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**MEDIA CLIPS – Sept. 8, 2018**

**Key error sinks Rox; NL West lead thinned**  
**Missed chances catch up with Colorado, now in first by a half-game**  
**By Owen Perkins Special to MLB.com**  
**1:11 AM MDT**

DENVER -- Rockies fans have grown accustomed to seeing **Nolan Arenado** save runs -- and games -- with his glove, leading all third basemen with defensive runs saved in each of the past two seasons. In Friday night's nailbiter between two teams vying for the National League West lead, the pendulum swung the other way, as an Arenado error in the fifth -- challenged, unsuccessfully, by the Rockies -- led to two unearned runs and was the difference in the Dodgers' 4-2 win over Colorado.

With the loss, the Rockies' lead atop the standings shrunk to a half-game over the Dodgers, and one-and-a-half games over the D-backs, who beat the Braves Friday.

The moment of truth came when the Rockies lost a big challenge on what would have been an inning-ending groundout with the game tied 2-2 in the fifth. Pinch-hitter **Alex Verdugo** drove a ball to the hole at shortstop, and with the shift on, Arenado ranged to his left, fielded and fired to first while backing up to get his footing. The throw ultimately pulled **Ian Desmond** off the base a split-second before Verdugo touched the bag, but it wasn't clear if he'd remained in contact with the bag until he caught the ball.

"It was just a tough play," Arenado said. "I tried to get rid of it quick. It caught me in between, so I had to backpedal. I wish I would have made it. I feel like I usually make those plays. It's just one of those times right now where nothing's working out."

Replays looked promising to the 41,547 fans in Coors Field, but ultimately the replay official could not definitively determine that Desmond's foot was touching the base when the ball contacted the interior of his glove. The call stood as an E-5, with an unearned run coming home on the play and another unearned run scoring when **Yasiel Puig** singled to right in the next at-bat.

Arenado emphasized that the **lingering pain from a shoulder injury** he sustained in August is not the issue, saying he's just in a slump.

"I wish I wasn't going through it right now, especially [with it] being September," Arenado said. "This game's hard, and I'm doing the best I can. I got to pick it up. I got to help this team somehow. It sucks."

The fourth run scoring on the play after the error was critical, even with the Rockies' potent lineup at home in Coors Field. Starting pitcher **Clayton Kershaw** came into the game with a 102-0 regular-season record when the Dodgers give him four or more runs of support. Center fielder **Charlie Blackmon** said he was "not especially" happy with the way the team approached Kershaw.

"I felt like we competed pretty well," Blackmon said. "We took some good swings here and there, but we got a lot of guys that are better than what we did tonight."

After the Dodgers got the early lead with a run-scoring double from **Cody Bellinger** in the first and a solo homer from Puig in the second, Colorado caught up in the bottom of the inning when **Matt Holliday** hit his second homer since his return, a solo shot to left, Desmond doubled to center, and **Drew Butera** plated Desmond with a single to right.

The Rockies were poised to turn the game after Kershaw left at the end of six. Pinch-hitter **Chris Iannetta** beat out an infield single to second off reliever **Caleb Ferguson**, and **DJ LeMahieu** kept the inning alive with a single to right that prompted Dodgers manager Dave Roberts to go to his 'pen again. **Dylan Floro** walked Arenado, bringing **Trevor Story** to the plate with the bases loaded. He struck out on a slider, low and away.

"We got some guys on," manager Bud Black said. "It's a competition between pitcher and hitter. That's the beauty of this game, when that happens and the game is tight and the game is close, it comes down to those confrontations. Tonight in a couple different at-bats, they won."

## MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

**Gray grinding:** Rockies starter **Jon Gray** struggled through four innings, but left the game with a 2-2 tie. He gave up four hits and tied a career high with five walks while striking out four, elevating his pitch count to 85.

"If I walk one or two guys it's too much," Gray said. "It's got to be fixed."

With the game tied in the top of the fourth, he walked Grandal to open the inning, retired Puig and Kershaw, then walked **Joc Pederson** to face the middle of the order with two on and two out. Rockies tormenter **Justin Turner** came to the plate, bringing a .313 average (5-for-16 with three doubles) against Gray. Turner watched three straight pitches to get the count to 3-0, then watched three straight strikes to end the inning looking. Gray was pulled for a pinch-hitter in the bottom of the inning.

"Jon was a little out of sorts," Black said. "He just didn't look as though he was in sync tonight with his release point, his arm action, his fastball command. He threw some good sliders. He got some outs with sliders, he got some strikeouts with sliders. Got underneath the lefty a couple times for strikeouts. But overall, Jon just looked out of sync."

## SOUND SMART

Story surpassed **Troy Tulowitzki's** 2009 mark by collecting his 301st base of the season, giving him the record for most total bases by a Rockies shortstop in a single season.

## YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Even before the Rockies lost their big challenge in the fifth, the inning was an ill-omened adventure. Gray came out after four, and reliever **Chris Rusin** walked the first two batters he faced on eight balls before pulling himself together to fan Bellinger. Facing **Enrique Hernandez**, Rusin was called for a balk, advancing the runners to second and third. Black came out to argue the call and was promptly ejected by home-plate umpire Andy Fletcher.

"I saw a basic inside move by Chris," Black said. "Andy, who I think is a very good umpire, did not see it how I saw it. It looked to me as though, just from my vantage point, that when Chris picked his right leg up he broke the plane and went back over the rubber."

Hernandez then grounded into the hole at short, and Story went far to his right to make the play, firing home to nail the lead runner on a 6-2 fielder's choice, setting up the challenged Arenado error and the unearned game-winning runs to follow.

### **DO-IT-YOURSELF REPLAY**

There was frustration on both sides of the field regarding some of the calls from Fletcher behind the plate, and while Black called it "dangerous" to talk about the strike zone's impact on his team's uncharacteristically high nine-walk tally, Blackmon didn't mind airing some grievances about his final at-bat when he struck out on a full count without swinging at a single pitch and gave Fletcher an impromptu earful. All six pitches were out of the strike zone, according to Gameday's pitch chart.

"I try really hard at what I do, so anything that's close or where there's something that's controversial that happens, I go look at it [on video], because there's something to be learned," Blackmon said. "That's what people who want to be good at what they do, do. I would expect that from everybody on a big league baseball field. "When I went back and looked at it, yes [my opinion was reinforced]. I felt at the time the calls were missed."

### **UP NEXT**

Sophomore starter **Kyle Freeland** toes the rubber for the Rockies in the middle game of the three-game set with the Dodgers, taking on **Walker Buehler** at 6:10 p.m. MT on Saturday. Freeland leads all Rockies starters with 13 wins and a 2.96 ERA, and the Denver native boasts an astonishing 2.27 ERA at hitter-friendly Coors Field. The southpaw is undefeated in his last six starts, and the team is 11-1 over his last 12 starts.

## **Arenado slowed by lingering shoulder pain**

**Third baseman has been dealing with the issue since early August**

**By Owen Perkins Special to MLB.com**

**Sep. 7th, 2018**

DENVER -- For the second consecutive season, **Nolan Arenado** is on the short list in conversations about National League Most Valuable Player candidates. Like last season, the way the Rockies fare down the stretch will figure into Arenado's chances, and like last season he is competing with a teammate for consideration. In 2017, it was **Charlie Blackmon** vying for top honors with Arenado, who finished fourth with Blackmon fifth. This year, it's **Trevor Story**, who's had a late-season surge just as Arenado has found a funk at the plate.

Arenado and Story are in the top 10 of most offensive categories, including batting average (8th and 9th, respectively), homes runs (tied for 4th), RBIs (5th and 3rd), total bases (6th and 1st), slugging percentage (6th and 3rd), and extra base hits (5th and 1st).

For Arenado, however, the last month has been a bit of a grind. Though he's hitting .299 with 31 homers and 93 RBIs in 133 games this season entering play Friday, he's hitting .250 with 2 homers and 10 RBIs in 24 games since leaving an Aug. 10 game against the Dodgers with a sore shoulder. He's hitting .143 (5-for-35) with no homers and three RBIs over his last nine games, during which he endured a career-high-tying stretch of 19 at-bats without a hit. And while he and Story both have Gold Glove skills -- with Arenado winning five in his first five seasons -- when a ball sneaks past Arenado at third, it's easy to find cause for concern.

"Physically, I'm OK," Arenado said on Friday, prior to the opener of a three-game set with the Dodgers. "I mean, it's this time of year. Not everyone feels great at this time of year. I'm not using it as an excuse."

Even when watching his words, Arenado makes it clear that he's dealing with something less than ideal in recovering from a shoulder injury that had him leave one game, pinch-hit the next two, and DH for a two-game series in Houston before returning to regular play.

"I've never really gone through shoulder pain -- I've never really felt that," Arenado said. "But it's a different year. You deal with something different every year. It's something I have to deal with. It is what it is. We have a chance to win the division, so you just deal with it."

Arenado has only been on the disabled list once in his career, missing close to six weeks in 2014 when he fractured his left middle finger. He's missed a total of six games this year -- five of which came during a suspension after his leading role in an April fracas -- after not missing more than five games in each of the past three seasons.

"Listen, it's never fun to play the game when you're in a little bit of pain," Arenado said, acknowledging the lingering issues from his shoulder injury. "You wish you could feel good all the time. It's just not realistic in this game. There's times where you deal with different soreness, stuff like that. It's part of the game. Sometimes you feel worse. This year. I feel worse physically than I did last year. It's just part of the grind. Sometimes that happens -- you just have to deal with it."

Story's surge in that same nine-game stretch -- when Arenado's slump hit rock-bottom -- helps account for the Rockies improving their standing from trailing by a game and a half to leading the division by a game and a half in that span. Story hit .417 (15-for-36) with five homers and 11 RBIs over the last nine games, with all the homers and eight RBIs coming in the three-game sweep of the Giants.

"It's great," Arenado said of the feeling up and down the Rockies' roster. "The team feels really good. We have a chance to win the division. We put ourselves in a good position. Last year at this point, we were just hoping to make that Wild Card Game, because the Dodgers just ran away. This year, we have a chance to do something special, and we understand that. We're excited about it."

### **Minor League hardware**

The Rockies had three Minor League players named MVP of their respective leagues. Arenado's cousin, Josh Fuentes, was MVP of the Triple-A Pacific Coast League, Casey Golden took top honors in the Class A South Atlantic League, and Coco Montes was the Pioneer League Rookie Ball MVP.

Additionally, two Minor League affiliates are in the playoffs. The Lancaster JetHawks are tied at a game apiece in the Class A California League South Division Finals against Rancho Cucamonga. The Grand Junction Rockies open their playoff run Friday night in the Division Round of the Pioneer League Playoffs, on the road against the Ogden Raptors.

**Dodgers take advantage of contentious fifth inning, anemic Colorado offense to defeat first-place Rockies in series opener**

*Chris Rusin, he of a 8.10 ERA in his prior 15 appearances, came on and threw eight straight balls to give the Dodgers life*

By KYLE NEWMAN | [knewman@denverpost.com](mailto:knewman@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: September 7, 2018 at 10:46 pm | UPDATED: September 8, 2018 at 2:27 am

Coming off the buzz of Wednesday's sweep of San Francisco which featured Trevor Story's historic three-dinger night, Coors Field certainly wasn't lacking in energy for Friday's series opener against fellow National League West contender Los Angeles.

What was lacking was timely production out of the Colorado bats as the Rockies fell to the Dodgers 4-2 in front of 41,547 fans. Colorado finished the night 1-for-9 with runners in scoring position, with ten men left on base.

"We got some guys on, and when that happens, it's a competition between pitcher and hitter," manager Bud Black said.

"When the game is tight, when the game is close, it comes down to those confrontations, and tonight in a couple different at-bats, they won."

The deciding Dodger runs came during a contentious fifth inning in which Black was ejected for the second time this season.

After Chris Rusin opened the frame with a pair of walks, a disputed balk call got Black tossed, and then RBIs by Alex Verdugo and Yasiel Puig gave Los Angeles the buffer it needed as the visitor's bullpen — sans all-star closer Kenley Jansen on this trip due to an irregular heartbeat issue — kept Colorado at bay in relief of ace Clayton Kershaw.

"We competed pretty well, and we took some good swings here and there, but I feel like we've got a lot of guys who are better than what we did tonight," said Charlie Blackmon, who finished 0-for-5 with three Ks.

Colorado's first-inning horrors continue to be a major-league worst, as Jon Gray spotted the Dodgers an early 1-0 lead after Cody Bellinger's two-out double scored Manny Machado.

Los Angeles then tacked on another run the next inning via a solo home run by Puig, who returned from a two-game suspension just in time for the start of the series in LoDo, to make it 2-0.

Gray relied heavily on his slider, using it for 62 percent of his total pitches. His previous game-high was 49 percent earlier in the season.

“Jon was out of sorts,” Black said. “He didn’t look at though he was in sync tonight with his release point, and his arm action and his fastball command was off.”

The Rockies responded to the Dodgers’ early damage in the bottom of the second by plating a pair to even the game. Matt Holliday led off with a solo home run, his second since rejoining the club and first career dinger off Kershaw in 50 career plate appearances.

Then, Ian Desmond’s two-out hustle double on what should have been just a single up the middle set up catcher Drew Butera’s first hit with the Rockies. Dealt by the Royals in exchange for reliever Jerry Vasto on Aug. 31, Butera kept his hands inside a Kershaw fastball for a grounder through the right side of the infield, bringing around Desmond.

But the tide quickly turned back in favor of Los Angeles in the fifth after Gray, at 85 pitches and with five walks, was lifted in the bottom of the previous inning in favor of pinch hitter Pat Valaika, who popped out to second with two outs and a pair of runners on base.

“I ran my pitch count up so high that I didn’t have any (quality) work left,” Gray said. “I wish I could scraped (the outing) into the sixth or seventh.”

Rusin, he of a 8.10 ERA in his prior 15 appearances, came on and threw eight straight balls to give the Dodgers life. That led to the balk call which led to Black’s 29th career ejection, and presented Los Angeles with an opportunity it capitalized on.

Alex Verdugo’s two-out chopping grounder to Nolan Arenado toward the shortstop hole was fielded cleanly, but Arenado’s momentum took the throw slightly up the line, and Desmond had to fully stretch for it on a close play at first.

Desmond was ruled off the bag and Verdugo safe, scoring Max Muncy. The Rockies challenged the call and lost — screenshots on social media indicated the play was extremely close — which extended the inning before Puig’s single pushed the score to 4-2.

In the seventh, with Colorado now facing the Dodgers’ bullpen, the Rockies stirred their biggest would-be rally of the night. Chris Iannetta reached on a pinch-hit infield single, and a DJ LeMahieu single and Nolan Arenado walk set up Story with a two-out, bases-loaded opportunity.

But “True” Story — whose sixth-inning single gave him the most total bases in a single season for a Rockies’ shortstop at 301, passing Troy Tulowitzki — K’d on a Dylan Floro breaking ball in the dirt to end the frame.



Meanwhile, Yency Almonte, Harrison Musgrave, Seunghwan Oh, Scott Oberg and Chad Bettis combined for four scoreless innings of relief work after Rusin to keep the Rockies in it.

The snapping of Colorado's five-game win streak was sealed by leaving Gerardo Parra standing at third in the eighth, and then failing to do anything with Chris Iannetta's leadoff single in the ninth. The Rockies now lead the division by ½ game over the Dodgers and 1 ½ over the Diamondbacks, who beat the Braves.

"We just have to kick this one to the side," Gray said. "We know what kind of ballclub we are, and that's a lot better than what we showed tonight."

**Rockies' manager Bud Black ejected in series opener against Los Angeles Dodgers**

*With runners on first and second in the fifth inning, Chris Rusin was called for a balk by home plate umpire Andy Fletcher*

By KYLE NEWMAN | [knewman@denverpost.com](mailto:knewman@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post

PUBLISHED: September 7, 2018 at 8:42 pm | UPDATED: September 8, 2018 at 2:32 am

Rockies' manager Bud Black earned his second ejection of the season on Friday in the series opener against the Dodgers at Coors Field after arguing a balk call with the home plate umpire.

With one out and runners on first and second in the fifth inning, reliever Chris Rusin was called for a balk by Andy Fletcher on a faked pickoff move to second base in which Rusin did not make a throw.

It appeared Fletcher thought Rusin's right foot landed in the direction of first base on the move, which would have required an actual throw-over without being called a balk.

"I saw a basic inside move by Chris," Black said. "And Andy, who I think is a very good umpire, did not see it how I saw it. I thought (Rusin) broke the plane back over the rubber with his right leg."

Catcher Drew Butera was incensed with the call, as was Black. The skipper began shouting at Fletcher from the dugout; the umpire then motioned for Black to stay put, and as soon as he came out onto the field, Fletcher tossed him.

Bench coach Mike Redmond took over the managerial duties in the wake of the ejection, the 29th of Black's managing career.

The tension between Fletcher and the Colorado dugout continued the rest of the night, up to and including Charlie Blackmon's strikeout looking in the ninth, which resulted in Blackmon confronting Fletcher after his at-bat.

Black said he "probably shouldn't answer" any post-game questions about the inconsistency of Fletcher's calls throughout the game.

"You're talking about the strike zone, all night?" Black said. "That's dangerous," referring to the potential for managers to be fined for criticizing umpires.

**Enjoy it while you can, Rockies fans: This is likely DJ LeMahieu's LoDo swan song**

***By all indications, Colorado's all-business, all-star second baseman is a long shot to be re-signed after the end of the season***

**By KYLE NEWMAN | [knewman@denverpost.com](mailto:knewman@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post**

**September 8, 2018 at 6:00 am**

DJ LeMahieu jump-started the Coors Field crowd early in Friday night's series-opening loss to the Dodgers, roping a first-inning double off Los Angeles ace Clayton Kershaw to give the Rockies their opening hit.

Then, in the second, LeMahieu's slick glove-side snag on a sharply smoked, short-hopped ball by Joc Pederson catalyzed a 4-6-3 double play to get the Rockies out of a jam and the inning.

But as longtime Colorado TV play-by-play announcer Drew Goodman likes to say: Take a good look, you won't see it for long.

Only this particular Goodman catchphrase isn't about home runs, the context which he usually uses it in. It's about the stellar skills on both sides of the ball by the impending free agent LeMahieu, who by all indications is a long shot to be re-signed following the season.

Ipsa factor, with a baker's dozen home games remaining, this is likely the LoDo swan song for Colorado's much-respected, all-star second baseman.

With the likes of young infielding talents Garrett Hampson and Brendan Rodgers waiting in the wings, Nolan Arenado's impending free agency in 2020 and the club's heavy fiscal investment elsewhere already — i.e. in the bullpen and in outfielder Charlie Blackmon — the next time LeMahieu plays at Coors Field after this season, he could be wearing a different uniform.

LeMahieu said that while the nostalgia of his seven-year tenure in Colorado is certainly palpable, he's not at all focused on the uncertainty of the offseason despite the fact new contract talks haven't taken place.

"I'm not really thinking about (free agency) or how it relates to me," LeMahieu said. "I'm just excited about the position we're in, and that we're playing good baseball... I've been here through some bad years, but I've had a couple really good years too, so it's been a fun ride."

The club's other notable impending free agents include veteran outfielders Carlos Gonzalez and Gerardo Parra, as well as mainstay reliever Adam Ottavino, who has been Colorado's most reliable arm out of the bullpen this season.

Gonzalez — a club veteran who went through this sort of unpredictability last year before re-upping on a one-year deal in the offseason — echoed LeMahieu's focused sentiments.

"I'm going to enjoy my opportunities as much as possible this month, because we have something so special ahead of us right now," Gonzalez said. "We're trying to win the division for the first time in franchise history so we can go to the playoffs with the high expectations of winning the World Series. There's no time to think about anything else."

**How Rockies' pitcher Kyle Freeland conquered Coors Field while becoming an underrated Cy Young candidate**  
*A rounded-out repertoire, a midseason training regimen switch and a bulldog mentality are catalyzing the southpaw's success*

By KYLE NEWMAN | [knewman@denverpost.com](mailto:knewman@denverpost.com) | The Denver Post  
September 8, 2018 at 6:00 am

Coming off a promising rookie year, Kyle Freeland, born and bred of these Rocky Mountains, clearly wasn't interested in sticking to the Rockies' traditional script.

Case-in-point, one of the left-hander's first orders of business prior to the start of spring training was to meet with some of the club's coaches to brainstorm how to improve his curveball.

That might seem insignificant as Freeland throws a curve about six percent of the time. But it's the small details, and the attention that he pays to them, that have enabled the 23-year old left-hander to slay the Coors Field beast.

In the process, he's become the Rockies' ace and a dark-horse Cy Young candidate. Heading into Saturday night's start against the Dodgers, Freeland had an ERA of 2.27 in 12 starts at Coors Field this year, well on pace to break Jorge De La Rosa's club record 2.76 set in 2013, to go with his 13-7 overall record.

"He's been the guy who's given us a chance to win whenever he goes out there, or if we're on a slide, he's come in and changed the tide to get us back in the right direction," veteran catcher Chris Iannetta said. "We've leaned on him a ton, and he's risen to the occasion in our playoff push."

And beneath those numbers — included in all the minutia which lines Freeland's pitching notebook — lie further clues for his success, such as a rounded-out repertoire of pitches, a midseason switch to a new training regimen and a bulldog tenacity.

***"Living on the black"***

Heading into the weekend, with five likely starts remaining, Freeland's 2.96 season ERA is challenging Ubaldo Jimenez's club record of 2.88 from 2010.

Freeland is putting up those dazzling numbers by keeping hitters off-balance. As a rookie, he featured a low-to-mid-90s fastball along with a slider, a cutter-slider and a changeup. This spring, he wanted to add "a little more of a wrinkle" in the form of a revamped curveball.

“I changed up my grip, changed my thinking about it and how I threw it,” Freeland said. “It’s been a constant progression, and we haven’t used it a ton, but it’s been a great pitch to steal a strike early and something to throw them off the hard slider, hard fastball and at times the hard changeup.”

Enhancing his curveball wasn’t the only improvement he made.

He also worked with pitching coach Steve Foster to make his delivery more methodical — incorporating a minuscule pause of his right leg prior to his stride — which has resulted in more consistency in his landing spot, arm slot and release point.

“It’s more about staying over the rubber and being slower to the plate — being slow in the setup, and then quick on the end instead of quick all the way through it,” Foster said. “We made (the delivery) to where it’s a better dance step rather than just a quick move.”

Freeland’s consistency in technique is translating to consistency in pitch location. No starter in baseball has thrown a lower percentage of pitches over the middle of the plate this season, per Fangraphs data. Freeland excels at pounding the edges of the strike zone.

“The consistency in performance has been as good as anybody in the game, especially when you consider around half his starts have come at altitude,” manager Bud Black said. “He’s living on the black.”

His four-seam fastball has become a more effective weapon against right-handed hitters, enabling Freeland to throw inside and set up his offspeed pitches down and away. When going offspeed, Freeland has an army of weapons, from his curve (low 80s), slider (low-to-mid 80s), cutter-slider (mid-to-upper 80s) and ever-evolving changeup (low 80s).

As a result, he’s dominated left-handed hitters. In August, he allowed just one hit to 32 left-handed batters, which is the lowest such mark by any pitcher in any month over the past two years.

“When I’m able to get so many outs against lefties, often that does help me work around any damage caused by right-handers,” Freeland said.

### ***Lower volume, less throwing***

While Freeland's rookie season was no doubt impressive — he posted a 4.10 ERA in 28 starts — he and Foster are quick to say he hit a wall toward the end of the season, when he scuffled before being demoted to a bullpen role.

The opposite has been the case this season, with the 6-foot-3, 170-pound Freeland improving — and his stamina increasing — during Colorado's playoff push. Freeland credits a modified workout routine which has swapped harder in-season weight lifting with low-volume, high-weight hybrid routines. That means lower set counts, and lower reps, with the goal of getting stronger and quicker but not necessarily bigger so as to not negatively impact his throwing mobility.

"He's not a high-force production guy. He's very dynamic, he's got an explosive lower half and he's got a super strong core, which along with long levers gives him the whip that he needs to pitch," said Nick Vinson, Freeland's sports performance coach. "He's very similar to Chris Sale, Randy Johnson, these guys who have their length and know how to use their timing and their core strength to be able to produce high spin rates to get weak contact and get guys out."

Freeland's also gotten smarter about limiting wear on his arm. Wes Carroll, Freeland's college coach at the University of Evansville, described him as "a throwing rat" during his time with the Purple Aces. Freeland has learned that strategy isn't necessarily effective over a 162-game season.

"His side (throwing sessions) have been shorter — a lot fewer throws — and his catch play has been a lot less because he's spent more time in the weight room and on the conditioning and less time with the throwing," Foster said. "That's helped him conserve a lot of the pitches for the game."

### ***A coachable bulldog***

Beyond the impressive stats, mechanical adjustments and subtle tweaks is Freeland's key intangible: The complete and utter lack of fear to fail on a mile-high mound which can often be the loneliest place in baseball.

Freeland has often stated he embraces the challenges of pitching in his home state, and relishes the fact he and other young pitchers such as Jon Gray and German Marquez are turning the notion of a Rockies' joke rotation on its head. That willingness to embrace the beast has been seen often in key moments during Freeland's starts this season, especially in LoDo, where he has been at his best, with a 7-2 record and a .219 batting average against.

“There’s been pitches to be made, in big spots, and he’s made them,” Black said. “That’s a sign of maturity and realizing what’s happening at that moment, because there are critical junctures in every game ... In Kyle’s games, like every other game, these moments happen, and Kyle’s done a really good job of making that pitch or getting an at-bat to go his way.”

The ability to bear down is something ingrained in Freeland since his youth baseball days in the Southeast Denver League, where Tory Humphrey — who coached Freeland for three seasons at Thomas Jefferson High School — recalled a skinny middle schooler already gung-ho about taking the mound in practice against the varsity.

“I’ve seen Kyle lose, but I’ve never seen Kyle defeated,” Humphrey said. “Kyle’s a gamer. He won’t back down, and he’s learned to harness that.”

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### ***Comparing Freeland to other aces***

*When using park-adjusted ERA to stack Freeland’s season against those at the forefront of the Cy Young race, his status among the game’s elite starters becomes clear.*

#### **ERA- (Fangraphs’ park and league-adjusted ERA)**

1. Chris Sale, Red Sox — 44
2. Jacob deGrom, Mets — 44\*
3. Blake Snell, Rays — 49
4. Trevor Bauer, Indians — 50
5. Max Scherzer, Nationals — 55\*
6. Aaron Nola, Phillies — 56\*
7. Corey Kluber, Indians — 62
8. *Kyle Freeland, Rockies — 64\**
9. Justin Verlander, Astros — 67
10. Mike Foltynewicz, Braves — 68\*

#### **ERA+ (Baseball Reference’s park and league-adjusted ERA)**

1. Chris Sale, Red Sox — 221
2. Jacob deGrom, Mets — 220\*



3. Blake Snell, Rays — 201
4. Trevor Bauer, Indians — 198
5. Aaron Nola, Phillies — 187\*
6. Max Scherzer, Nationals — 186\*
7. Corey Kluber, Indians — 160
8. *Kyle Freeland, Rockies — 157\**
9. Zack Greinke, Diamondbacks — 147\*
10. Justin Verlander, Astros — 146

\*indicates a National League pitcher

### ***Strong second half***

*A retooled curveball and revised delivery laid the base for Freeland's historic season, in which he's picked up the pace following the all-star break after making changes to his training regimen. (Statistics going into Saturday night).*

**Standard stats:** 5-1 record in nine starts (54.2 innings pitched), 2.63 ERA, 1.32 WHIP, .239 opponent average, 2 HR, 53 Ks

**Advanced stats:** 22.7 percent K rate, 81.7 percent left on base rate, 8.7 strikeouts/nine, 3.8 walks/nine, 62.2 percent of pitches soft/medium hit

**Controversial night at Coors Field ends with Charlie Blackmon double-checking a critical replay**  
**By Nick Groke - Sep 8, 2018 | The Athletic**

DENVER — By routine, Charlie Blackmon takes batting practice late into the night after nearly every game, working out his glitches and frustrations, trying to end his day feeling aligned at the plate, if not exhausted.

On Friday, he took a detour. The visiting Dodgers had just wriggled to a 4-2 victory over the Rockies to start a critical three-game series at Coors Field with the National League West lead at stake well into September. And Blackmon's six-pitch strikeout in the ninth inning was wearing on him.

"I went and looked at it immediately," Colorado's center fielder said.

Blackmon was displeased. The Rockies have not held first place in the West this late in the season since 1995. And in the moment, with the stakes raised and pinch-runner Raimel Tapia standing on first base with no outs, Blackmon knew that home plate umpire Andy Fletcher had missed three calls on pitches out of the strike zone. He argued the calls at the plate and loudly.

But he wanted to be doubly sure.

"I try really hard at what I do," Blackmon said. "So anything that is close or where there is something controversial that happens, I go look at it. Because there's something to be learned there. People who want to be good at what they do, they do that.

"And I would expect that from everybody on a big-league baseball field."

Blackmon's subtle sub-tweeting of Fletcher, so to speak, did not offer any consolation. Dodgers lefty Scott Alexander struck out Blackmon, then right-hander Kenta Maeda struck out Nolan Arenado and forced DJ LeMahieu to ground out in the ninth.

Maeda only pitched the ninth because Los Angeles' All-Star closer, Kenley Jansen, was not in Denver. The Dodgers kept him out of elevation after he suffered an irregular heartbeat in his last visit to Coors Field.

His absence was an opportunity for the Rockies, who had won five games in a row to overtake the division. Colorado (77-63) instead fell back to a half-game lead over the Dodgers and 1 1/2 over the Diamondbacks.

The Rockies tagged Clayton Kershaw for two runs in his six innings, on Matt Holliday's lead-off homer in the second, followed by an Ian Desmond double and catcher Drew Butera's run-scoring single to right field. But again, Blackmon felt no satisfaction.

“Not especially,” he said. “We competed pretty well and took some good swings here and there. But we have a lot of guys who are better than what we did tonight.”

Nolan Arenado, the Rockies’ suddenly slumping NL MVP candidate, struck out twice and went 0-for-4 at the plate with a walk. He swears a strained shoulder is not affecting his swing, an opinion shared by Colorado manager Bud Black. “He’s in a little bit of a funk with his hitting mechanics,” Black said. “But I don’t think it’s anything physical.”

Blackmon and Carlos Gonzalez also went hitless. Trevor Story struck out three times, including with the bases loaded in the seventh. And the Rockies left 10 runners on base.

But the venom of 41,547 fans in LoDo was not directed toward Colorado’s hitters. Their grievance started in the fifth inning, after Fletcher called a balk on reliever Chris Rusin for his half-spin move toward second base. Rusin could not understand the call.

And Black wanted an explanation. Fletcher told him none was coming. But Black traveled to home plate anyway and the umpire immediately ejected him. Black did not back down from his disagreement after the game, even after spending two hours in the clubhouse watching on TV as bench coach Mike Redmond managed in his place.

Even on TV, Black saw why Blackmon was so enraged. But he could only bite his tongue.

“I probably shouldn’t answer,” Black said. “That’s dangerous.”

Butera, a late-August trade addition from the Royals, was acquired for his defensive acumen and he twice threw out baserunners with two outs and a man on third base. He also tried to take advantage of what was nipping at the Rockies.

Knowing that the amorphous strike zone was hedging away from the plate, Butera called on Colorado starter Jon Gray to attack on the other side of the edge. Gray could not pinpoint his fastball with any command, but his slider was working, so he threw 53 of them among his 85 total pitches, more than he has in any start in his career. And many of them were off the plate.

It worked against Justin Turner, who struck out looking to end the fourth on two pitches that, like the three that rattled Blackmon, appeared to land outside the zone.

“We talked about how we were getting more on the outside to righties,” Butera said. “So we tried to play off that more. We still focused down in the zone, but tried to get more off the plate to expand the zone out there.”

While the Rockies were undefeated in September, the Dodgers, too, were surging. They have won 10 of their past 13 and eight of nine against NL West opponents. There is a steel cage match of sorts in the division, a three-team rumble that seems headed toward a wild finish. The Rockies will face their two rivals in 12 more games this month.

But first, Blackmon watched a replay.

“As a guy who wants to be good at baseball, I go back and check,” he said. “Emotion never gets a good reaction, it never gets anything done. I did a good job in that at-bat of putting it behind me, trying to do the best I can going forward, knowing I can’t do anything about what already happened.”

## **Kershaw efficient, Dodgers pull closer to 1st-place Rockies**

**By PAT GRAHAM – Today / AP**

DENVER (AP) — Kenta Maeda felt something the veteran pitcher doesn't always experience — a touch of nerves.

Stepping into the shoes of All-Star closer Kenley Jansen happens to be stressful work. Even more so in the heat of a division chase.

Clayton Kershaw threw six effective innings, Maeda finished the ninth in place of Jansen and the Los Angeles Dodgers crept closer to the NL West-leading Colorado Rockies with a 4-2 win on Friday night.

Yasiel Puig homered and had an RBI single for the Dodgers, who climbed within a half-game of the Rockies as they began a pivotal three-game series. This is the latest into the season the Rockies have been alone in first place since 1995.

"We need to play like we're in the playoffs right now and close to the World Series," Puig said.

Kershaw (7-5) baffled the Rockies even if he didn't have his best stuff. The left-hander allowed two runs and six hits as he improved to 22-7 in 39 career starts against Colorado, with a 3.21 ERA.

Scott Alexander got two outs in the eighth and began the ninth in place of Jansen, who didn't make the trip after a team cardiologist recommended he not pitch at altitude after suffering an irregular heartbeat episode in Denver last month.

Alexander gave up a long single to Chris Iannetta and struck out Charlie Blackmon before turning it over to Maeda. He got two outs, including a strikeout of Nolan Arenado to end the game and earn his second save.

"Still makes me a little nervous," Maeda said of filling in as closer.

Chris Rusin (2-3) took the loss for the Rockies, who had their five-game winning streak halted. They're chasing after their first division title.

"We just need to kick that to the side," said starter Jon Gray, who went four innings, allowed two runs, walked five and struck out four. "We know what kind of ball club we are. We're a lot better than we were today."

Reliever Dylan Floro threw one of the biggest pitches of the game when he struck out Trevor Story on a slider with two outs and the bases loaded in the seventh. Story hit three homers Wednesday against San Francisco, including one that went an estimated 505 feet.

A crowd of 41,547 saw a game that featured a little bit of everything, including Matt Holliday hitting his first regular season homer off Kershaw, Rockies manager Bud Black getting ejected for arguing a balk call in the fifth and, later that inning, a throwing error by Gold Glove third baseman Arenado which allowed the go-ahead run to score.

Puig followed with a two-out, run-scoring single to give the Dodgers a 4-2 lead.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Dodgers: RHP Ross Stripling (lower back inflammation) was reinstated from the disabled list. He got one out in the eighth.

Rockies: LHP Mike Dunn is scheduled to have surgery on his pitching shoulder Sept. 19. He's been sidelined since early July.

#### GOING FOR THIRD

Kershaw pulled into second with a double in the sixth and thought about stretching it into a triple.

"I was thinking about Coors Field and you don't breathe as well and I don't want to be tired," Kershaw said.

#### NO JANSEN

Jansen has experienced an irregular heartbeat several times while the Dodgers were in Colorado. His most recent episode happened Aug. 9 during the start of a four-game series at Coors Field. He ended up having his heart shocked back into rhythm at a Denver hospital. He was placed on the disabled list a day later and began taking blood-thinning medication.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts plans to use a bullpen-by-committee approach this weekend.

Jansen is slated to join the team in Cincinnati, the second of three stops on the Dodgers' 10-game trip.

#### HOLLIDAY'S HOMER

Holliday homered off Kershaw during Game 2 of the Division Series on Oct. 8, 2009, while he was with St. Louis.

#### UP NEXT

Dodgers rookie RHP Walker Buehler (6-2, 2.92) gets another taste of Coors Field on Saturday. He threw seven scoreless innings on Aug. 11 in a no-decision. The Rockies counter with LHP Kyle Freeland (13-7, 2.96), whose 2.27 home ERA season is among the league's best.

**Story Belongs in Rockies Top 10 HR Efforts -- But Where?**  
**TRACY RINGOLSBY - SEPTEMBER 7, 2018 | InsideTheSeams.com**

Trevor Story earned his own niche in Rockies history in the 5-3 victory against the San Francisco Giants on Wednesday night.

Story hit not one, but three home runs, each with a very distinctive aura, and each off Giants starting pitcher Andrew Suarez.

With two out in the first inning, after Nolan Arenado's sacrifice fly tied the score at 1-1, Story turned a 2-2 pitch into a go-ahead home run, swinging so hard that he landed on his posterior, and watched the ball sail out from ground level.

And it got better.

With an Aramis Garcia home run in the top of the fourth giving the Giants another one-run lead, 3-2, Story stepped to the plate with one out in the bottom of the fourth, and on a 1-1 count not only delivered a game-tying home run, but drove the ball 505 feet, the longest home run hit in Major League Baseball during the statcast era.

And he wasn't done.

In the sixth inning, the score still tied at 3-3 and two out, Story turned on the first pitch Suarez threw him in that at-bat and delivered what turned into the game-winning home run, giving the Rockies a 4-3 lead that grew to 5-3 by night's end.

Talk about memories.

Take your pick.

Somewhere in the Rockies Top 10 Home Run list Story's effort belongs.

There question is where.

My Top 9, waiting for you to decide where Story's effort fits into the list:



1. It was the bottom of the ninth inning of the second game of a Sept. 18, 2007 doubleheaders, and the Dodgers, nursing an 8-7 lead, turned to Takashi Saito, who led the majors in save and had held the Rockies to a combined 0-for-14 with two walks in earned five earlier saves against him.

Saito had retired the first two batters this time, but then . . . Matt Holliday delivered a two-out single, and Todd Helton, hitless in four at-bats that night, drove a 1-2 pitch from Saito over the right-field fence.

More important, as Helton rounded first, the stoic elder statesman of the Rockies, thrust his arm in the air, a signal to his young teammates that it was time to get excited. And they responded. That turned out to be the third game in a 21-of-22 season-ending stretch that saw the Rockies climb from fourth place in the NL West to the NL wild-card, finishing a half-game out of first.

They went on to sweep the Phillies in the NL Division Series and Diamondbacks in the NLCS before being swept themselves by the Red Sox in what is the only World Series appearance in franchise history.

2. Having made their debut as a Major League team by being swept in a season opening two-game series against the Mets in Shea Stadium in 1993 – their only run a Dante Bichette home run – the Rockies found themselves playing in front of a major league record crowd of 80,277 at Mile High Stadium, and they did not disappoint those fans.

Leading off the bottom of the first, Eric Young, worked the count to 3-2, and then unloaded a home run in the first at-bat every by a Rockies player in Colorado. The crowd went nuts, and the players got pumped, turning their home debut into an 11-4 victory that remains a critical part of Rockies lore.

3. Two seasons after Helton, on Aug. 24, 2009, in what was another Rockies dash to a wild-card berth, it was Ryan Spilborghs who found himself on center stage in a game against the Giants that rolled through 13 innings as a 1-1 tie – the Giants scoring on a first-inning sacrifice fly by Pablo Sandoval, and the Rockies in the fifth on a bases-loaded walk to Todd Helton.

In the top of the 14th, however, the Giants scored twice, taking the field in the bottom of that inning three outs from a victory – three outs they didn't get thanks to Spilborghs getting his day in the sun.

The bottom of the 14th began with a walk to a sore-kneed Dexter Fowler, and a Clint Barmes pop up. Chris Iannetta, in a pinch-hit role for Carlos Gonzalez who couldn't grip a bat because he had sliced his finger with a knife during dinner two days later but had come in the game as a pinch-runner earlier, would single. After Troy Tulowitzki walked to load the bases. Up stepped pitcher Adam Eaton, ordered not to swing at a pitch so he would not hit into a game-ending double play.

He didn't, but he did wind up with a five-pitch walk, forcing home a run to cut the score to 3-2. Up stepped Spilborghs, who had grounded into an inning-ending double play to end the 10th. This time, though, he greeted reliever Merkin Valdez with a game-ending grand slam in what was a dash off, Spilborghs running full speed around the bases and jumping into a pile of teammates, waiting on him at home plate.

4. When history calls it's hard to ignore, and on Father's Day last year – June 19 – Nolan Arenado answered in milestone-setting style. Having singled, doubled and tripled in his first three at-bats, Arenado came to the plate with the Giants leading 5-4, two men on base, and closer Mark Melancon on the mound. Melancon made a first-pitch mistake – a fastball in and off the plate, Arenado's strength.

Arenado made him pay, drilling the ball into the left field stands, becoming the first player in history to hit a cycle-completing home run to lift his team from a deficit to a walk-off victory.

5. Hey, nothing like an opening day at home to stir up memories, like the first game ever at Coors Field. Delayed nearly four weeks by the late settlement of a players' strike that had wiped out the 1994 post-season, the Rockies finally got to show off their new digs on April 29, 1995. Having rallied from deficits of 6-5 in the ninth and 7-6 in the 13th, the Rockies came to the plate down 8-7 in the bottom of the 14th.

With one out, and two on, thanks to a Mike Kingery leadoff single, and a Tim Bogar error that allowed Joe Girardi to reach, Dante Bichette turned a 2-1 pitch from Mike Remlinger into a bullet that landed on the concourse behind the seats in left field, the opening act in a season that ended with the Rockies claiming the wild-card, and advancing to the post-season faster than any team in history.

6. The Rockies had already taken a 3-0 lead against Marlins right-hander Kevin Brown at Pro Player Stadium on the afternoon of May 31, 1997 when, with two out in the top of the fourth, Brown gave up back-to-back singles to

Eric Young and Quinten McCracken, who scrambled to second when Young drew the outfielders throw in advancing to third base.

After Brown issued an intentional walk to Larry Walker, Andres Galarraga worked the count to 2-2 and then unloaded a mammoth home run to right field that landed on the top 20 rows up from the walkway. Initially announced at 573 feet, the Marlins officials, after hearing mention of the fact it would surpass a blast by Mickey Mantle 40 years earlier in Washington, D.C., as the longest home run in history, quickly reduced the distance to 529 feet, and it has since been changed to 509 feet.

Nobody, however, could take away from majestic flight of the arching ball and the way it bounced off the tarp that covered the empty seats in the upper deck of the stadium. Ken Boyer, with the Cardinals in 1961, Cesar Tovar with the Twins in 1982, Dwight Evans with the Red Sox in 1984, and Arenado teammate, Carlos Gonzalez in 2010, all completed cycles with walk-off home runs, but in all four of those incidents the score was tied.

7. Vinny Castilla fits not for one dramatic home run, but two, in the Astrodome, in different games, but both were game-winners off former Astros closer Billy Wagner.

Pitchers can be stubborn, and Castilla could hit a fastball, the pitch that Wagner prided himself on throwing.

So, it was, on April 28, 1997, in the massive Astrodome that Castilla came to the plate in the top of the 10th inning with the score tied 6-6 and two out. Wagner throws Castilla a first pitch curveball that Castilla futilely swings at for strike one. Then Wagner comes back with a fastball and Castilla returns the favor, driving the ball over the left-center field fence for what became the game-winning hit.

Nearly two months later, on Aug. 23, 1997, the Rockies are back in the Astrodome in a 3-3 game in the top of the ninth with Wagner on the mound, and Castilla at the plate. Wagner, using his curveball, gets ahead in the count 1-2.

Then comes a fastball. There goes a three-run Castilla home run that lifted the Rockies to another win.

“You can’t sneak the cheese past the rat,” Castilla explained afterward.

8. There's something about Opening Day in Denver, and in 2005 rookie shortstop Clint Barmes added another chapter. The Padres went into the bottom of the ninth with a 10-8 lead and eventual Hall of Fame closer Trevor Hoffman on the mound. It's all they could have asked for. They, however, didn't have the answer for what the Rockies had to offer. With two out, Cory Sullivan doubled home one run, and Aaron Miles singled home another. Then, with the score tied 10-10 and two out, Barmes came to the plate, and the first pitch Hoffman threw him, Barmes delivered the walk-off home run.

9. No list is complete without the Larry Walker effort in his return to Montreal on April 5, 1997. Facing the team he came to the big leagues with and then left as a free agent to sign with the Rockies in the spring of 1995 because the Expos didn't offer him a contract, Walker was the constant target at Olympic Stadium of boo birds, who felt he jilted them.

Walker homered off Anthony Telford in the fourth, Omar Daal in the sixth, and Dave Veres in the seventh. Then, in the bottom of the eighth, knowing he would be the third hitter in the ninth and with a chance to make a loud statement to the booing fans, Walker told manager Don Baylor he should give John Vander Waal a chance to swing the bat and get an inning in right field.

"But you have a chance to four home runs," said Baylor.

"Vandy needs an at-bats, we may need him for a clutch pinch-hit," said Walker.

**Rockies drop frustrating game to Dodgers in controversial fashion**  
**By Drew Creasman - Posted on September 7, 2018 | BSN Denver**

DENVER – As a near sellout crowd gathered at Coors Field to witness a postseason-level contest between the Colorado Rockies and Los Angeles Dodgers, battling for supremacy in the NL West, they instead were treated to a game mired in controversy that featured far too much of home plate umpire Andy Fletcher.

His strike zone was a mess all evening and a few highly questionable calls ended up being the difference in a 4-2 win for LA.

Starter Jon Gray had an odd outing but ultimately this game came down to just a few key moments that went disastrously against the Rockies.

Gray got two quick outs in the first but, of course, the Dodgers just had to add to that first-inning ERA, getting a soft single through the right side from Manny Machado, a walk from Max Muncy, and a double down the right-field line from Cody Bellinger. With a pair of runners still in scoring position, Gray got Enrique Hernandez to hit a grounder to third to end the inning.

The Dodgers added in the second on a Yasiel Puig solo home run, punishing a hanging slider, pulling it into the bleachers in left field.

The Rockies came right back to tie it up in the bottom of the second. Matt Holliday led things off by taking a 2-2 fastball on the inning half and turning on it to plant one into the seats in left. It was the first time in 50 at-bats against him that Holliday has hit a home run against Clayton Kershaw.

Ian Desmond kept the pressure on by hitting a ground ball up the middle and added even more with an aggressive baserunning decision, noticing that Bellinger wouldn't be able to make a play before he got to second with a hustle double.

Carlos Gonzalez hit a liner to center but it wasn't deep enough to score him. That put catcher Drew Butera in a tough spot, batting with one out and a runner in scoring position in front of the pitcher. He took a shortened contact approach and managed to squib one through the right side for his first base hit as a Rockie, tying the game at 2-2.

Gray had to battle his command, the home plate umpire, and a patient Dodger lineup through the third and fourth. A walk of Justin Turner (on a 3-2 pitch in the zone) was followed by a pair of emphatic strikeouts against Machado and Muncy. Cody Bellinger then fought off a tough pitch for a single up the middle before Gray was able to get Hernandez once again to end it.

The fourth also began with a lead-off walk, this time to the struggling Yasmani Grandal. Gray got Puig to work just underneath a 3-2 slider and fly out to center before striking out Kershaw on a bunt attempt. But he lost his command against Joc Pederson, walking him on four pitches and fell behind Turner 3-0.

For some reason, the tides turned on the strike zone and he got a few just outside before freezing Turner with a low, inside slider for the strikeout looking.

While he refused to give in and battled all night, he had thrown 85 high-stress pitches already and a two-out, two-on opportunity presented itself in the bottom of the fourth so Bud Black elected to end Gray's night at that. Pat Valaika popped out to second in the at-bat.

Chris Rusin came into the tie game in the fifth and couldn't have gotten off to a worse start, throwing eight straight pitches out of the strike zone to walk Machado and Muncy. Somehow after that, he came back to strike out Bellinger on three pitches. Then he caught a really tough break on a balk call that saw Black tossed from the game immediately for arguing, only the second ejection of the season.

Rusin then got a phenomenal play from Trevor Story who picked up one running to his right and fired home. Butera made an equally impressive play by fielding a tough short hop and applying a difficult tag to keep the go-ahead run from scoring.

It looked like the Rockies were going to get out of it when Yency Almonte came in and got a bouncer toward third. But Nolan Arenado fielded it awkwardly and unleashed an off-balance throw. It pulled Desmond off the bag at first and Hernandez was ruled safe. Though replays appeared to show that he kept his toe just barely on the bag, the call stood after an almost three-minute-long review.

Of course, Puig managed to bounce one through the right side to score another run and the Dodgers suddenly held a 4-2 advantage without having hit the ball hard once in the inning. Neither run was earned after the Arenado error.

The Rockies couldn't sustain a rally against Kershaw but were pesky enough to drive his pitch count up, getting him out of the game after six innings of work.

They almost struck immediately against the bullpen in the seventh. Chris Iannetta came up with a single that Brian Dozier couldn't field at second and DJ LeMahieu came up with one to right with two away. Despite his recent struggles, Arenado was worked around for a five-pitch walk to load the bases. Story fought off some tough ones in the next encounter, keeping the crowd on their feet the whole time, but ultimately succumb to the swinging strikeout to leave 'em loaded.

The Dodgers went to All-Star Ross Stripling in the eighth, pitching out of the 'pen for the first time since early in the season after returning from injury. Holliday greeted him with a double to left and Desmond moved him over to third with a groundball to the right side.

That brought in lefty Scott Alexander to face Carlos Gonzalez. CarGo hit one hard the other way but Turner was able to haul it in at third, keeping Gerardo Parra, who came in to pinch-run, at third. A pinch-hitting David Dahl grounded out to first to end another frustrating inning for the bats.

Controversy reared it's head again in the ninth when, after a long single from Chris Iannetta, Charlie Blackmon was called out on three pitches all of which were outside the strike zone. Arenado struck out to end one of the most frustrating losses of the season for Colorado.

#### **FINAL STATS:**

*Jon Gray: 4 IP, 4 H, 2 ER, 5 BB, 4 K*

*Chris Rusin: 0.2 IP, 0 H, 2 R, 0 ER, 2 BB, 1 K*

*Yency Almonte: 1.1 IP, 2 H, 0 ER, 0 BB, 1 K*

*Harrison Musgrave: 0.1 IP, 0 H, 0 ER, 1 BB, 1 K*

*Seunghwan Oh: 0.2 IP, 1 H, 0 ER, 0 BB, 1 K*

*Matt Holliday: 1-for-2, 1 R, 1 RBI, 1 BB (HR: 2)*

*Ian Desmond: 1-for-4, 1 R*

*Drew Butera: 2-for-2, 0 R, 1 RBI*

**WHAT'S NEXT:**

The second game of the series features two of the most exciting young pitchers in baseball, Kyle Freeland and Walker Buehler. Saturday evening first pitch at 6:10 Mountain Time.



## Colorado Rockies: Nolan Arenado insists shoulder not causing slump

by Kevin Henry - 47 minutes ago | RoxPile

**Nolan Arenado of the Colorado Rockies is mired in a slump, hitting just .200 with one home run and six RBI over his last 15 games. The timing comes as Arenado has acknowledged he is battling a sore shoulder, an issue that has plagued him since last month.**

Is the sore shoulder having an effect on the **Colorado Rockies** All-Star third baseman? He flatly told Rox Pile and other members of the media after Friday night's loss to Los Angeles Dodgers that there is no connection.

"It's not affecting me hitting. I don't know what's going on. It affects me on my throw sometimes," Arenado said of his sore right shoulder. "It's just one of those times right now where nothing is working out. I'm not hitting. I'm not making my plays. It's disappointing but it is what it is."

When Arenado refers to "making his plays," he was talking about a fifth-inning throwing error on Friday night that pulled **Ian Desmond** off first base and allowed **Max Muncy** to score what would eventually be the winning run. It was a tough play and Arenado was leaning backward to make it so, yes, it could have been made ... but Arenado is one of the few players in the game who could have made it.

A clearly frustrated Arenado said the recent lack of production at the plate isn't just one thing that he can decipher.

"Putting the work in is not the question. I'm putting the work in," Arenado said. "I'm doing my routine. Every day, I'm trying to figure it out. I don't know why. Just right now, it isn't working.

"Individually, I have to pick it up. I have to help this team somehow. It sucks not helping."

Arenado saw his 2018 average drop below .300 with an 0-for-4 performance on Friday night, including a game-ending strikeout, one of two Ks on the night. For the year, he's now hitting .299 with 31 homers and 93 RBI heading into Saturday night's matchup against the Dodgers.

"The injury is not the problem. It's a slump," Arenado said. "It happens. Obviously I wish I wasn't going through it right now, especially being in September. This game is hard. I'm doing the best I can."

## Colorado Rockies morning after: Don't just blame one thing for loss

by Kevin Henry - 4 hours ago | RoxPile

The Los Angeles Dodgers came to Coors Field on Friday night for what has been billed as an epic showdown between two of the three contenders for the National League West crown. Holding a 1.5-game lead in the division, the Colorado Rockies braced for impact in just the latest series in a line of “the biggest series of the season.”

The Dodgers are an old nemesis but it was a different **Colorado Rockies** foe that made an appearance at 20<sup>th</sup> and Blake early on Friday night.

On a night when **Jon Gray** didn't have anywhere close to his best stuff and All-Star **Nolan Arenado** kept scuffling through arguably the worst slump of his career, it ended up being a call made two time zones away that made one of the biggest impacts on Friday night. Notice I put, “one of” in there. The call hurt Colorado's chances ... but it didn't doom them to the loss.

Let's talk about the call and then about the offense.

Argue about what effect Arenado's sore shoulder has on his swing or not, but Arenado told me after the game it didn't play a role in an errant throw he made in the top of the fifth inning. Backing up to field a bounding ball off the bat of pinch hitter **Alex Verdugo**, Arenado heaved a wide toss that forced **Ian Desmond** to use every bit of his 6-foot-3 frame to not only catch but try to keep his toe on the bag.

On the play, **Max Muncy** scored from second, putting the Dodgers up 3-2 ... or not?

Initially Verdugo was ruled safe. Slow motion replays appeared to show Desmond kept a toe on the bag while catching Arenado's heave. MLB replay officials in New York didn't see it that way, keeping Muncy as scoring the go-ahead run and Verdugo at first, much to the dismay of the Colorado portion of the 41,547 fans in attendance.

### RELATED PRODUCT

The next batter, **Yasiel Puig**, singled into right field, plating **Enrique Hernandez** and extending the Dodger lead to 4-2.

It capped a weird and pivotal fifth frame. **Chris Rusin** opened the inning with eight straight balls to put **Manny Machado** and Muncy on, then was called for a balk to move the Dodgers runners over one base. The balk was

questioned by Rusin, catcher **Drew Butera** and manager **Bud Black**, who eventually was ejected by home plate umpire Andy Fletcher. It was Black's second toss of the season.

Oh ... and we haven't even talked about an amazing play by **Trevor Story**, who fielded a grounder from Hernandez deep in the hole and fire a strike to Butera to nail Machado at the plate and temporarily keep the Rockies and Dodgers deadlocked. When talk of Story's potential Gold Glove is discussed, rest assured that this play will be referenced.

Two walks. A balk. An ejection. A stellar defensive play. An error by the game's best third baseman that didn't look like an error on replay. The go-ahead run. A single. An insurance run.

Welcome to September baseball, it seems. It's not always about just the best players but also sometimes the questionable calls that turn a game one way or the other.

## Rockies Write New Story in Wild West Race

Dan Schlossberg | Forbes

Nobody gives the Colorado Rockies any credit.

Currently first in a National League West that is truly wild, they are widely considered freaks of nature – mainly because they play half their schedule in a ballpark that stands a mile high.

While balls do travel farther at Coors Field, the Rockies have been a formidable force on the road this year too.

Entering play Thursday, they were 37-30 at home but a solid 40-32 on the road, adding up to a 77-62 mark that makes them best in the West by a game-and-a-half over the Los Angeles Dodgers and two games over the Arizona Diamondbacks.

A 1993 expansion team that has reached the World Series only once (2007), the Rockies are built to score more runs than they allow.

It's a team tradition, established by the likes of Larry Walker, Andres Galarraga, Dante Bichette, Ellis Burks, Vinny Castilla, Todd Helton and a host of others.

Except for Matt Holliday, a former NL batting champ who made a surprise return to the Rockies this fall, the names have changed even though the idea is still the same.

This year's powerful roster is led by Nolan Arenado, an MVP contender who started the All-Star Game at third base for the National League; Charlie Blackmon, a prolific leadoff man who led the league in hits, runs, and total bases last year; Carlos Gonzalez, a dependable slugger when healthy; and DJ LeMahieu, a surprise batting champion in 2016.

But the story lately has been Trevor Story, who is swinging the bat better than anyone else at his position. Even Manny Machado, the American League's All-Star starter before his trade to the Los Angeles Dodgers, can't keep up.

One of six men in the majors with at least 20 homers and 20 stolen bases this season, Story joined the club Wednesday with a three-homer outburst against the Giants at Coors.

He homered in his first three at-bats in the game, which ended in a 5-3 Colorado victory – the team's fifth win in a row. The middle home run was his 30th, putting Story in special company: he's the first shortstop with 30 homers and 25 steals since Hanley Ramirez in 2008.

"That was awesome," Colorado manager Bud Black told waiting writers. "What great swings. Trev was doing his thing. It was a great night for sure."

The first three-homer game of his career featured a rare fall-down home run – Story actually sat on home plate after hitting it. Though it didn't look pretty, he had no trouble springing to his feet and running the bases.

Added together, the trio of long balls traveled 1,380 feet – longer than four-and-a-half football fields. The first, which gave the Rockies the lead, went 459 feet. Then the shortstop outdid himself by hitting one 505 feet, a phenomenal feat even in the Mile High City. According to StatCast, it was the longest home run since a 504-foot shot at Coors by Giancarlo Stanton in 2006.

For timeliness rather than distance, Story's shot of the night was the last one, his fifth of the three-game San Francisco series, because it gave his team a lead it never lost.

"That was pretty cool," said the soft-spoken shortstop in the winning locker room. "There have been a lot of big home runs here, a lot of big power guys."

Laughing about his less-than-graceful pratfall, the 6'1", 210-pound Texan noted that his personal favorite, Adrian Beltre, also fell after his follow-through on a home run swing once in awhile.

"That was definitely his thing," said Story of Beltre, the 39-year-old third baseman of the Texas Rangers. "Mine definitely wasn't as smooth. I pretty much fell on my face."

In the box score, nobody can tell how far a home run was hit or how the batter looked at the moment of contact. Story wrote stories in both departments Wednesday.

Carlos Gonzalez, who saw the Stanton shot two years ago, admitted later he was worried about the windshield of his Lamborghini in the players' parking lot.

"He's in the MVP conversation now," said the veteran outfielder of Story, a righthanded hitter currently tied with Arenado for the club lead in home runs. "He's got more than 30 homers, close to a 30-30 season, and an average close to .300. He's carrying the team."

Story made a national impression in the 2018 All-Star Game, his first, with a home run in his first at-bat. On the season, he currently stands at .298 with 39 doubles, 31 home runs, 25 stolen bases, and five triples. Not bad for a 25-year-old infielder making \$555,000, barely above the big-league minimum. He's eligible for salary arbitration before next season, however.

"I'm more excited about the win," he said after the game. "Every win from here on out is huge."

Unlike previous Colorado clubs that have been victimized by unreliable pitching, this one has several solid arms – especially in a deep bullpen led by National League saves leader Wade Davis (38). Adam Ottavino has a 1.96 ERA and 100 strikeouts in 69 innings. Scott Oberg, a name nobody knows outside of Denver, is 7-0.

Although Coors Field is considered a place where pitchers go to die, the 2018 Rockies even have three starters with double digits in wins: Kyle Freeland, Jon Gray, and German Marquez. The team, burned in the past by high-priced but under-performing free agents Denny Neagle and Mike Hampton, has taken to developing its own starters while patching the pen with free agents.

So far, so good. But we'll have to wait and see how this Story plays out.