



MEDIA CLIPS – April 8, 2018

Rockies regroup with walk-off BB in 10th

Owen Perkins / MLB.com | April 7, 2018

DENVER -- Tony Wolters drew a bases-loaded walk off Arodys Vizcaino to give the Rockies a 3-2 walk-off win over the Braves on Saturday night at Coors Field.

Carlos Gonzalez delivered an opposite-field double off Vizcaino with one out in the 10th. After left-handed hitter Gerardo Parra was intentionally walked, Trevor Story drew a walk to load the bases for Wolters.

After Charlie Blackmon -- nursing a tight back -- was given the bunt sign with two on and none out in the ninth against A.J. Minter, DJ LeMahieu laced a liner that seemed destined to break the tie until it found a leaping Ozzie Albies' glove and resulted in a double play. Albies advanced to third base in the top of the 10th, but he was left stranded when Nick Markakis' two-out liner found shortstop Story's glove.

"You saw back-to-back hard-hit balls and middle infielders making great plays," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "That's the beauty of our game. You don't know what's going to happen. And we saw a walk-off walk.

"Trevor showed great athleticism. And tremendous boosties. When you jump high, it's referred to as boosties. It's a slang term for being able to jump."

Wade Davis' shaky ninth denied a win for Rockies starter Chad Bettis, who allowed one run and four hits over 5 2/3 innings. The Braves entered the game with a Major League-best 56 runs scored, the highest total through a season's first seven games since the 2003 Yankees.

"That's Chad Bettis," catcher Wolters said. "He executed. He made really good adjustments early. His changeup is his second best pitch, and it was up in the zone early. He made good adjustments keeping it down. He started throwing the

cutter a little bit more, which started turning into more of a slider. He threw some really good curveballs close to the lefties, he executed fastballs up and in and consistently all night. He did a great job and took their aggressiveness away."

The outing paired with his five-inning, two-run win in San Diego gives him a pair of solid starts, and the rematch with the Braves rekindled thoughts of Bettis' first start in 2017 -- seven innings of shutout ball in a 3-0 win over Atlanta after four and a half months on the disabled list recovering from cancer treatment.

"That game's kind of in the past," Bettis said. "It's in the lock-box. It's something I'll cherish forever. Today was just another day. Another game to go out there and give my team a chance to win."

Making his first start of the season, Braves right-hander Anibal Sanchez surrendered Nolan Arenado's RBI single in the third inning and then made a mistake on a 2-1 slider to Story, who snuck a solo homer over the left-center-field wall to give the Rockies a 2-0 lead.

Story's solo shot was his 53rd career homer -- the most by a shortstop through his first 251 games. It was also the 27th home run Sanchez has allowed over the 113 1/3 innings he has totaled since the start of last season.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Ninth-inning rally: Kurt Suzuki drew a one-out pinch-hit walk off Davis and scored the tying run when Dansby Swanson and Ryan Flaherty followed with consecutive singles off Davis, who suffered his first blown save since signing a three-year, \$52 million deal this offseason. Through eight games, Flaherty has three multi-hit performances, two fewer than his total from the 2016 and '17 seasons combined.

Influential review: Wolters quickly pounced on Albies' bunt as he slid on his knees and fired a strike to first base to record the second out of the sixth. The Braves challenged and the call was ruled as stands because there was not definitive evidence Albies was safe. The speedy second baseman would have likely scored to tie the game when Freddie Freeman followed with a RBI double to the left-center-field gap.

QUOTABLE

"I think the bunt I had is the most barrell I've gotten in a while." -- Wolters, on his ninth-inning pop-bunt single to first

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Story has nine career home runs against the Braves, each of which has come within a span of 42 at-bats dating to July 22, 2016.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

The Rockies challenged a play in the third inning when Inciarte was initially ruled safe at first on a fielder's choice. After a review, replay officials ruled the ball contacted first baseman Ian Desmond's glove before Inciarte's foot hit the bag and the call was overturned, resulting in a 5-4-3 inning-ending double play.

WHAT'S NEXT

Left-hander Kyle Freeland will take the mound at 1:10 p.m. MT on Sunday in the series finale with the Braves. Freeland threw six innings of three-run ball against them in a 4-3 loss at Coors Field last season.

Blackmon removed from Rox win with tight back

Owen Perkins / MLB.com | April 7, 2018

DENVER -- Center fielder Charlie Blackmon was removed from the Rockies' 3-2 10-inning win over the Braves after the ninth inning on Saturday night because of a tight back.

"It was a little bit tight most of the game, and it just kept getting tighter," Blackmon said. "I've dealt with that before, been all right. Usually it's pretty manageable. It's not something that's new. It's not something that I would consider an injury, it's just more of a spasm situation."

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Blackmon, one of the team's most dangerous hitters, attempted a bunt with runners on first and second and none out in the ninth inning. He popped foul to Braves third baseman Ryan Flaherty for the first out.

"Charlie, being the gamer that he is, grinded through a progressively tightening back throughout the game," manager Bud Black said. "So when we got to that situation in the ninth, I wasn't going to let him swing with a bad back. I thought he could square a bunt down, he's a good bunter. At that moment, that was our best option to advance the runner to get to [DJ LeMahieu] and [Nolan Arenado], and potentially CarGo [Carlos Gonzalez]."

In the top of the 10th, Blackmon was replaced in the field by Mike Tauchman.

After the game, Blackmon said he still felt a little tight, but he was not overly concerned.

"I've dealt with it at some point every year for the last three years -- at times," said Blackmon, who played in 157, 143 and 159 games over the previous three seasons and signed a six-year extension on Wednesday. "It's not something that's always there. It's usually when I get tired. It tends to happen here more than on the road."

Story hits early HR, provides stellar D in 10th

Owen Perkins Special / MLB.com | April 7, 2018

DENVER -- Rockies shortstop Trevor Story launched his second homer of the season in the fourth inning off Anibal Sanchez on Saturday night in a 3-2 walk-off win in 10 innings at Coors Field.

The homer cleared the left-field wall and traveled a projected 404 feet, according to Statcast™, and it gave the Rockies a 2-0 lead. It was his second homer in two games.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

"I feel like I'm taking good at-bats," Story said. "I'm just seeing the ball well. That's what it's all about for me. I think the results will come. I felt good up there, and that's all I'm really looking for."

It was Story's 53rd career home run since he debuted on Opening Day in 2016, when he became the first player in Major League history to hit six home runs in his team's first four games. Story's homers are the most by a Major League shortstop through their first 251 games. Nomar Garciaparra is second on the list with 47 in that span, followed by Alex Rodriguez (46), Hall of Famer Ernie Banks (44) and the Astros' Carlos Correa (42).

Story later showed his value on both sides of the diamond, making a run-saving catch in the top of the 10th inning with the score tied at 2. With Ozzie Albies on third and two out, Nick Markakis drilled a liner toward left. Story leapt, and with his arm fully outstretched, caught the liner to end the inning.

"It was a very intense part of the game for sure," said Story, noting that Albies had robbed DJ LeMahieu of a walk-off hit in the ninth. "Great play by Ozzie. He laid out and made a great play. We thought we had it right there. I kind of returned the favor a little bit."

Story came to the plate in the bottom of the 10th after the Braves intentionally walked lefty Gerardo Parra with right-hander Aroldys Vizcaino on the mound. Story walked to load the bases, and Tony Wolters drew a four-pitch walk to win it.

"Facing Vizcaino is tough," Story said. "He throws really hard and he's got really good breaking stuff, too. You just have to get something you can handle. I felt like I got one pitch to do it and I fouled it off, and I just tried to be patient after that."

Walt Weiss returns to Colorado without much fanfare, but plenty of satisfaction with the Braves

Weiss is part of a veteran staff that includes his former first-base coach in Colorado, Eric Young Jr., and veteran Ron Washington.

Nick Groke / TheDenverPost.com | April 7, 2018

Even if he was in a gorilla suit, you could spot Walt Weiss during batting practice. He stands with his right foot crooked and casual, leaning his hand into a bat, a natural extension of his arm. It's the posture of a man born to be around baseball.

"It's in my blood," he said.

The former Rockies manager held that stance again Saturday in his return to Coors Field, this time in a blue uniform instead of purple. He returned to the game this season as bench coach of the Braves under first-year manager Brian Snitker, part of Atlanta's club overhaul meant to match a major rebuild with a young and talented system of rising prospects.

Weiss' return to Denver came Friday in the Rockies' home opener, without much fanfare but with plenty of satisfaction.

"It is weird coming back here," Weiss said inside the visitor's clubhouse. "But this job has been better than I expected, to be honest with you. I was really excited to get a call from Snit, because I have history with the Braves."

There were moments during spring training at Champion Field in Florida when Weiss put on his Braves uniform and thought about how he blew back into baseball. His four seasons at the helm in Colorado oversaw some lean years, when the Rockies transitioned from a top-heavy cast of veterans to a homegrown core of young players.

He arrived in 2013 as manager in Colorado to find a mess, inheriting a 98-loss team, and through three years the club saw little improvement in the standings while they rebuilt from within. They twice finished last in the National League West. His fourth season saw improvement to a 75-87 record and a jump to third in the division.

And then he left, vexed by what Weiss thought was an unproductive relationship with general manager Jeff Bridich. He chose instead to watch baseball from a distance, taking a year away from the game.

And after former Braves manager Bobby Cox recommended him to Snitker, Weiss rejoined the final club he played for. Weiss was an all-star shortstop at Atlanta for three seasons through 2000.

"It's been more of a homecoming than I thought it would be," Weiss said.

His new job roused Weiss into new territory. Snitker tasked him with coordinating a spring training program. He is a sounding board and a player's mentor. He introduced Snitker to an analytical and statistical bent to managing. And he is specifically helping guide the Braves' coveted young shortstop, Dansby Swanson, just as he did Troy Tulowitzki and Trevor Story in Colorado.

"I always gravitate toward the shortstops anyway," Weiss said. "I've been fortunate. I had Tulo and Trevor and now a kid like Dansby. It's a natural connection for me. I've enjoyed getting to know Dansby. We've had some really good conversations, below the surface."

Weiss is part of a veteran staff that includes his former first-base coach in Colorado, Eric Young Jr., and veteran Ron Washington. Snitker called on Weiss to help set a bar with experience and knowledge and a player's touch. "He brings instant credibility, with the respect he's earned over the years," Snitker said.

With the Rockies, first as a front office assistant and then as manager, Weiss was always more at home in the clubhouse than pushing paper behind a desk. A manager deals with the entire club, the point person for all departments. And Weiss said he only truly enjoyed his job in Colorado when baseball was all that mattered.

That is why Weiss was so enthused by volunteering as a coach at Regis Jesuit before his Rockies tenure. The game is what most matters to him. At Atlanta, Weiss is back in the game, where he knew he belonged.

"The thing I've enjoyed more than anything is being more hands-on with baseball," he said. "As a manager, you don't get that. It's one of the things I didn't enjoy. I enjoyed it once the game started and you finally get to do baseball stuff."

Braves RHP Sean Newcomb (0-1, 10.38) vs. Rockies LHP Kyle Freeland (0-1, 6.75), Sunday 1:10 p.m., ATTRM, 850 AM

Freeland allowed just four hits in his first start this season, last week at San Diego, but he was undone by two home runs from the Padres' Christian Villanueva in the second and fourth innings. Villanueva hit a third homer after Freeland exited in the fifth. Now in his second season, Freeland, the 24-year-old Denver native, is trying to navigate a sophomore season when hitters now have evidence of his patterns. He can no longer get by as the unknown newbie. Newcomb is in the same boat with the Braves. After a promising rookie season last year, he gave up six runs in 4 1/3 of his season debut last week.

Monday: Padres LHP Clayton Richard (0-1, 4.50) vs. Rockies RHP Jon Gray (1-1, 2.45), 6:40 p.m., ATTRM

Tuesday: Padres LHP Joey Lucchesi (0-0, 2.79) vs. Rockies LHP Tyler Anderson (0-0, 7.56), 6:40 PM, ATTRM

Wednesday: Padres RHP Luis Perdomo (1-1, 6.00) at Rockies RHP German Márquez (0-1, 6.52), 1:10 p.m., ATTRM

Denver Rescue Mission staff and others make good on annual opening day cleanup

Annual ritual attracts 60 volunteers

Monte Whaley / TheDenverPost.com | April 7, 2018

At least 646 pounds of trash was collected Saturday during the annual Rockies Cleanup, which drew 60 volunteers including Denver Rescue Mission staff, the facility's program participants, Colorado Rockies staff (including Rockies owner Dick Monfort) and members of the Ballpark Neighborhood Association.

Rockies Cleanup is traditionally held the day after opening day of the Colorado Rockies baseball season.

Denver Rescue Mission spokeswoman Stacy Parker said the annual cleanup is to demonstrate the Mission's neighborly spirit and commitment to the Coors Field community.

"The event is also a way for New Life Program participants to give back — a powerful experience that reminds them how far they've come from once living on these streets," Parker said.

Tony Wolters' plate patience, Chad Bettis' model of consistency leads the Rockies by the Braves in extra innings

Nick Groke / TheDenverPost.com | April 7, 2018

They tried to manufacture a run by calling for Charlie Blackmon to bunt. They survived the first blown save from their high-priced new closer. They wriggled away from a runner at third base late with two stellar defensive plays. And they played their first extra-inning game since 2016.

And after all that, the Rockies escaped with a 3-2 victory Saturday over the Braves at Coors Field when catcher Tony Wolters took a four-pitch, walk-off walk that scored Carlos Gonzalez with the bases loaded.

Gonzalez lined a one-out double to left field, after striking out in three previous at-bats, before Wolters watched three 98-mph fastballs and an off-center slider from Braves reliever Arodys Vizcaino land out of the strike zone.

"I knew he didn't have a good feel with this fastball," Wolters said. "I'm gonna take until I get two strikes and feel him out, because he doesn't have good command."

Vizcaino allowed three walks in the 10th, the first an intentional pass to Gerardo Parra, then another to Trevor Story from a full count. Vizcaino walked behind the mound in disgust, then charged back up to the rubber in a hurry.

"You could see the pitcher was losing it," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "His mannerisms changed dramatically."

Colorado closer Wade Davis gave up two hits and a run-scoring single to Ryan Flaherty in the ninth as Atlanta rallied to tie. But he struck out Lane Adams to end the inning with runners still on second and third.

That set up a strange ninth inning. Wolters bunted into a single to lead off — "the most barrel I've seen this season," he said — and pinch hitter Chris Iannetta walked. With two on and no outs, Blackmon, the National League batting champion, twice tried to bunt after meeting with third base coach Stu Cole before his at-bat. The second attempt popped into a foul ball out.

Black said Blackmon was suffering a tight back throughout the game and he was not going to let Blackmon swing. He was removed for the 10th inning and replaced by Mike Tauchman in center field.

"It was a little bit tight for most of the game and kept getting tighter," Blackmon said. He called it a "spasm" and said he was not injured. "I've dealt with it before and been all right. But a good win. A win is a win."

The “school of hard knocks” for young Rockies pitchers, as Bud Black called it, took a recess when veteran right-hander Chad Bettis moseyed to the mound. Black positioned the senior member of his pitching staff between two budding arms in the rotation, not for an island of experience, but because he knows exactly what to expect.

“Chad between anybody is pretty good,” Black said. “There’s going to be a consistency to Chad’s games. I suspect Chad’s starts, if he makes all 33 or 34, there will be less variability in his outings.”

Bettis for the second time this season cruised through a crafty and professional outing, throwing 5 2/3 innings on 88 pitches while giving up just four hits. Freddie Freeman’s run-scoring double in the sixth, on Bettis’ final pitch, was the only mark against the 29-year-old.

Trevor Story belted a solo homer to left-center field in the fourth and Nolan Arenado singled in e Blackmon in the third as the Rockies (5-4) rebounded from a frigid loss to the Braves in their home opener Friday.

Sitting 89-91 on his fastball and working with quick efficiency, Bettis blew through five innings on 69 pitches. He allowed more than one base runner in an inning just once, in the sixth. And even his walks were harmless. After Dansby Swanson’s free pass led off the fifth, Bettis forced Flaherty into a spinning double-play from Ian Desmond to Story and back again at first base.

“Very crisp,” Black said of Bettis. “His fastball played.”

Bettis mirrored his season debut last week, when he gave up two runs on five hits in a victory at San Diego. Now in his sixth season, Bettis has become an unlikely sage in an otherwise youthful rotation. Colorado’s other four pitchers are an average age of 25 with about six years of combined serviced time.

The knowledge he brings, though, serves Bettis well. He threw five fastballs to Carlos Perez in the fifth inning, none topping 90 mph, then struck out Atlanta’s catcher looking at pinpoint 86-mph changeup to end the frame. And he was helped by Wolters in the sixth, after Wolters slid on his knee pads through the grass, then spun a diving throw to first to nab Ozzie Albies.

Mike Dunn, Bryan Shaw and Jake McGee combined to throw the 2 1/3 scoreless innings, on just two hits. Adam Ottavino pitched a hitless 10th to earn the win. He was helped by a sprinting catch in the left field corner from Gerardo Parra, who was shaded toward center field against Freddie Freeman, and a leaping grab of a liner from Story to rob Nick Markakis.

Story’s homer was his ninth in just 16 career games against the Braves, and it was seen in person by Peyton Manning, who watched the game from a Coors Field suite.

Saunders: Charlie Blackmon’s big deal raises two huge questions for Rockies

How does outfielder's \$108 million deal affect Nolan Arenado's future?

Patrick Saunders / TheDenverPost.com | April 7, 2018

Charlie Blackmon is set for life, at least financially. Which is great, because the bearded one can now afford to buy new tires for his 2004 Jeep.

I can think of other things to do with a \$108 million, but, hey, that's just me.

I'm genuinely thrilled for Blackmon, but there are two huge questions that have arisen in the wake of his new deal.

Blackmon turns 32 on July 1. He'll be making \$21 million in 2020, at age 34, and another \$21 million in 2021 at age 35. He plays his home games, at altitude, at cavernous Coors Field. Can his body hold up?

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

If it were almost any other player, I would be skeptical. But Blackmon has transformed his body and spent countless hours working out and maintaining his health. He's strong, but lean. Plus, I don't think it will be too long before David Dahl is roaming center field and the Rockies move Blackmon to a corner spot. That would save some wear and tear on his legs.

The other major issue is how much Blackmon's deal affects Nolan Arenado's future in Colorado. The five-time Gold Glove third baseman is scheduled to become a free agent after the 2019 season.

"This has nothing to do with Nolan Arenado," Bridich said. "This is all about Charlie Blackmon. They are teammates, but they are obviously different people. So there is no relationship there at all."

I'm not buying that.

In the moment of the signing, of course, it was all about Blackmon. But we know that Bridich and Monfort have a long-term financial plan in place. They have to. Will that blueprint include signing Arenado to a long-term deal that might approach \$300 million? I honestly don't know, but I have my doubts.

I hope I'm wrong, but in my opinion. Blackmon's signing makes it less likely that Arenado becomes a Rockie for life.

And don't forget that Arenado is going to have a major say in his future. Bottom line: he wants to play for a perennial contender, in Colorado or somewhere else.

"There is something to be said for being with an organization for your whole career, I definitely believe in that," Arenado told me this winter. "I admired Todd (Helton) and I admired (Yankees icon) Derek Jeter; guys who stick with one team their whole career. So I have a lot of respect for what Todd did. But at the end of the day, I don't want to be in Todd's shoes where I only go to the playoffs twice in my (17-year) career."

Owner Dick Monfort, to his credit, has opened up his wallet to make the Rockies better. He shelled out \$106 million to improve the bullpen this winter, propping up Bridich's master plan for the Rockies. Then he shelled out \$108 to Chuck Nasty.

But suppose the Rockies are contenders at this year's trade deadline, and suppose it becomes obvious that they need to rent a star pitcher or big right-handed bat in order to make a second-half run and possible postseason success. Would the Rockies pull the trigger on a trade, like the champion Houston Astros did when they acquired Justin Verlander late last August?

How that question is answered could very well answer the question about Arenado's long-term future here.

Pipeline Preview: O'Neill looks to stay hot

Cardinals' No. 4 prospect has three homers over the past two games

Mike Rosenbaum / MLB.com | April 7, 2018

Here's a look at top prospects to watch in today's Minor League action:

Hitter to watch: Tyler O'Neill (Cardinals' No. 4), Memphis at Round Rock (2:05 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

MLB Pipeline's No. 94 overall prospect belted a pair of two-run home runs and a double on Friday in Triple-A Memphis' win over Round Rock, and then connected on another two-run shot in his second at-bat Saturday for the Red Birds, giving him three in his first three games.

Pitcher to watch: Mitch Keller (Pirates' No. 1), Altoona vs. Akron (2 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

Keller, MLB Pipeline's No. 16 overall prospect, will be making his season debut when he takes the mound for Double-A Altoona. The 22-year-old finished his impressive 2017 campaign in the Eastern League, posting a 3.12 ERA and a .197 opponents' average with 45 strikeouts in 34 2/3 innings (six starts). Altogether, he pitched to a 3.03 ERA, while averaging nine strikeouts-per-nine innings, in 116 frames across three levels.

Duel of the day: Peter Lambert (Rockies' No. 5) vs. Sean Reid-Foley (Blue Jays' No. 10), Hartford vs. New Hampshire (1:05 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV) (Double-A)

Speaking of debuts, Lambert, 20, is set to make his first Double-A start against a New Hampshire lineup that could include phenoms Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Bo Bichette, MLB Pipeline's Nos. 3 and 13 overall prospects. Spending all of 2017 in the Class A Advanced California League, Lambert posted a 4.17 ERA with 18 home runs allowed, but also 131 strikeouts in a career-high 142 1/3 innings (26 starts).

Reid-Foley, meanwhile, is returning to New Hampshire after struggling in his first Eastern League exposure last season. Making 27 starts, the 22-year-old right-hander logged a 5.09 ERA, while posting 122 strikeouts against 53 walks, in 132 2/3 frames. A ground-ball pitcher early in his career who yielded just eight homers in his first two full-season campaigns, Reid-Foley saw that total spike to 22 last year with the Fisher Cats.

Sunday's Top 100 prospect probables

No. 38 Jack Flaherty (Cardinals' No. 2), Memphis at Round Rock (2:05 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

No. 61 Dylan Cease (White Sox No. 5), Winston-Salem at Carolina (1 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

No. 83 Max Fried (Braves' No. 7) vs. Oscar De La Cruz (Cubs' No. 3), Tennessee at Mississippi (2 p.m. ET on MiLB.TV)

No. 100 Riley Pint (Rockies' No. 3) vs. Brenan Hanifree (Orioles' No. 10), Asheville at Delmarva (2:05 p.m. ET)

More top prospect probables

Triple-A Erick Fedde (Nationals' No. 4), Syracuse at Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (Triple-A)

Rogelio Armenteros (Astros' No. 12), Fresno at Reno (Triple-A)

Tom Eshelman (Phillies' No. 15) vs. Jalen Beeks (Red Sox's No. 15), Lehigh Valley at Pawtucket (Triple-A)

Sam Howard (Rockies' No. 17), Albuquerque at Salt Lake (Triple-A)

David Hess (Orioles' No. 18), Norfolk Gwinnett (Triple-A)

P.J. Conlon (Mets' No. 24), Las Vegas vs. El Paso (Triple-A)

Double-A Kyle Funkhouser (Tigers' No. 6), Erie at Reading (Double-A)

Mike Shawaryn (Red Sox's No. 9), Portland at Binghamton (Double-A)

Lewis Thorpe (Twins' No. 12), Chattanooga vs. Birmingham (Double-A)

Merandy Gonzalez (Marlins' No. 16), Jacksonville at Jackson (Double-A)

Ian Clarkin (White Sox No. 17), Birmingham at Chattanooga, Game 2 (Double-A)

Joey Wentz (Braves' No. 10), Florida vs. Daytona (Class A Advanced)

Cody Sedlock (Orioles' No. 12) vs. Bryan Hudson (Cubs' No. 24), Frederick at Myrtle Beach (Class A Advanced)

Luis Escobar (Pirates' No. 12), Bradenton vs. St. Lucie (Class A Advanced)

Anthony Kay (Mets' No. 14), Columbia vs. Augusta (Class A Advanced)

Class A Blayne Enlow (Twins' No. 9), Cedar Rapids vs. Quad Cities (Class A)

A.J. Alexy (Rangers' No. 17), Hickory at Greensboro (Class A)

Spencer Howard (Phillies' No. 22), Lakewood at Kannapolis (Class A)

Oliver Jaskie (Mariners' No. 26), Clinton vs. Kane County (Class A)

Tomas Alastre (Nationals' No. 26), Hagerstown at Rome (Class A)

Rockies 3, Braves 2: Rockies walk to win in tenth inning

There was some late drama, but the Rockies won it in 10

Eric Garcia McKinley / Purple Row | April 7, 2018

Phew. The Rockies held on to a slim lead throughout most of the game, but Wade Davis blew his first save of the season in the ninth inning, which tied the game at two and sent the Rockies to the bottom of the ninth. The Rockies had a chance to walk it off, but some weird stuff happened that prevented it (explained below).

In the tenth, the Rockies loaded the bases, and Tony F. Wolters took a walk to give the Rockies the 3-2 win. What a game.

Defense

The defense was mostly solid. Nolan Arenado nearly threw Ozzie Albies out after dodging a broken bat, and the Rockies turned three double plays. Ian Desmond was part of one of those—a nice 3-6-3 double play that got Dansby Swanson off the base paths and eliminated the threat in a tight game.

Tony Wolters had a nice slide and throw that for a while seemed like it was going to be the play of the game. And in the tenth, Wolters airmailed a throw to center field to allow Ozzie Albies to get to third. But then Trevor Story made the real defensive play of the game:

Ummm

Here was the situation. The Rockies had two runners on with nobody out in the bottom of the ninth of a tie game. They were fortunate enough to have Charlie Blackmon up to bat. Things were looking good!

Then the pitch came, and Charlie squares up to bunt? Why?! Okay, okay, he fouled it back. Maybe it was one of those things where you try it once and move on.

Nope.

Squared up again, but this time Chuck got enough of the baseball to pop it up in foul territory. That made the first out. DJ LeMahieu followed by drilling one to second on a hit and run that ended up being a double play.

On the one hand, you can sort of understand the inclination to put a runner on third with one out, even if it takes the bat out of Blackmon's hands. On the other hand, Charlie Blackmon is one of the best players in the National League, and it has nothing to do with his bunting, and why would you want to take the bat out of his hands? The Rockies took a risk, and it turned out poorly.

Also, it all worked out in the end.

Looking ahead

The Rockies and Braves wrap up their series tomorrow starting at 1:10 MT. It'll be a battle of left-handers. Kyle Freeland will start for the Rockies, and Sean Newcomb starts for the Braves.

Colorado Rockies: Charlie Blackmon leaves game with back tightness

Kevin Henry / RoxPile.com | April 7, 2018

Charlie Blackmon of the Colorado Rockies left Saturday night's 3-2 win over the Atlanta Braves in the ninth inning with back tightness.

Blackmon, who had gone 0-for-3 with a walk through the game's first eight frames, stepped into the box in a 2-2 game in the bottom of the ninth with no outs and runners on first and second. The All-Star center fielder attempted to lay down a bunt, but popped it up to Atlanta third baseman Ryan Flaherty. The Rockies did not score in the frame but would eventually win on a Tony Wolters walk-off walk in the 10th.

After the Rockies didn't score in the ninth inning, Mike Tauchman replaced Blackmon in the outfield.

The attempted bunt in the ninth inning surprised some Rockies fans but manager Bud Black explained the situation after the game.

"When the game started, his back started getting a little tight," Black told Rox Pile and other reporters after the game. "Charlie, being the gamer that he is, grinded through a progressively tightening back all throughout the game. When we got to that situation in the ninth, I didn't want him to swing with a bad back. I thought he would be able to square away and put the bunt down. At that moment, that was our best option to advance the runner and get to DJ (LeMahieu) and Nolan (Arenado) and potentially CarGo (Carlos Gonzalez)."

Blackmon discussed the early exit after the game, describing it as a spasm.

"It was a little bit tight most of the game," Blackmon, who mentioned he had dealt with back tightness in the past, told Rox Pile and other media members inside the Rockies clubhouse. "Usually it's pretty manageable. It's not something that's new. It's not something I would consider an injury. It's more of a spasm situation."

Blackmon said the tightness in his back didn't affect him at the plate, including in the bunt situation in the ninth inning.

NEXT: The grade book on a frigid Rockies home opener

Colorado and Atlanta will play the final game of their three-game series on Sunday afternoon at Coors Field. Blackmon's availability for the contest will be determined Sunday morning.

Colorado Rockies: Walt Weiss enjoying transition from manager to coach

Jake Shapiro / RoxPile.com | April 7, 2018

DENVER – The rise of the Colorado Rockies from cellar dweller to the playoffs started a season before Bud Black. For the first time since 2010, the Rockies won 75 games in 2016 and that club was led by Walt Weiss.

Weiss managed the Rockies from 2013-2016 to a 283-365 record. The former Rockie and resident of Denver returned to the Centennial State for 2018's opening weekend. Now the bench coach of the Atlanta Braves, a laid back and rather joyful Weiss spent Saturday with familiar faces.

Along with Braves First Base Coach Eric Young Sr., the two spent time with outfielder Carlos Gonzalez and former pitcher Pedro Astacio around noon. All four are on the club's 25 best players list for the Rockies 25th anniversary in 2018.

Weiss flashed a smile when he saw some more familiar faces, "Wow, I didn't expect to be in such high demand.

"It's ironic, because last time I left the Rockies I came to Atlanta as a player, and now I'm doing it again," the first year Braves bench coach told Rox Pile in an exclusive chat. "There are some consistencies and parallels. Coming back here is a little weird. I spent 15 years with the Rockies in some capacity or another. It's strange, but I think the year out gave a little separation. Things are great overall."

Weiss spent the 2017 baseball season making almost weekly trips to Chapel Hill, N.C., where he played collegiate baseball. This time, he was there to see his son Bo, a well-regarded right-handed pitcher, wear the Carolina Blue.

The 1988 AL Rookie of the Year with the Oakland Athletics, Weiss, spent the final three seasons of a 14-year Major League career with the Braves. This is his first time serving as a coach in the majors, performing essentially every other role in the bigs from special adviser to scout to manager.

"It's been neat," the 54-year-old said. "I've really enjoyed this role. It's a lot easier to connect with the players. As a manager, you really have to go out of your way make an effort to connect with players. It's a little weird for a player around a manager. They don't open as much. I've really enjoyed that, being more hands on with the players."

Weiss continued on that beat.

"My typical day is baseball stuff," he said. "That's one of the things I didn't like about managing. Most of your day is non-baseball-related things and I didn't like that."

Much happier to hold a mitt, fungo and give signs than carry a notepad and be in high demand, he clarified.

“I’m not talking about the media. I’m talking about dealing with all different departments,” Weiss said. “And you’re not out there getting your hands dirty with the players. There just aren’t enough hours in the day. Everyone else’s headache in all these different departments becomes your headache and I know you sign up for that and I got that. But I am enjoying this role.”

Gonzalez Is Where He Belongs; That's More Important Than Money

Tracy Ringolsby / InsidetheSeams.com | April 7, 2018

Carlos Gonzalez took his spot along the first base line with his Rockies teammates for the player introductions prior to the Rockies home opener on Friday afternoon. The crowd accompanied his trip from the dugout with a loud ovation.

And the reality set in.

As excited as he had been to re-sign with the Rockies in the opening weeks of the spring it wasn't until Friday that he fully understood what it all meant.

"Being on the line with my teammates, really got me," he said. "I was like, 'Wow, I can't believe I'm here.' It didn't hit me until then. It was emotional. It was great."

He signed with the Diamondbacks as a 16-year-old. He made his big-league debut with the A's.

He, however, is most at home with the Rockies, where he is now in his 10th season, something that six months ago he never envisioned happening.

In the spring of 2017 he had turned down a three-year \$45 million contract extension. During the summer of 2017 he suffered through what was the most disappointing season of his professional career. And in the fall of 2017 he filed for free agency, feeling that the only thing for sure about that move was that his days with the Rockies were over.

"I thought I was out of here for sure," said Gonzalez.

The world of free agency, however, took a strange turn this past off-season. Teams did not jump at the idea of throwing millions of dollars and multi-year contracts around like in the past. And so as 2017 turned into 2018, Gonzalez was unsigned and hadn't even received a concrete offer.

He was under the impression that the Diamondbacks, Orioles, Blue Jays and Astros had interest.

"I was picturing myself with the world champs," he said of the Astros. "After they said (Carlos) Beltran was not going to be back there, that he was retiring, I was thinking they need an outfielder/DH guy," said Gonzalez. "So I thought I might get to play with (Jose) Altuve. Altuve was like, 'Yeah, yeah, come here.'"

"I trained with him some in the winter and he's like, 'Yeah, come here! He would stay at my house and would say, 'You should play with me.' I thought it might be happening, but it never got close."

Nothing got close. The calendar turned from 2017 to 2018 and Gonzalez was waiting for a team to make an offer, and he began to think maybe he could return to the Rockies.

"I always stayed in touch with Jeff (Bridich, the general manager) and my teammates, the coaching staff, the manager," said Gonzalez. "The manager texted me at like, one in the morning on New Years. He was like, 'Man, let's make this happen, I really want you to play for me.' I texted him, 'I don't know what's going to happen, I would love to play for you but I don't know if it's going to happen.'"

And then, after camps had opened, Bridich reached out.

A deal got done, for \$5 million with \$3 million of incentives based on days on the active roster. It was a far cry from what had been speculated in the fall. Gonzalez, however, didn't care.

"There are going to be plenty of people saying, 'Hey, man, you should have taken that deal (last spring),' said Gonzalez, "but I never regret any of my decisions. When I was 16 years old, I had an offer for almost a million dollars to pitch, and I ended up taking two hundred thousand to be an outfielder with Arizona. Everybody said, 'Whoa, you're crazy, you left a lot of money because you wanted to hit?' I said, 'It's not about the money, it's about what makes you happy.' Maybe a lot of guys make decisions based on money, and then they ended up regretting it.

"At the time you think, 'Is that really what I'm worth?' But after it's over, you know it's not about the money. It's about playing the game that you love. I never thought about how much I was making, even when I was under contract. It's baseball, you know? When the game starts, when the season starts, when spring training starts, it's not about who's getting paid the most, it's about performing every day, trying to get better every day. It is about helping your teammates out, trying to be the best person you can, on and off the field."

The actions back up the words. What stood out about Gonzalez a year ago was that with free agency pending and Gonzalez battling through a season gone bad, he never withdrew. There was always a smile. There was always a helping hand for his teammates.

He lives in a world where the focus is on the future, not the past.

"I want to be strong," he said. "I want to be healthy. I want to play games. I want to have a good, long career. As long as I take care of that, money is going to come. I want to play for at least five, six more years, whatever God has for me."

He paused.

"I'm not doing it for money," he said. "I'm doing it because I love the game."

Olney: Like Charlie Blackmon, future free agents can capitalize on emotional leverage

Buster Olney / ESPN.com | April 8, 2018

Charlie Blackmon concluded a deal with the Colorado Rockies on Wednesday that guarantees him \$108 million, or basically the same amount of money slugger J.D. Martinez got from the Boston Red Sox, in spite of a couple of stout industry trends.

First, that teams are more reluctant than ever to invest in long-term contracts for aging players; Blackmon turns 32 in July.

Second, rival evaluators have viewed Rockies hitters warily in the free-agent market because they suspect outsized offensive production is rooted in their hitting at mile-high altitude rather than their skills -- just ask Carlos Gonzalez, who had to settle for a one-year deal to go back to Colorado. Blackmon had home/road OPS splits last season of 1.239/.784, so it's possible Blackmon would have struggled to get a fifth or sixth year in an offer next winter.

But Colorado stepped up and paid big dollars to the center fielder, mostly because Blackmon is a great hitter and probably at least partly because Blackmon had another major factor working for him: emotional leverage.

Chuck Nasty is staying put in Colorado

Blackmon had a ton of emotional leverage tilted his way. The Rockies made the playoffs last year for the first time in a decade, and the franchise has built some momentum. But it might be more difficult for Colorado to sustain success than any other team because of its home park and its impact on pitching, and it's very possible the Rockies' best player, Nolan Arenado, will be the premier free agent in the fall of 2019. Friends of Arenado say he burns to win and that will drive the decision of which team will be his next employer.

For the sake of stability -- in the face of the Arenado uncertainty -- it made sense for the Rockies to go above and beyond to keep Blackmon. Now they can operate knowing they'll have a lineup anchor and a well-known player to market. The fans' love for and interest in a player is at the root of emotional leverage.

Other players who will have a lot of emotional leverage the next two years:

- Clayton Kershaw: The future Hall of Famer can opt out of his contract after this season. If he does, he would become the kind of free agent Dodgers exec Andrew Friedman has seemingly worked to avoid -- someone older than 30 years old, with his best years probably behind him.

But Kershaw is the heir apparent to Sandy Koufax, someone beloved by Dodgers fans; he's a legacy guy. Kershaw is not someone who needs or wants a lot of stuff in his life -- the vacation homes throughout the country, a fleet of cars -- but he does seem to take his role as a union standard-bearer seriously. It would make some sense for him to use that emotional leverage to get more guaranteed money than the \$70 million the Dodgers owe him for 2019 and 2020 under his current contract.

2018 MLB Season Preview

- Paul Goldschmidt: One evaluator said he would not be surprised if the Diamondbacks' first baseman signs an extension sometime in the next six months, given the circumstances. The slugger has been the Diamondbacks' best and most popular player and could be eligible for free agency in the fall of 2019.

He is in a situation similar to that of Blackmon: Goldschmidt will be 31 this year and plays a position the industry has not compensated especially well in the past couple of winters.

But Goldschmidt is The Man in Arizona, and his emotional leverage might never be higher than it is right now.

- Alex Bregman and George Springer: Jose Altuve signed a long-term deal, and the challenge for the Astros moving forward is to retain their other core position players -- Bregman, Springer and Carlos Correa. There is a perception among other teams that Correa, who would likely be at the top of his free-agent class given his age, position and power, is the least likely of the three to sign. That could give more emotional leverage for Springer, who won't be eligible for free agency until he's 30, and Bregman, who could be in line for a massive deal before he becomes eligible for arbitration in a couple of years in the winter of 2019-20.

- Madison Bumgarner: Surrounded by a group of older position players, Bumgarner is 28 and playing for \$12 million this year with a \$12 million team option for 2019. Over the next five years, the Giants might see some of the players from the championship years move on. Bumgarner could be the last link to those teams, and the player most recognizable and beloved to fans who fill AT&T Park. The Giants have thrived over the past two decades, and if they go through some lean rebuilding years, they might need Bumgarner as much or more for his legacy as for his production. In two years, Bumgarner might have more emotional leverage than anyone.

News from around the major leagues

The Yankees' CC Sabathia came out of Friday's game with hip soreness and landed on the disabled list. The Angels lost Matt Shoemaker to a forearm problem. The Red Sox started the season with a couple of starters on the disabled list. Holes have opened up in the rotations of contending teams already. But there are a couple of things worth remembering about the need for starting pitching.

First, some club executives expect that this summer's starting pitching trade market will be one of the worst in recent memory, with few options available. If the Rangers eventually punt on their season, they'd probably like to move Cole Hamels. He's expensive, though, with a \$23.5 million salary and a \$6 million buyout on his contract, and he might not have a lot of trade value.

The Rays' stance on Chris Archer is well-known within the league: Yes, they would discuss a possible deal involving the right-hander, but they would want a major prospect haul in return, given Archer's talent and team-friendly contract. Archer is making \$6.4 million this year and \$7.67 million next year, with team options of \$9 million and \$11 million for the next two seasons.

Some teams might work to pry Michael Fulmer away from the rebuilding Tigers, and a surprise collapse of a contending team could make a few pitchers available, but, generally, execs say they don't anticipate finding much help.

Second, with the increased emphasis on relief pitching, few teams are as reliant on starting pitching, anyway. The model for how a team would handle its pitching would be for the starter to work into the late innings before turning the ball over to a closer, or maybe a setup man and a closer. But last year's World Series provided evidence of just how outdated that philosophy is. The number of pitchers used per game:

A decade ago, contenders that lost a valued starting pitcher would have worked to identify another starter to assume a similar load. Now teams assume day to day that they'll just do what they can to piece together nine innings, and the starter is expected to work really only a handful of innings.

"It seems like you only need starters for the postseason," said one executive, "and even then, it's only for three or four innings."

The starting pitcher as the ace who carries the team -- such as Bumgarner in 2014 -- is an endangered species, and the summer's trade market will reflect that.

- Within the span of one week, Shohei Ohtani won his first start in the big leagues and clubbed about a quarter-mile's worth of home runs, and the media concern over Ohtani's spring training results evaporated. The truth is that the Angels staffers were never worried about Ohtani, because Ohtani never seemed to fret. They say his demeanor never wavered, he never seemed anxious and, all along, it seemed to be business as usual -- a player getting ready for the start of a season.

- Hitters strike out more than ever in this era, generally ... but this doesn't apply to Boston's Mookie Betts. In the first seven games of this season, the Red Sox right fielder saw 120 pitches and swung-and-missed just twice.

- The Mets' Matt Harvey pitches against the Nationals on Sunday Night Baseball after a strong spring training, and Bryce Harper's at-bats against him could be a barometer of Harvey's progress. Harvey dominated Harper in the first years of their duels -- Harper started his career 0-for-21 against Harvey -- but in the past two seasons, Harper has swung at 18 pitches thrown by Harvey and hasn't missed any of them.
- The Braves' Freddie Freeman continues to be baseball's most underrated player. In the first week of the season, he had 12 walks, five extra-base hits, 10 runs and just three strikeouts. It could be that Freeman will rack up a lot of walks this season, as opposing pitchers choose to pitch around the dangerous slugger in the way pitchers once work around Barry Bonds.
- The Mets' Mickey Callaway is managing for the first time in his life and learning some of the mechanics of the job. He and pitching coach Dave Eiland, longtime friends, each told this story through laughter: In the Mets' first series of the season, reliever Anthony Swarzak strained an oblique while pitching against the Cardinals. Callaway, a longtime pitching coach with the Indians, went to the mound to check on the right-hander with Eiland and an athletic trainer. It was determined that Swarzak would not be able to continue, and so Callaway told home-plate umpire Brian O'Nora and Eiland they would summon Jeury Familia, who had already been throwing in the bullpen.

So the umpire knew. The pitching coach knew. But Familia, in the bullpen, did not know.

Eiland looked at Callaway and reminded him that now would be the appropriate time to signal for the reliever -- something that Callaway had not done in his work as a pitching coach. That's the job of the manager, of course.

Then, as Familia made his way to the mound, Eiland and the athletic trainer started to return to the dugout ... and Callaway, as well. They were at the apron of the mound when Eiland mentioned that Callaway would need to stay to hand the ball to the incoming reliever. As Callaway told the story, he then made some gesture to the dugout as if to signal for Wilmer Flores as part of a double-switch, to cover for his move toward the bench.

- Anthony Rendon is famously understated and prefers to talk about just about anything other than himself. On Saturday, he was ejected without saying a word. Plate umpire Marty Foster kicked him out after Rendon dropped his bat disgustedly following a called strike three.

Baseball Tonight Podcast

Friday: Karl Ravech on whether the first week represents a case of small sample size for the Diamondbacks, the Red Sox starters and Gabe Kapler or a sign of things to come; Jessica Mendoza on Harper's free agency; Marly Rivera on a sad picture from the Astros' dugout, the Houston juggernaut and Adrian Beltre's record.

Thursday: Keith Law on whether Blackmon or the Rockies got the better deal; Sarah Langs plays the Numbers Game; former big leaguer and current Giants mental-skills coach Bob Tewksbury on his new book and the psychology of baseball.

Wednesday: Boog Sciambi on Ohtani's excellent first days in the big leagues and Kershaw's adjustments; Paul Hembekides on a distinct trend in MLB; and Bob Nightengale on the current quandary for the union.

Tuesday: Dave Schoenfield on Kenley Jansen's slow start, Kapler and the Cubs' dormant bats; SNY reporter Steve Gelbs on the Mets and the Callaway Effect; and Langs plays the Numbers Game.

Monday: The Dodgers' Rich Hill on learning about pitching and his curveball; Tim Kurkjian with first impressions from the first weekend; and Todd Radom's weekly quiz and uniform presentation.

And today will be better than yesterday.

Rockies beat Braves on game-ending walk in 10th inning play

AP / ESPN.com | April 8, 2018

DENVER -- A game that featured superb pitching and dazzling defense came down to a walk-off walk.

Tony Wolters drew a four-pitch bases-loaded walk off Arodys Vizcaino with two outs in the 10th inning, sending the Colorado Rockies to a 3-2 win over the Atlanta Braves on Saturday night.

"I was just looking middle-away, trying to get my pitch, put a hit out in the outfield," Wolters said, "and I never got that pitch."

He got mobbed by his teammates just the same.

"It's pretty cool having all my teammates come out and throw everything at me," said Wolters, who was doused with water.

After Carlos Gonzalez doubled down the left field line with one out, Vizcaino (1-1) struck out Ian Desmond and intentionally walked Gerardo Parra. The runners advanced on a wild pitch before Vizcaino walked Trevor Story to load the bases.

"I just knew that he didn't have a good feel with his fastball," Wolters said. "And once I saw that he was coming back with his fastball, I was like, 'I'm going to take until I get two strikes and just feel him out because he doesn't have good command.'"

Facing Wolters with the bases full was "obviously a difficult situation," Vizcaino said. "Make any mistake and the game's over. Just one of those things. Pitches weren't falling in the zone."

"He kind of got out of whack and was having a hard time regrouping himself," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "I thought with the breaking balls, when he walked the hitter before, maybe he was trying to get him to chase, get himself out. He kind of got out of whack there and it's kind of a tough spot to try to work your way back. He started out firing the ball really good and it kind of got away from him."

Wolters looked at four straight pitches out of the strike zone, making a winner out of Adam Ottavino (2-0). The right-hander escaped a jam in the ninth when shortstop Story leaped to snare a two-out line drive by Nick Markakis that otherwise would have brought home Ozzie Albies from third.

Albies also flashed some great defense late in the game.

After Ryan Flaherty tied it with a single in the ninth off Rockies closer Wade Davis, Atlanta's second baseman saved the game -- momentarily -- with a diving catch of DJ LeMahieu's line drive up the middle for a rally-snuffing double play. Wolters, who might have scored the winning run, instead was doubled off second base.

"That's the beauty of the game," Rockies manager Bud Black said of the pair of defensive gems by middle infielders. "You don't know what's going to happen -- and we saw a walk-off walk."

Chad Bettis stood to get the win after giving up just one run and four hits in 5 2/3 innings, but the Braves rallied against Davis in the ninth to erase a 2-1 deficit. It was his first blown save in five chances but he did limit the damage to give the Rockies a chance to win it.

COOLED OFF: The Braves went into the game with the major's most productive lineup, averaging eight runs a game and leading the majors with a .298 batting average and a .381 on-base percentage. But they were stifled by Bettis and the Rockies' refurbished bullpen until rallying in the ninth.

STILL UNBEATEN: Anibal Sanchez is unbeaten in six career starts against the Rockies. He allowed two runs and seven hits over five innings. He struck out six and walked a pair of batters before leaving with Atlanta trailing 2-0 after five innings.

Story homered for the second straight game, sending a fastball into the left field seats in the fourth, one inning after Nolan Arenado singled in a run .

Freddie Freeman's RBI double with two outs in the sixth made it 2-1 and chased Bettis.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Braves: 3B Johan Camargo (right oblique strain), who went 0 for 4 Friday while playing shortstop for Class A Florida, will move his rehab to Triple-A Gwinnett after DHing Saturday. "He feels good, health is not an issue," Snitker said. "It's just about wanting to see some pitches."

Rockies OF Charlie Blackmon battled through a stiffening back and was replaced by defensive sub Mike Tauchman to start the 10th.

UP NEXT

Atlanta sends LHP Sean Newcomb (0-1) to the mound Sunday in the series finale, and Colorado counters with LHP Kyle Freeland (0-1).