But the trainers are on top of this and and they'll let let me know."

A strained left oblique has limited Valaika to just three Cactus League games and seven at-bats. Currently, he's only swinging a bat during soft toss and modified batting practice in the cage. Caution is at play.

"He's not close to being in a game," manager Bud Black said. "It's just that the full-intensity, big-league hack that you have to take — it's not there."

Valaika is searching for silver linings while he sits out games.

"Knock on wood, but this is the first time I've been injured, so this is new to me," he said. "Hopefully I get this out of the way and move on."

Plus, he showed the Rockies what he could last season, so it's not as if he's a raw rookie trying to garner attention.

Valaika led all pinch hitters last season in RBIs (16), doubles (eight) and extra-base hits (12), and he also hit four homers.

"I guess it's good this didn't happen last (spring), because maybe things would have been a little different, but you never want to miss time," Valaika said. "It's tough because I use spring training to get a lot of at-bats, and during the year it's usually one at-bat a game, so it's tough to miss this time."

**Worth watching.** So what is Black looking for from his pitchers during these exhibition games? It's certainly not raw numbers from the box score.

"I'm looking at how their stuff is, basically," Black said. "Is there velocity where it needs to be? Are their mechanics where they need to be. More than anything, are they physically in a good spot. Are there any red flags on their stuff or on their arms?"



“I know that if there velocity is a little short, it’s been proven to me over time that when the regular season starts, it will be where it should be.”

**Footnotes.** Carlos Gonzalez, who has agreed to a one-year, \$8 million contract, was at the Rockies’ spring training complex for the second consecutive day, but the deal is still not yet official. An announcement could come Monday. ... Right-handed reliever Carlos Estevez (oblique) could be back on the pitching schedule in a few more days. ... Right-handed starter Jeff Hoffman (sore shoulder) is making progress, and though he won’t be ready for opening day, the Rockies hope to see him pitch in a Cactus League game.

## Chris Iannetta's displays his power, but Rockies pitchers struggle vs. Dodgers

*Ryan McMahon stays hot; Ian Desmond stays ice cold*

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

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### Dodgers 13, Rockies 7

*At Salt River Fields*

Chris Iannetta intends to pick up where he left off last season when he smacked 17 homers in just 272 at-bats for Arizona. The veteran catcher looks to be on track. He hit his third home run of the Cactus League season Sunday, a two-run shot in the second off Dodgers lefty Hyun-Jin Ryu.

**On the mound:** On a day when a number of Rockies pitchers got torched, lefty Sam Howard threw three scoreless innings, allowing two runs and striking out four. ... Starter German Marquez got lit up for eight runs on nine hits, and right-hander Austin House got knocked around for five runs on six hits, including a homer, in just 1  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings.

**At the plate:** Rookie Ryan McMahon, who could be on the roster bubble with the pending return of Carlos Gonzalez, hit another double and is now batting .366. ... Ian Desmond, who started at first base Sunday, went 0-for-3 with a strikeout. He's hitting .045 (1-for-22) with nine strikeouts.

**Worth noting:** Outfielder Gerardo Parra, making his first start of spring after breaking the hamate bone in his right hand, started in left field and went 0-for-1 with a walk.

**Up next:** Rockies at Diamondbacks, 2:10 p.m. (MDT) at Salt River Fields. Rockies RHP Chad Bettis vs. D-backs RHP Kris Medlen.

**Rockies Rotation: Youth Is Served**  
**By Tracy Ringolsby, March 11, 2018 | InsideTheSeams.com**

SCOTTSDALE – In the ever-changing world of Major League Baseball the Rockies are looking to take a page out of the game's history.

In a game that puts a premium on experience in a pitching staff, the Rockies underwent a major overhaul last year – in part because of injuries – and created the groundwork for a rotation that won't have a rookie in 2018 but will still be the youngest contingent in Major League Baseball.

With youth comes some challenges, but Steve Foster and Darren Holmes, the Rockies pitching gurus, are confident in the young arms they oversee, and they have some history on their side.

The Rockies did, after all, advance to the post-season a year ago with a rotation in which four rookies – Kyle Freeland, German Marquez, Antonio Senzatela and Jeff Hoffman – not only combined to make 93 starts, but were a combined 38-28.

That wasn't merely the best record for rookies in a rotation in the big leagues in 2017. It was the fourth best win total for a group of rookie starting pitchers since at least 1913, according to Stats, Inc.

Only the 2006 Marlins (43-21), 1937 Boston Bees (40-19) and 2012 Oakland A's (40-30) had more wins from the rookies in their rotations. Those 40 wins by the Bees came from a couple aged rookies, Lou Fetter (20-9 at age 30) and Jim Turner (20-10 at age 33).

And while Foster and Holmes don't mention comparisons to other teams in discussing an expected rotation, the talk about the potential conjures up memories of the late '60s Orioles, which in 1969 made the first of three consecutive World Series appearances with a rotation of Mike Cuellar, Dave McNally, Tom Phoebus, Jim Palmer and Jim Hardin.

Cuellar was the elder statesman at 32, but the other four were 27 or younger. Their combined age that season was 133 years – at least two years older than a projected Rockies rotation that will be taken from the group of six of Chad Bettis (29), Tyler Anderson (28), Jon Gray (26), Kyle Freeland (25), German Marquez (23) and Antonio Senzatela (22). Jeff

Hoffman (24) would also be in consideration, but what is termed a minor shoulder soreness has sidelined him for at least 10 days this spring.

There is a confidence that this group will step forward, and not fall victim to that sophomore jinx.

"Most of all they have a great deal of humility and a great work ethic," said Foster.

Holmes agrees.

"They are so engaged with where they are," he said. "Because they came through the system for the most part and the way our system runs in the minor leagues is a very regimented way, so when they get here they have a foundation to build off."

The Rockies were careful with the demands they put on their staff last season. Marquez was the only pitcher on the team to reach the 162-inning mark necessary to qualify for an ERA title. He also led the team with 29 starts.

The workloads were tempered either by injuries (Bettis, Gray and Anderson) or design (Freeland, Marquez, Senzatela and Hoffman). They all spent time in the bullpen, although Marquez did not get called on in the first 10 days of the season in that role, after which he was sent to the minor leagues for a brief spell before being recalled and put in the rotation.

"Are you familiar with the bamboo shoot?" said Foster. "The bamboo shoot if planted and if given proper nourishment will grow two-tenths of an inch per year its first four years," he said. "In year five if given the same sunlight and nourishment it will grow up to eight and a half feet."

It takes proper nourishing to get the job done with the bamboo and with young pitchers.

"Last year the guys were really good early and a little tired past the All-Star Game. Scouting reports were compiled," said Holmes. "They made adjustments. They got their rest. And they are ready to get back in and go after it."

And the Rockies are looking for each of them to take another step forward in 2018.

The Rockies 2016 rotation had the third-best winning percentage, second-highest win total, fifth-best ERA and the fewest hits allowed in a 162-game season.

**You are definitively wrong if you don't believe in paying for leadership in baseball**  
**By Drew Creasman - Posted on March 11, 2018 | BSN Denver**

With the news that the Colorado Rockies are on the verge of signing Carlos Gonzalez to a one-year, \$8 million contract, there has been a parade of diverse opinions.

Some couldn't be happier to see a fan favorite and all-time great member of the franchise bring his signature smile and sweet swing back to the Mile High City.

Others are frustrated by a perceived lack of faith in young outfielders David Dahl and Raimel Tapia, who have shown a ton of promise in both the minors and MLB and—based solely on results from a season ago—may offer more on-field value than Gonzalez already. They see little chance for a rebound from CarGo, or at least one whose benefits would outweigh the gains made by getting the young guys regular playing time.

Though, here's one quick reminder that he's just 32-year-old.

Another faction seems oddly concerned with the contract details of a one-year deal. While the most reasonable among them admit that it has no bearing on the future, they can't help but scoff at a franchise that appears more than willing to shell out big(ish) bucks for past performance and—ew—clubhouse chemistry.

It's fair to argue that he should have to earn his way back into an everyday role, as we did on a recent BSN Rockies Podcast. It's fair to be concerned about the effect this will have on the prospects or what another extended slump could do to the 2018 win total.

Here's the thing, though. Arguing that you should never pay for experience and leadership—or clubhouse chemistry—is patently absurd and I can prove it to you.

This season, manager Bud Black will make more money than almost the entire pitching staff combined.

And I feel confident right now projecting that the Rockies' manager will put up precisely zero WAR. Though, if he could pick up a few innings in relief, you better believe he'd be worth a few more million.

Sure, it's a rare set of circumstances that has led to this situation and it is perhaps an example of how unfair the current CBA is to young, productive talent. But it's also not entirely absurd. Black is being paid for his experience in the game and his ability to communicate that experience in a meaningful way to others.

If you could collect every single person who has ever played in baseball and get them all together, you couldn't fill the average baseball stadium. That's how few there are. And that's including a decent number who unfortunately didn't live to be 150 years old and so are no longer with us.

People with experience, let alone decades of the stuff, are rare birds indeed and thus, that experience comes with a price. This works on a scalable model. Carlos Gonzalez is a savvy baseball player in his own right and proved last year that he can be a positive force in the clubhouse and a mentor to younger players even in the midst of his most difficult times on the field.

Furthermore, this season will complete a full decade of roaming every position of arguably the trickiest outfield in baseball to patrol. He saved multiple runs in 2017 by using the high scoreboard in right field in order to deke runners into thinking he had a chance to make a catch. Little nuances like that can be passed down to Tapia, Dahl, Mike Tauchman, and Jordan Patterson as they begin their attempts to tackle the beast of Coors Field.

There is a reason coaches, scouts, and all manner of front-office personnel draw a salary. Despite not providing any on-field value, each contributes to wins. Some GMs pull in numbers above the average for players, and that makes sense given the ultimate responsibilities of that job.

Last season, the Rockies paid \$22 million to Jose Reyes... to play for the New York Mets. This season, they will pay him an additional \$4 million to officially be gone from their books.

And you know what? That was the right move. It was actually a better use of that money than keeping the player for which they would have gotten *some* on-field value all of which would have been negated by his mere presence in the clubhouse. So, if you don't like the CarGo signing because you believe he is well past his prime, blocking younger players with more potential to contribute on the diamond both now and in the future and his nightmarish season from a year ago cost you as many sleepless nights as it did him, that's understandable.

But let's not act like spending \$8 million on another coach who also might hit 20 home runs is a completely ludicrous proposition.

Have you ever gone to school or worked at a job? Cool. Then you know the dramatic difference between spending all day around someone who wants to be there and someone who desperately doesn't. CarGo's tears after the All-Star game and his statement that the Rockies meant something to him as more than a baseball team, but as a family, made it absolutely clear how happy he will be to go to work in 2018.

The Colorado Rockies paying Carlos Gonzalez out of loyalty and an understanding of the leadership, and joy, is not an indictment of the organization but a tribute to their understanding of what it takes to win.



**Colorado Rockies 2018 team season preview: Good pitching and wild-card aspirations**  
**The Rockies claimed a wild-card spot in 2017, and they'll be looking to return to the playoffs in 2018**  
**by Dayn Perry | @daynperry | Mar 9, 2018 • 5 min read | CBS Sports**

The Colorado Rockies in 2017 reeled off 87 wins and in doing so secured just the fourth postseason berth in franchise history. That trip to the postseason was short-lived, as they fell to the Diamondbacks in the NL Wild Card Game. It was, however, a much-needed renaissance for a club that had endured six straight losing seasons coming into 2017. Can the duo of Nolan Arenado and Charlie Blackmon line the Rockies up for another trip to the playoffs in the season to come? Let's dig in ...

**The vitals**

**2017 record:** 87-75, third place in NL West (plus-67 run differential)

**2018 depth chart:** [Click here](#)

**2018 schedule:** [Click here](#)

**2018 Fantasy outlook:** [Click here](#)

**Probable lineup**

1. Charlie Blackmon, CF
2. DJ LeMahieu, 2B
3. Nolan Arenado, 3B
4. Gerardo Parra, RF
5. Trevor Story, SS
6. Ian Desmond, LF
7. Ryan McMahon, 1B
8. Chris Iannetta, C

Probable bench: Raimel Tapia, OF; Michael Tauchman, OF; Pat Valaika, INF/OF; Tony Wolters, C

**Probable rotation**

1. Jon Gray, RHP
2. Chad Bettis, RHP
3. Tyler Anderson, LHP

4. German Marquez, RHP
5. Kyle Freeland, LHP

### **Probable bullpen**

Closer: Wade Davis, RHP

Set-up: Bryan Shaw, RHP; Jake McGee, LHP

Middle relief: Adam Ottavino, RHP; Mike Dunn, LHP; Chris Rusin, LHP, Scott Oberg, RHP

Long relief: Zac Rosscup, LHP

### **The amped-up bullpen**

This winter, the Rockies lost reliever Pat Neshek to free agency (after acquiring him at leading up to last year's non-waiver trade deadline), and presumably closer Greg Holland is going to ink elsewhere at some point. However, GM Jeff Bridich replaced those losses and then some. Since the offseason began the Rockies have ...

- Signed closer Wade Davis to a three-year, \$52 million contract.
- Signed right-handed setup man Bryan Shaw to a three-year, \$27 million contract.
- Re-signed left-handed setup man Jake McGee to a three-year, \$27 million contract.

So that's an investment of more than \$100 million in the bullpen. That makes a certain sense. After all, the league-wide trend is to shift innings from the rotation to the bullpen, and the Rockies of course have always had trouble getting length out of their starters at Coors Field. So it's wise in 2018 for a team -- especially one that plays its home games at a mile above sea level -- to pump up the pen.

It's also a very good bullpen. If you look at runs-based WAR, the Rockies' pen ranked second in the NL last season. Per WAR based on underlying pitching indicators, the Rockies' bullpen ranked fourth in the NL.

So how does second-year manager Bud Black figure to handle the relief corps this season. If his 2017 habits are any guide, then he'll focus on matchups with his many lefty arms while at the same time registering a lot of multi-inning outings (the Rockies ranked fourth in the NL in that category last season). As well, Black did a good job in 2017 of limiting his relievers' zero-days'-rest appearances. That should help keep arms fresh for the stretch drive and, potentially, the postseason.

### **The dynamic duo's last ride?**

Last season, Arenado and Blackmon combined for 13.2 WAR, which made them one of the most valuable one-two punches in all of baseball. In matters related, each finished in the top five of the NL MVP balloting. The expectation is that Arenado and Blackmon will once again pace the Colorado attack as they have for the past three years or so. But will this be their final season together? Blackmon is entering his walk year, and even though the 2018-19 free agent market figures to be loaded it's still possible that the Rockies won't be willing to pay the going rates.

As for Arenado, he's in the final year of a two-year, \$29.5 million contract that provided the club with some cost certainty during his first two arbitration years. However, he's arb-eligible again next season. If Blackmon walks, will the Rockies devote the savings to trying to lock up Arenado long-term? Or will they decide to pivot to a rebuild and deal him next winter going into his walk year? Regardless of how the Rockies play it, it's entirely possible that this will be Arenado's and Blackmon's last campaign as teammates. The bright side, of course, is that the Rockies an excellent start toward a contending roster in 2018.

### **The homegrown rotation**

For so very long, the Rockies have struggled to develop starting pitchers, probably largely because of the aforementioned challenges of baseball at high altitudes. Right now, though, they're pretty well packed with homegrown starters. Jon Gray (third overall pick, 2013) has genuine ace upside, as does Denver native Kyle Freeland (eighth overall pick, 2014). Chad Bettis was a Rockies second-rounder back in 2010, and Tyler Anderson was the 20th overall pick back in 2011. That's 80 percent of the likely Opening Day rotation right there. The other, German Marquez, was acquired from the Rays as a minor-leaguer and is a former top-100 prospect. More to the point of contending in 2018, Gray, Freeland, and Marquez give the Rox a nice blend of youth and front-of-the-rotation upside.

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Strange as it sounds given that we're talking about the Rockies, the pitching should be fine once you apply the necessary contexts. Arenado should again be in the NL MVP mix, and Blackmon, even if he regresses a bit from his 2017 heights, will again be a notable asset. The problem for the Rockies will be getting adequate production from the non-Arenado/Blackmon portions of the lineup. Their season may hinge on whether young bats like Ryan McMahon, David Dahl, and Ramel Tapia produce right away. As well, top prospect Brendan Rodgers should force his way onto the active roster at some point in 2018. Speaking of which, Bud Black needs to make the difficult call to play the kids if vets like Ian Desmond, Carlos Gonzalez (at this writing, reportedly on his way back to the Rockies), and Trevor Story aren't producing.

The Rockies will play a tough, unbalanced schedule in the NL West, which will make it challenging for them to compete for a wild-card berth against teams from the Central (no, the Rockies aren't going to win the division). That said, an outsized chunk of the NL isn't even trying to compete this season, which is to Colorado's benefit. Slot them in just behind the Cardinals and Brewers and alongside the Diamondbacks and Giants among the teams with legit designs on a wild-card berth.