It's a new year, so maybe bygones are bygones and Rockies left-hander Tyler Anderson will not have his performance against the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park on Thursday shortened by ... well, a misunderstanding. Last Aug. 13, Anderson started against the Phillies and gave up a three-run homer to Maikel Franco in the first inning. Anderson hit Franco with his first pitch in the fourth, and was promptly ejected by home plate umpire Eric Cooper. Anderson took the decision in the 6-3 loss. Hoping to have a more conventional performance Thursday, Anderson will face Phillies right-hander Vince Velasquez, who hasn't completed six innings in five of his eight starts. The Rockies will be going for the four-game sweep and fifth straight win overall, while the Phillies look to halt a five-game skid.

Three things to know

• Velasquez shut down the Rockies last July 8 at Coors Field. He pitched around eight hits in six innings, but held the Rockies to two runs and fanned six.
• Anderson's cumulative numbers don't look good, but he has moved in the right direction this month. In three May starts, the 78.6-mph average exit velocity from opposing bats is the lowest among pitchers with 250 or more pitches thrown, according to Statcast. It's not a fluke. Last year, his 83.9 mph average exit velocity was the lowest among Major League pitchers.
• Velasquez hasn't thrown his changeup often -- about 12 percent of the time, according to Statcast. But maybe there's good reason. Hitters are 12-for-29 (.414) against it with four home runs and an .862 slugging percentage.
Rockies ride seven-run inning in rout of Phils

By Todd Zolecki and Ben Harris / MLB.com | May 24th, 2017

PHILADELPHIA -- It has not been a fair fight this week at Citizens Bank Park.

The Rockies rolled to a 7-2 victory over the Phillies on Wednesday night and have won the first three games of the four-game series by a combined score of 23-5. With the win, the Rockies improved to a National League-best 31-17.

Phillies right-hander Jeremy Hellickson allowed seven runs in the third inning as the Rockies built a 7-0 lead. Charlie Blackmon picked up his 20th hit with runners in scoring position this season, knocking in the first two runs. Nolan Arenado singled to score a run, Carlos Gonzalez hit a three-run home run and Gerardo Parra drove in another on a sacrifice fly to cap the inning.

“We strung them together. When you score that many runs in one inning, there's a lot of good things happening,” Rockies manager Bud Black said.

Michael Saunders drove in the Phillies' lone runs with a two-run shot off Mike Dunn in the eighth, his fifth homer of the season.

The Phillies' rotation continues to struggle. It has posted a 6.39 ERA (80 earned runs in 112 2/3 innings) this month as the club has lost 20 of its last 24 games. Only the Mets' rotation has been worse.

"I know they're better than that," Phillies manager Pete Mackanin said. "In a long season, these things sometimes happen. I remember Atlanta, the first half of last year, was terrible. They had a real good second half. I believe we just need to get something going. We're going to put something together. I believe that."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Good Story: Rockies shortstop Trevor Story returned from the 10-day disabled list Wednesday and recorded a double with two walks and a run scored. He had been on the DL since May 11 because of a strained left shoulder.

No no-no: Rockies right-hander Tyler Chatwood cruised against the Phillies. He retired 12 of the first 15 batters he faced before allowing a single to Andrew Knapp with two outs in the fifth inning for the Phillies' first hit of the game. Chatwood allowed one hit and four walks in seven innings. He struck out eight to improve to 4-6 with a 4.50 ERA.
QUOTABLE

“I think you just don't want to be the guy left behind, you don't want to be the guy not pitching well in the rotation and not helping us win.” -- Chatwood, on the Rockies' thriving young starting pitchers

“I remember when I took over in '15, the team was scuffling, really not playing well. Then something clicked and we started beating teams. Last year, we had a good first part of the season and then kind of scuffled at the end. Sometimes one little thing clicks and we get better. There's a lot of baseball left, and I know we're better than this. We just have to have some kind of spark to get out of it.” -- Mackanin, on the early-season struggles

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The Phillies' three lowest offensive hit totals have all come in their last four games. They have been three-hit twice this series and once against the Pirates on Sunday.

MORGAN OPTIONED

The Phillies optioned left-hander Adam Morgan after he pitched three scoreless innings. They will make a corresponding move Thursday. They could activate right-hander Jeanmar Gomez, who is on the DL with an impingement in his right elbow.

WHAT'S NEXT

Rockies: Tyler Anderson (3-4, 6.00 ERA) gets the ball for the Rockies as they look for the four-game sweep Thursday at 11:05 a.m. MT. After a rough six starts in April (7.71 ERA), Anderson has settled in and holds a 3.06 ERA in three starts in May.

Phillies: Right-hander Vince Velasquez (2-4, 5.98 ERA) pitches Thursday's series finale against the Rockies. Velasquez has struggled this season and has become frustrated with his performance. He said last weekend in Pittsburgh that he felt "clueless" on the mound.
PHILADELPHIA -- **Trevor Story** may have missed the last two weeks with a bum shoulder, but you wouldn't have known it if you tuned into his return to the lineup in the Rockies' 7-2 win in Philadelphia on Wednesday.

The refreshed shortstop reached base in each of his first three plate appearances, doubling, walking, and scoring a run in the Rockies' seven-run third inning. He also walked in the fifth.

It was the third time this season that Story has reached base at least three times. Another came in the top half of a doubleheader on May 9, the day he was injured.

"There's some anxiousness, I'm sure, because you're back in a big league game, but it shouldn't happen," Rockies manager Bud Black said when asked if it can be tough for a player to be patient enough to draw two walks in his first game back after a trip to the disabled list.

"Should be calm, if you're a big leaguer."

Story played every bit the part of a calm big leaguer Wednesday, just as he had prior to his injury.

The injury cut off Story's hottest streak of the season, but he seems to have picked up right where he left off. In his last five games -- including going 0-for-4 in the game he was injured -- Story is hitting .375 with a .944 OPS.

On Tuesday, Story noted that the time off allowed him to work on "slowing [his] body down." His skipper saw that come into play early Wednesday night.

"What he's worked on over the last couple weeks, about being in the batter's box and being a little more quiet and within himself, I think that showed up tonight," Black said.

Everything was moving slowly for Story on Wednesday. In a good way.

"Once you get back in the box, you kind of let your instincts play out, and that's what I did tonight," Story said.

His four-game rehab stint with Triple-A Albuquerque was a hint that he was fully healed. He slashed .273/.385/.545 and hit a homer. Now he's carried that into what is already the hottest lineup in baseball.
"I feel good right now, I feel like I'm in a good spot. It's really fun when we're winning, and that's what I try to keep thinking about," Story said.

"Hitting is contagious, I think especially with us we pride ourselves on being good hitters. It's fun when we get it rolling, and it's fun to be a part of it."
Chatwood finds his groove on the mound

By Thomas Harding / MLB.com | @harding_at_mlb | May 25th, 2017

Rockies right-hander Tyler Chatwood didn't want to stop at 99, and who could blame him?

That's where Chatwood's pitch count stood after six innings -- he had shaken off early control issues -- of the Rockies' eventual 7-2 victory over the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park on Wednesday night. While the conversation in the dugout with manager Bud Black wasn't heated, it was animated.

"He walked up and said, 'You got 10 pitches to try and get through it,'" Chatwood said. "I think I threw 11, but I got through it, which was nice."

Actually, it took 13 in a spotless seventh with two strikeouts, but who's counting when the team's most experienced pitcher is committing his new-found groove to muscle memory? Chatwood threw seven scoreless innings, held the Phillies to one hit and fanned eight as the Rockies won the series. They have a chance to complete the sweep on Thursday.

"He threw the ball well. I thought he had good stuff all the way to his very last pitch," Black said. "That's something he's able to do -- hold his stuff, by that I mean velocity, the action on his pitches, the stamina.

"His delivery was under control again for the most part. The tempo, his rhythm, we talk about that so much because he does have such a momentum-building delivery, that the timing has to be there. For the most part, it was there."

Before Wednesday, Rockies rookie starters had earned a club-record eight straight winning decisions. But Chatwood (4-6), who is only 27 after breaking in with the Angels in 2011 and joining the Rockies a year later, and lefty Tyler Anderson, a second-year man who pitches Thursday, had not found their groove.

While Anderson has been showing signs with 25 strikeouts and two wins in his last three starts, Chatwood was coming off two losses that saw him walk nine in 9 1/3 innings.

"You don't want to be the guy left behind," Chatwood said.

Wednesday, Chatwood walked two in the first and threw strikes on just half of his 20 pitches. But a two-strikeout second and a fourth in which he overcame a leadoff walk with two grounders, one a double play, put him on track. The Rockies' seven-run third inning let him relax.

Andrew Knapp delivered the Phils' first hit with two out in the fifth.
“He really wasn’t giving us much to hit, so you have to take what you get with that and shoot it the other way,” Knapp said of his single.

It was somewhat familiar territory for Chatwood. He was perfect for 5 2/3 innings of a 5-0 shutout of the Giants on April 15. He yielded no hits through five against the Padres on May 2, only to give up five runs while managing one out in the sixth and lose.

This time, he didn't let the Phils back into a contest that he didn't want to leave. Even before he and Black talked after the sixth, his work on the mound had presented a convincing case for one more inning.

“We talked about how he was throwing,” Black said. “We talked about how he felt. I gave him some of my thoughts. He gave me some of his thoughts, and he went back out in the seventh.”
Amarista, Valaika's efforts won't go unnoticed

By Thomas Harding / MLB.com | @harding_at_mlb | May 25th, 2017

Trevor Story returned to the starting lineup at shortstop for the Rockies on Wednesday night against the Phillies. But his fill-ins for 13 games since he suffered a left shoulder strain -- Alexi Amarista and Pat Valaika -- did enough in Story's absence to not be forgotten in manager Bud Black's future playing time decisions.

The Rockies signed Amarista to a one-year deal during the offseason, in part because of his familiarity with Black, who managed him with the Padres. During Story's absence, Amarista led the team in batting average (.458), on-base percentage (.458), slugging (.708) and OPS (1.167). All this came on a team that has Charlie Blackmon on fire from the leadoff spot.

And forget the old light-hitting glove man label. Amarista drove in seven runs, including three on a homer and another on a hit in the same inning during a 12-6 victory at Cincinnati.

Valaika hit just .194 with Story out; however. His three homers were tied for second on the team during that stretch, and he drove in six runs.

"They've been great, just look at the numbers. Look at what they've done in their starts," Black said. "Alexi's average is well over .300, he's getting on base, he's knocking in some runs. The big home run in Cincinnati to stretch the lead from 2-1 to 5-1 the other night."

"Pat's big two-home run game against the Dodgers, which was huge. Those guys are doing great, they're playing defense, and at that position, those guys have held their own and they've been productive."

Black has multiple positional options with both. Amarista has started at second base, third base, left field and center field - plus he entered in right when Carlos Gonzalez left a game in San Diego with a right calf strain. Valaika has started at second base, third base and left field, in addition to shortstop. Valaika added first base to his skill set during Spring Training.

"They'll get their pinch-hit at-bats and Trevor isn't going to start every game," Black said. "We'll figure that out daily."

Worth noting

• Black said first baseman Mark Reynolds, with a .319 batting average, 12 home runs and 39 RBIs, will return to the starting lineup Thursday -- after not starting Tuesday and Wednesday.
“Just giving him a little couple days’ respite,” Black said. “He’s fine. Wanted to get Gerardo Parra in there, thought there were some good matchups for him and I think it was a good time for Mark. Actually, we gave Mark two games [off] in San Diego right when Ian Desmond came back, he got two games off. He probably wants to play.”
By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | @psaundersdp | May 25th, 2017

PHILADELPHIA — A perfect storm struck Citizens Bank Park on Wednesday night.

The Rockies’ potent offense — now featuring a red-hot Carlos Gonzalez — combined with starter Tyler Chatwood’s seven excellent innings to leave the foundering Phillies flattened.

Colorado won 7-2 for its fourth consecutive victory and eighth win in its last 10 games. Owners of the best record in the National League, the Rockies improved to 31-17 overall and are an astounding 18-7 away from the friendly confines of Coors Field.

The Phillies, meanwhile, continue sinking lower in the National League East. Losers of 20 of their last 24 games, they sit in the basement with a 15-29 record.

Chatwood, who has run hot and cold this season, sizzled Wednesday night. The right-hander blanked the Phillies for seven innings, allowing just one hit — a two-out single by Andrew Knapp in the fifth. Chatwood struck out a season-high eight, but he walked four and his high pitch count prevented him from chasing his second complete game of the season.

“For the most part, I had pretty good command of my two-seamer, mixing it in and out. And I had a good curveball and a good changeup,” said Chatwood, who threw 112 pitches, his most since June 25, 2011, when he was with the Angels.

Chatwood, 4-6 with a 4.50 ERA, attacked hitters, and it paid off. He threw first-pitch strikes to 16 batters.

“I thought Tyler had good stuff, all the way through his very last pitch,” manager Bud Black said. “That’s something he’s able to do — truly hold his stuff. That means hold his velocity, the action on his pitches, the stamina. Tonight, even though some pitches got away from him … I thought his delivery was under control.”

Chatwood and Black had an animated discussion in the dugout after the sixth inning; a debate about how long Chatwood would continue pitching.

“He told me I had 10 pitches to try to get through (the seventh),” Chatwood said. “That was pretty much the whole conversation. He said I had 10 pitches. I think I threw 11 and got through it, and that’s what counts.”

The Rockies, holding down first place in the National League West since May 3, clinched another series and are 11-2-2 on that front this season. They have a chance to sweep Philadelphia on Thursday afternoon, although heavy rain is in the forecast.

The Phillies are a bad team, but dominating them has not been an easy task for Colorado. Prior to this season, the Rockies had won just once series at Citizens Bank Park since 2005.
All of Colorado’s runs came in one inning, but that seven-run third was a showcase for its increasingly formidable lineup. Phillies starter Jeremy Hellickson got the full Charlie Brown treatment when the Rockies sent 11 men to the plate and pounded out six hits. Colorado had 12 hits total, marking just the second time in franchise history it has produced double-digit hits in six consecutive road games.

Gonzalez’s three-run homer to score Charlie Blackmon and DJ LeMahieu was the shot that blew Hellickson’s socks off. Gonzalez hit a screaming, low line drive into the right-field seats to boost the Rockies’ lead to 6-0. It was just Gonzalez’s fourth homer of the season, but his second in four games.

“It’s nice to see my bat get going to help the club,” he said. “It’s all about timing. I can go into batting practice and hit bomb after bomb everywhere, but I’m trying to put that swing into a game.

“You want to get that foot down and let your hands go to work and be on time. When I’m able to do that, good things happen.”

Gonzalez had been ice cold. Entering a May 11 game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, he was hitting .181. But the right fielder is heating up in a hurry now, going 3-for-5 on Wednesday night. He’s riding a season-high seven-game hitting streak, during which he has batted .464, raising his average to .252.

Blackmon, baseball’s leadoff RBI machine, delivered a two-run single in the seventh to increase his RBI total to 42 in 47 games played.

The Phillies avoided being shut out when Michael Saunders crushed a two-run homer off reliever Mike Dunn in the eighth inning.
Rockies pitchers are bunting better, and Charlie Blackmon is reaping the rewards
Blackmon has reached 40 RBIs, all from the leadoff spot, in Colorado’s first 47 games of the season.

By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | @psaundersdp | May 24th, 2017

PHILADELPHIA — In the very recent past, laying down a sacrifice bunt was not a strength of Rockies pitchers. And that’s being kind.

Watching former Rockies left-hander Jorge De La Rosa attempt to advance runners would have been comical, had it not been so maddening.

Things have changed this season.

Entering Wednesday’s play, the Rockies led the National League with 15 sacrifice bunts from their pitchers, ahead of Washington (11) and Los Angeles (10). In 2016, the Rockies ranked seventh in the NL with 26 for the entire season, and in 2015 they ranked 14th with just 18.

Leadoff hitter Charlie Blackmon, who entered Wednesday’s play as the major-league leader with 40 RBIs and with a .463 average with runners in scoring position, has been the big beneficiary.

“Unless I had 40 homers, which I don’t, the credit goes to all of those guys in front of me,” Blackmon said Tuesday night after Colorado’s 8-2 victory over Philadelphia. “Our lineup is really deep, and there are no easy outs. And I give our pitchers a lot of credit, too. They have been really good in situations, moving runners into scoring position.”

Antonio Senzatela leads the Rockies with four sacrifice bunts, followed by Wednesday’s starter Tyler Chatwood and lefty Tyler Anderson with three, Kyle Freeland and German Marquez with two and Jeff Hoffman with one.

“I know that in spring training, the bunting station was a priority for our pitchers,” first-year manager Bud Black said. “I think the pitchers took a high degree of responsibility and commitment to bunting. I think it’s paying off.”

The young pitchers’ athleticism also is a factor.

“Freeland and Tyler Anderson and Chatwood and those guys have shown the ability to handle a bat,” he said. “And I think that Hoffman, Senzatela and Marquez have improved a lot.”

Making history. Blackmon might be a leadoff hitter, but he’s belting the ball around the yard like he’s Lou Gehrig.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, no leadoff hitter has ever driven in 40 runs faster than Blackmon has this season.

From Elias: Blackmon has reached 40 RBIs, all from the leadoff spot, in Colorado’s first 47 games of the season. It’s the fewest team games to accumulate 40 RBIs from the leadoff spot since the major leagues began recording RBIs in 1920.
Ian Kinsler (2009) and Mookie Betts (2016), who both reached 40 RBIs from the leadoff spot in 52 team games, shared the previous record.

**Road warriors.** The Rockies have posted a winning road record just one time in franchise history, in 2009, when they finished 41-40. Yet during spring training, Black didn’t dwell on that fact. Instead, he told his team to focus on playing its game, regardless of the venue.

“The focus of the group, no matter where we are, is in a really good place right now,” Black said. “There’s been conversations about doing it how we do it. It’s about playing our game no matter where it is — Denver, on the West Coast, in the Midwest, back east, doesn’t matter. That’s how we’re going to do it.”

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**Looking ahead …**

**Rockies LHP Tyler Anderson** (3-4, 6.00 ERA) at **Phillies RHP Vince Velasquez** (2-4, 5.98), 11:05 a.m. Thursday, no TV; 850 AM

Anderson is starting to figure things out and is beginning to resemble the pitcher he was last season when he put up a 3.54 ERA in 19 starts, the second-lowest by a Rockies rookie in franchise history (minimum 100 innings pitched). With his fastball setting up his excellent changeup, Anderson’s 2-1 with a 3.06 ERA in his last three starts. Compare that to his 1-3 record and a 7.71 ERA in his first six starts. Valasquez is really struggling, failing to go six innings in five of eight starts this season and 16 of his last 32 starts. *Patrick Saunders, The Denver Post*

**Friday:** Cardinals RHP Carlos Martinez (3-3, 3.28 ERA) at Rockies RHP Antonio Senzatela (6-1, 3.67), 6:40 p.m., ROOT

**Saturday:** Cardinals RHP Adam Wainwright (4-3, 4.81) at Rockies LHP Kyle Freeland (5-2, 3.31), 7:10 p.m., ROOT

**Sunday:** Cardinals RHP Lance Lynn (4-2, 2.53) at Rockies RHP German Marquez, 1:10 p.m., ROOT
Rockies leadoff hitter Charlie Blackmon is driving in runs at a historic rate
Blackmon is the fastest leadoff hitter to reach 40 RBI in a season in MLB history

By Patrick Saunders / The Denver Post | @psaundersdp | May 24th, 2017

PHILADELPHIA — Behold the power of the beard!

Sure, Rockies center fielder Charlie Blackmon is a leadoff hitter, but he’s belting the ball around the yard like he’s Lou Gehrig in the cleanup spot.

Consider this statistical nugget from the Elias Sports Bureau’s daily file on ESPN.com:

*Charlie Blackmon went 2-for-4 with two homers and four RBIs in the Rockies’ win over the Phillies (Tuesday night).*

Blackmon has reached 40 RBIs, all from the leadoff spot, in Colorado’s first 47 games of the season. It’s the fewest team games to accumulate 40 RBIs from the leadoff spot since the major leagues began recording RBIs in 1920. Ian Kinsler (2009) and Mookie Betts (2016), who both reached 40 RBIs from the leadoff spot in 52 team games, shared the previous record.

Baseball has tons of esoteric statistics, but this one illustrates just how potent Blackmon has been at the top of the lineup.

“Charlie’s locked in,” said second baseman DJ LeMahieu, Blackmon’s close friend and the Rockies’ No. 2 hitter. “He battles and always gets his hits, but when he gets hot, he doesn’t miss any mistake pitches.”

Also, credit the bottom of the Rockies’ order for setting the table for Blackmon.

“For Charlie to get the RBIs, guys at the bottom have to be on base,” manager Bud Black said. “You include the pitcher getting some bunts down along the way here. That’s been critical. If you look back at that, that’s all part of it.”

More fireworks could be on the way for Blackmon, who’s torched the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park, where the Rockies have two more games remaining in the four-game series. In 18 career games at Citizens Bank Park, including 11 starts, Blackmon is batting .347 (16 for 46) with 13 runs, seven home runs and 12 RBIs.

**Shutdown artist.** Here’s another tidbit from Elias, this one regarding Colorado rookie right-hander German Marquez:

*German Marquez pitched six solid innings in the Rockies’ win over the Phillies on Tuesday night. Philadelphia batters went 0-for-7 with runners in scoring position against Marquez. Marquez has held opponents hitless in their last 22 at-bats with runners in scoring position, the second-longest such streak in the major leagues this season, behind Yu Darvish (0-for-30).*
Colorado Rockies dismantle Philadelphia Phillies, 7-2, behind Tyler Chatwood’s dominance
The Colorado Rockies continued to prove they’re for real on Wednesday night.

By Ryan Freemyer / Purple Row | May 24th, 2017

The Colorado Rockies improved to 31-17 overall, 18-7 on the road—both best in the National League—and 7-2 on their season-long 10-game road trip with a 7-2 drubbing over the Philadelphia Phillies on Wednesday night. They’ve now won the first three of a four-game series by a combined score of 23-5 in a matchup that frankly hasn’t looked like a fair fight.

The Rockies exploded for all seven of their runs and hit for the cycle as a team in the third inning off Phillies’ starter Jeremy Hellickson, punctuated by a 3-run home run off the bat of Carlos Gonzalez. Trevor Story returned from the disabled list with a double, two walks, and no strikeouts and every Rockies’ hitter with a plate appearance had a hit in a complete team performance. They knocked Hellickson out of the game after five rough innings, during which he allowed seven runs (all earned) on eight hits with four walks and just two strikeouts.

Meanwhile, Rockies’ starter Tyler Chatwood put together an outstanding start, tossing seven scoreless innings. The 27-year-old righty allowed just one single and struck out eight. The one bugaboo for Chatwood remains his walks, as he issued four free passes and has walked 4.65 hitters per nine innings on the season, but if he can maintain the bat-missing ability he showed in this start it will become less of an issue.

After Chatwood departed, Mike Dunn’s struggles continued, as he allowed a pair of runs in just a third of an inning on a Michael Saunders homer in the eighth inning. His ERA ballooned to 5.79 on the year and an especially unsightly 11.37 since returning from the disabled list. Adam Ottavino and Jake McGee finished up the final five outs of the ballgame.

They didn’t allow a hit and struck out three. McGee, in particular, was impressive, as he struck out a pair in a perfect ninth and now boasts a 2.00 ERA and a ridiculous 12.5 strikeouts per nine innings.

At 31-17, the Rockies have their best 48-game start in franchise history, easily beating out their previous mark of 27-21 set in 1995 and 2013. The last time the Rockies went 31-17 or better in any 48-game stretch was from July 29th to September 19th, 2010. Strangely, there are no records anywhere of what happened immediately following that streak.

Tomorrow afternoon, the Rockies have an opportunity to go for a sweep in what has been a terrific road trip. Tyler Anderson will take the ball for the Rockies against Vince Velasquez for the Phillies. It’s an early start, with first pitch scheduled for 11:05 am MT.
The 2017 MLB Draft is a few weeks away, we want to know: how have the Colorado Rockies approached the last few drafts and what does it tell us about how they might approach this year? Yesterday we reviewed the 2014 draft class, most of whom are still in the minors. Today: we are reviewing the 2015 draft class.

Whereas the 2014 MLB Rule 4 Draft was flush with pitching talent, 2015 was all about the bats (cultural reference!). Most pre-draft rankings placed a trio of shortstops at the very top with various position players filling out the first round. In reality, 11 of the top 15 picks were position players. Four of those players (Dansby Swanson, Alex Bregman, Andrew Benintendi, and Ian Happ) have already debuted in the majors.

With the Rockies picking third there was hope that Swanson, a Vanderbilt shortstop who the Rockies drafted in the 38th round in 2012, might fall to them. Unfortunately his junior season was a little too impressive for the Diamondbacks to pass on him for the top overall pick. No matter: the Rockies got the shortstop that many considered the top talent in the draft, Florida high schooler Brendan Rodgers. He immediately rocketed up PuRPs lists, debuting at no. 3 behind Jon Gray and David Dahl. In 24 games at High-A Lancaster this season, Rodgers is hitting .356/.374/.594, which is bonkers, even for the California League. If you’re wondering how the Rockies snagged such a talent, perhaps it should be pointed out that the two shortstops taken ahead of him are already major league regulars: Swanson for the Braves and Bregman for the best-in-baseball Astros.

Rockies 2016 Draft, By the Numbers

**First Pick:** Riley Pint, RHP, St Thomas Aquinas (KS) High School

**Signed:** 33

**Unsigned:** 8

**High School:** 9

**College:** 31

**Junior College:** 1

**Pitchers:** 24

**Position Players:** 15

The Rockies had four of the first 44 picks, which provided a unique opportunity to snag some top tier talent. They selected Mike Nikorak 27th overall, Tyler Nevin 38th, and Peter Lambert 44th. All three players remain on our latest PuRPs list,
though Nikorak’s (No. 27) and Nevin’s (No. 23) stocks have fallen and Nikorak is currently recovering from Tommy John surgery. Lambert (No. 11) has nearly 10 K/9 in nine starts for Lancaster to go with an impressive (for the Cal League) 4.21 ERA. Though there is no confirmation on whether he is, in fact, three small children stacked on top of one another.

By selecting four high schoolers with their first four picks, the Rockies did something they hadn’t done since Choo Freeman was their second pick of the 1998 draft. General manager Jeff Bridich, in his first draft at the helm of the front office, and vice president of scouting Bill Schmidt insisted it was about selecting the best available player by their draft board, regardless of the risk of taking high school players. While the team was more willing to take risks in the previous year’s draft, this represents an explicit characteristic of the Bridich regime for which to be on the lookout come this year’s draft.

Of the 2013-2016 drafts, this draft had high school players taken (15), including five players from Colorado high schools. Only one of those five Colorado preps eventually signed, it indicates the team seems intent on scouting their own backyard well.

It’s still early, so most players from this draft are either toiling away in Lancaster or Asheville, or awaiting short season assignment from extended spring training. However, Bridich does seem to have struck—not quite gold, maybe brass?—in several college pitchers. Parker French (fifth round) and Jack Wynkoop (sixth) both had great campaigns in High-A last year and are performing admirably in Double-A. French (no. 26 PuRP) has a 3.86 ERA with a 28:13 K/BB in 44⅔ innings, while Wynkoop (who had an absurd 144:12 K/BB ratio in 170⅔ IP last year) has a 4.42 ERA with a 29:12 K/BB. Colin Welmon (eighth round) and Trey Killian (ninth) have 5.00+ ERAs for Lancaster.

Currently the two biggest surprises from the draft are a couple of college position players tearing up Lancaster alongside Rodgers. Brian Mundell (seventh) has a .295/.364/.526 slash line mostly playing first base, while Sam Hilliard (15th) is crushing to a line of .340/.407/.556 from the outfield. Time will tell if they can keep this production outside of the friendly Cal League, but it’s encouraging considering few other 2015 draftees are making much of an impact at the plate, besides Rodgers.

Whether it the front office saw a deep and talented draft pool, or Bridich was seeking to make a splash his first time around, the team’s stated willingness to go after “best talent available” was clear. This can be a rather boom-or-bust strategy. But by tempering high ceiling types (like the four high schoolers taken) with some college pitchers and hitters, they’ve (likely) mitigated some of that risk.

It will be several years before we see the return on Bridich’s first draft. Only time will tell.
Colorado Rockies pitching coordinator Darryl Scott keeps all affiliates on same page
Former Isotopes pitching coach enjoying his new role

By Chris Jackson / Purple Row | May 25th, 2017

Former Albuquerque Isotopes pitching coach Darryl Scott is a happy man these days. Now the Colorado Rockies minor-league pitching coordinator, Scott oversees the staffs of the top three teams in the farm system. Once upon a time that might have been a chore with so little talent coming up, but not anymore.

“It’s way, way more (talent) than ever before,” Scott said. “That’s what’s so exciting. When you can absorb the losses that we had in spring training of Chad Bettis and then Jon Gray, and to be able to maintain a winning team, we’ve never really been in that position to have guys ready to step up.”

While rookies Kyle Freeland, German Marquez and Antonio Senzatela have done their part in the big leagues, there is more talent on the way to Denver. Heck, Jeff Hoffman just went out and pitched a gem for the Rockies in a spot start and had to be sent back down to the Isotopes because there isn’t a rotation opening right now.

“There’s a lot of organizations who would love to have that issue right now,” Scott said. “Here (in Albuquerque) you’ve got (Harrison) Musgrave, he’s taken a little time off with the (injured) hip and he’s back going again. Obviously Hoffman’s here. We have pitchers. Then you go sign a guy like Barry Enright who has some experience. Shoot, you’ve got Carlos Estevez down here. Another guy that’s a big-league pitcher.

“Then you move to the Double-A level and there’s really a staff of really good pitchers. Then you’ve got Peter Lambert at the Lancaster level, the High-A level. Then you’ve got Riley Pint at Asheville. Hopefully we can just continue that trend, where we have those guys coming through the system. It’s nice when there are no gaps in the system.”

Scott’s job now is not to override the pitching coaches at Albuquerque, Hartford or Lancaster, but to back them up and help them out as needed, all while making sure everyone at every level sticks to the organization’s philosophies.

“Really it’s overseeing the upper levels, the Triple-A, Double-A and High-A levels,” Scott said. He see’s his job “as not necessarily a pitching coach to the pitchers but a pitching coach and an assistant to the pitching coaches and working with those guys. When I go in the first thing that I ask them is what can I help with? What can I help you reinforce?“It’s not me coming in and doing something different as much as it is coming in and reinforcing what’s already going on. We have to have guys that look out over those levels and now you can kind of get some comparisons within the levels and see who’s ready to move (up).”

Keeping the pitching coaches on the same page from level to level helps keep the players’ mindsets the same as they move up the ladder. Namely that is to execute pitches and not worry about what happens beyond that.
“Yeah, absolutely, and we’re preaching it from day one,” Scott said. “We’re really preaching to get out of the stats. We’re not looking at stats. We’re looking at how you’re going about executing your pitchers. We’re looking at how you’re going about handling yourself, body language, mentality, everything else. The stats are the last thing we really care about. We care about you going out there and competing and learning and getting better on a daily basis.”

Scott said keeping the pitchers focused on moving forward is the key.

“I was in Lancaster and I sat there talking to the guys and I said, ‘Hey, Brandon Emanuel, the pitching coach, his job isn’t to make you a good A-ball pitcher. His job is to make you a good major-league pitcher. When you go to Double-A and Dave Burba is there, his job is to make you a good major-league pitcher. He’s just working on the next step,’” Scott said. “That’s the mentality now.”

Rockies fans groaned when they saw the new affiliation agreement with Lancaster, one of the most notorious hitter-friendly parks in all of the minors. Scott said a big part of the Rockies’ pitching philosophy is to never use the conditions as an excuse.

“One of the things, we’re in Lancaster, the wind blows straight out to right field at about 25 miles per hour on average,” he said. “You have to learn to deal with that type of stuff. For me, we’re almost weeding out the weaker guys mentally. If you can’t handle pitching in Lancaster, then guess what, you’re not going to be able to handle pitching in Denver. So we’re teaching them how to handle different situations. Then you get shipped back east, that’s a whole new world. It’s been a great environment.”

Scott said that in many ways, exposing young pitchers to hitter-friendly environments is a good thing when the big-league team plays half its games at the highest elevation in the majors. It has certainly worked for the pitchers who have come through Albuquerque.

“What I did the last two years I’d come in on the first day and sit down and go over every negative thing I could possibly think of,” Scott said. “You’re going to give up home runs that should never be home runs. You’re going to give up more triples than ever before in your life. This infield will get fast, the air is dry, you’re going to have trouble holding onto the ball.

“I’ll go through everything and get done and say, ‘We’ve got that out of the way. That’s the last time we’ll ever talk about it. Your job isn’t to worry about the conditions, your job is to go out there and execute pitches.’ We get it out in the open and it’s over and done. Nobody is ever allowed to use conditions as an excuse because the other team is playing under the same conditions.”
Well hey there and welcome to the Colorado Rockies fan club. With the Rockies being one of the hottest teams in Major League Baseball and putting together an April and May like at no other time in franchise history, there are going to be plenty of people who suddenly have the urge to wear purple and come down to Coors Field. And that's OK. There is plenty of room on the Rockies bandwagon for all of you.

After the Rockies took the first three games in Philadelphia to jump out to a 7-2 record on this season-long 10-game road trip, Colorado is getting plenty of attention from the national media. There may even be some more mentions of the Rockies in local media than reports on the battle for the third-string tight end for the Denver Broncos. Maybe that's pushing it a bit too far, but you get the idea.

There are plenty of people who are dusting off their Rockies hats and gear to prepare for what is shaping up to be a magical summer at the corner of 20th and Blake. Maybe you're one of the ones who gave up on the Rockies a few years ago. It's OK. There are plenty of you out there who are starting to come back to the fold.

Maybe you don't live anywhere near Denver and you're just starting to hear about this team that has some pretty darn good young pitching and is mashing the ball right now. That's OK too. We welcome fans from throughout the world to the Rockies family.

Now, if you're going to be a bandwagon fan, you're going to need to know some things about Colorado’s season so far in order to sound knowledgeable with your friends or coworkers or those people who are giving you high-fives at Coors Field. With the Rockies in town for Memorial Day weekend, we figure it's a great time for you to learn about the 2017 Colorado Rockies. We're here to help. Let us give you some basic pointers and talking points.

Maybe one of the reasons why you put your Troy Tulowitzki jersey in the closet a few years ago and never brought it out again was because the Rockies simply had no pitching. No matter how good the offense was, the pitching couldn't keep up. Too many 15-14 games for your liking, right? Trust me, we understand.

Well, this year's team doesn't have that problem. A young rotation and a solid bullpen are helping the Rockies actually win games this year instead of lose them. People are actually using the word "good" and "Colorado pitching" in the same sentence this season. Crazy, right?

Now that you're on the bandwagon and chatting it up with your new Rockies friends, be sure to drop the names of Kyle Freeland and Antonio Senzatela with a sentence that is something like, "Wow, these young guys are really stepping up
this season, huh?” Bonus points for you if you talk about how well they’ve pitched in the absence of Jon Gray (Colorado’s ace who has been on the shelf for weeks now with a foot injury) and Chad Bettis (who hasn’t pitched this season after battling cancer).

Also, while we’re talking about pitching, you’ll want to introduce yourself to the lights-out closer the Rockies signed in the offseason, Greg Holland. Yeah, a lot of people wondered if he would be able to show the stuff that he had before Tommy John surgery. Well, he’s proving that he has that stuff. He’s 19-for-19 on saves (that leads the Majors by a long shot) with a 0.96 ERA. Drop those numbers when you’re discussing the bullpen.

One last tip … if you want to talk about how this year is so different from last year, just bring up Jake McGee. Another big part of the bullpen’s success this season, McGee has a 2.00 ERA after striking out two in a scoreless inning on Wednesday night. That comes after a 4.73 ERA in his first season with the Rockies. Go ahead and use, “What a difference a year makes, huh?” You’ll blend in just fine.

You see that guy at third base? That’s Nolan Arenado. Rockies fans who have watched him game in and game out believe he’s the best third baseman in baseball. You should as well … because he is. No one can make plays in the field like he can. Don’t bring up Manny Machado or Kris Bryant. Just don’t. If you’re going to be on the bandwagon, that’s a no-no.

See that bearded guy in center field? That’s Charlie Blackmon. He also goes by Chuck Nazty. Not Nasty. Nazty. Don’t make that rookie mistake. He’s the best leadoff man in baseball right now. He has 42 RBI in 47 games. From the leadoff position. Think about that.

You remember Carlos Gonzalez from the old days when you used to watch the team, right? Well, he’s still in right field for the Rockies and he is going through a recent renaissance at the plate. He batted cleanup for much of the start of the season before being moved down in the lineup because he was in such a deep slump. How deep? He was hitting .188 on May 10. Now? He’s hitting .252 on the season after Wednesday night when he smacked a three-run homer. That’s part of a seven-game hitting streak which is seeing him hit .464 during that stretch. There’s a nugget of knowledge to drop on your new friends.

Oh, one more thing, the Rockies signed Ian Desmond to play first base in the offseason and didn’t re-sign their first baseman from last year, Mark Reynolds. Then, in the spring, they decided to re-sign Reynolds to a minor league deal. Desmond was hit in the hand in spring training so Reynolds took over at first again. Now Reynolds is one of the leading home run and RBI guys for the Rockies and, because of that, Desmond is playing left field. There, that’s the short version that will catch you up on things there.

Some other sentences that you can use at any time…
“Man, I hope David Dahl is able to play soon.”

“I wish Trevor Story would lower his strikeouts.”

“Alexi Amarista has been a pretty pleasant surprise, huh?”

Drop those sentences and start a conversation. If you ever get stuck on what to say next, saying something about hitting at Coors Field is always a way to bridge the gap.

Enjoy the bandwagon ride, new Rockies fan. It’s going to be a fun one.
Chatwood returns to form, bats stay hot as Rox roll again

By MHS Staff / Mile High Sports | May 25th, 2017

The traveling freight train that is the Colorado Rockies just keeps on rolling. On Wednesday night it again barreled through the Philadelphia Phillies to the tune of a 7-2 victory that ensured a series win and at least a seven-win road trip on Colorado’s longest (10 games) of the season. The bats came alive for the third night in a row and Tyler Chatwood looked like the Tyler Chatwood fans came to love in 2016 in another dominant road victory for the Rockies.

Every Rockies starter recorded a base hit, including Chatwood, and seven of Colorado’s eight position players scored a run in yet another balanced offensive effort by Bud Black’s squad. Carlos Gonzalez stayed hot, going 3-for-5 with three RBIs – all via a three-run home run in the third inning. Trevor Story went 1-for-2 with a pair of walks in his return to the lineup after missing nearly two weeks with a left shoulder strain. Charlie Blackmon had a hit, a run and two RBIs to extend his team lead in that category. Colorado did all its damage in a seven-run third, all against Jeremy Hellickson who took his second loss on the year.

On the mound, Chatwood was outstanding. He looked like the same Tyler Chatwood that last year compiled a NL-best 1.69 ERA among starters on the road. Chatwood allowed just one hit over seven innings pitched in Philadelphia, striking out eight and walking four. Mike Dunn lost the shutout in the eighth inning, giving up two runs on two hits and a walk while retiring just one batter. Adam Ottavino wriggled out of the jam. Jake McGee struck out two in a perfect ninth inning to close things out.

Colorado improves on its NL-best record, now at 31-17 and an impressive 18-7 on the road. The Rockies will look for the sweep on Friday in a day game with Tyler Anderson on the mound. Anderson has showed slow but steady improvement over his last few starts, but still sits at 3-4 with a 6.00 ERA on the season. His opponent, Vince Velasquez, is off to a similar start at 2-4 and 5.98. First pitch is 11:05 a.m. MDT at Citizens Bank Park.
10 of MLB’s Biggest Team Strengths

By Anthony Castrovine / Sports on Earth | May 25th, 2017

We're headed into Memorial Day weekend, and this holiday is often cited as the point in the Major League schedule where teams start to have a good assessment of what they have and what they lack.
We'll have plenty of time to focus on deficiencies as we near the non-waiver Trade Deadline, but for now let's focus on the positive end of the spectrum. Here are 10 team strengths that have stood out thus far in 2017. This is not a full accounting of "good" teams, because there's nothing wrong with being above-average-but-not-elite in every area rather than jumping off the page in a single spot. But as you'll see, a team's striking success in one realm of the game can help us understand some surprise elements of the standings.

The Rockies' pitching in big spots
Mentioned this within this week's Rotation, but it bears repeating as the Rockies have continued to put themselves not just in the top position in the National League West but in contention for what would be the greatest regular-season record in franchise history. In what Baseball Reference defines as high-leverage spots, the Rockies' pitching staff has churned out a 1.97 ERA -- by far the best in baseball. Where did the Rox rank in this category last year? Dead last (5.24)! For further context, consider that the best ERA in high-leverage that BR has on record was the 2.28 mark achieved by the 1965 Dodgers and 2015 Cardinals.
Colorado has done it with the youngest starting staff in the game (with the depth tested by the absences of Jon Gray and Chad Bettis) and with a rebuilt bullpen in which Greg Holland has been a revelation in the ninth.
Overall, this "clutch pitching" has helped the Rockies go 9-0 in one-run games.

The D-backs' baserunning
Pardon the pun, but Arizona -- the NL West's other surprise squad -- is running away with the lead in FanGraphs' BsR stat. It combines stolen bases, caught stealings and other running plays such as taking the extra bag or being thrown out on the bases into a single above-average or below-average metric. This has been a separator for one of baseball's surprise squads. The D-backs are 16.9 runs above average in BsR. The Rays (10.7) are the only other club in double-digits. It doesn't hurt that the D-backs' best hitter, Paul Goldschmidt, is also an elite baserunner (so far, he has as many steals, 11, as the Tigers), despite his size.
Oh, and this is obviously not the D-backs’ only strength. While the Rox have had an elite pitching staff in high-leverage spots, Arizona batters’ .882 OPS in those moments is the best in baseball.

**The Twins’ defense**

Will regression catch up to the surprisingly-first-place Twins? I don’t know, but I do know the surprisingly-first-place Twins are catching everything. This is one of those rare kumbaya moments where the old and new ways of evaluating defense all seem to be in agreement. Not only have the Twins tied for the fewest errors (14) in baseball, but they rank second in defensive efficiency (.736) behind only the White Sox and they are far and away above everybody else in defensive runs saved (32). As expected, a full season of the incredible Byron Buxton has reinvented the reputation of the outfield group, which has gone from third-worst on the DRS scale in 2016 (minus-30) to second-best (plus-16) this year. Miguel Sano has also been surprisingly solid in his return to the hot corner, and Jason Castro has been a defensive upgrade behind the plate.

The collective improvement has allowed the Twins to maximize the potential of what rated as an uncertain pitching staff going into the season and has made this club far friskier than anybody anticipated.

**The Nationals’ offense**

They’ve got what amounts to the Major League team Triple Crown, leading in batting average (.277), homers (69) and RBIs (247), while also leading in more nuanced metrics like on-base percentage (.348), slugging percentage (.479), weighted on-base average (.351), isolated power (.202), weighted runs created (254), two-strike RBIs (83) and, well, you get the idea. These guys are good. As of Wednesday, Bryce Harper (1.140) and Ryan Zimmerman (1.139) trailed only the now-injured Freddie Freeman on the NL OPS board, and Daniel Murphy (.952), Anthony Rendon (.864) and Jayson Werth (.861) were in the top 27. So far, the loss of pesky leadoff man Adam Eaton to an ACL injury has not really affected this club.

If the Nats somehow keep this pace up, they’ll score 943 runs, which would not only blow away the franchise record (763 last year), but would be the most by any Major League club since the 2007 Yankees (968).

**The Indians’ bullpen**

Awkward timing here, perhaps, because the ‘pen has suffered its first two blown saves of the season this week. But the 2.19 ERA is still best in MLB, and it has helped the Indians offset some of the iffy nature of a rotation that has fallen short of expectation.
You know (or should know) about Andrew Miller and Cody Allen, but this is probably the deepest relief corps in the game right now. The signing of Boone Logan brought the Tribe a more traditional lefty setup situation to go with Miller's anywhere/anytime excellence, Nick Goody (no runs allowed in 16 2/3 innings) has been an underrated pickup in a low-profile trade with the Yankees, Zach McAllister has limited right-handers to a .336 OPS, and, though it's easy to fall in love with Miller's slider, some opponents think Bryan Shaw's cutter is the most deadly pitch on the staff (the two pitches have basically identical weighted values this year, according to FanGraphs' data). Wednesday's loss to the Reds was the first time all year that the Indians lost a game they had led after six innings. The Tribe could just as easily be listed here for their collective caught stealing percentage (53.6) from catchers Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez, which is by far the best in the game.

**The Cardinals' starting pitching**

It's scary to think where the Cardinals, who again this year have had some defensive and baserunning issues and who aren't getting anywhere near the power and run production they did a year ago, would be without their stellar starting pitching, which had the best staff ERA (3.06) and second-best Fielding Independent Pitching mark (3.74) in the Majors at the midweek mark. All the peripherals that pointed to Mike Leake having a tough-luck first year as a Card have proven true in his terrific start to the season (2.03 ERA, 206 ERA+), and the return of Lance Lynn (2.53, 165), the improved physical state of Michael Wacha (2.74, 152) and the continued development of Carlos Martinez (3.28, 127) have all brought this group closer to the level it reached in the aforementioned 100-win season of '15. It also doesn't hurt that the most accomplished member of the staff, Adam Wainwright, seems to have righted himself after a brutal April.

**The Brewers' first-inning fortitude**

More than most elements of this list, this one might be especially susceptible to correction over the course of the campaign. But a little window into why the Brewers have leaped into contention in the NL Central ahead of schedule is the way they've jumped on teams early. Entering Wednesday, their first-inning run differential of plus-30 was double that of the next-closest club, the Rays. This, despite regular leadoff man Jonathan Villar's big step back offensively so far this season (though Eric Sogard has taken some leadoff turns lately and swung a hot bat).
The Astros' zone contact

There are a lot of ways to explain the Astros' surge up the standings this season, but here's one that probably deserves a little more attention than it gets. The Astros have really remade their offensive profile this year. From 2013-16, their rate of one strikeout every 4.18 plate appearances was the worst in baseball, and this was attributable to a Major League-worst zone contact percentage (according to FanGraphs) of 83.1.

But this year, the additions of Josh Reddick, Brian McCann and Carlos Beltran and a full season of Yuli Gurriel have totally changed that tone. The Astros are now second in strikeout rate (only the Red Sox have been tougher to K) because they make contact on 88.5 percent of pitches in the zone -- the highest percentage in the Majors right now by 0.7.

Interestingly, the Astros have also been the best club in baseball at generating traffic with no outs, with a .374 OBP when leading off innings.

The Tigers’ barrels

The Tigers might be flirting with time as they try to ride the third-oldest position player group to October, but the results indicate that a lineup still centered around Miguel Cabrera and Victor Martinez (and buoyed by the recent return of J.D. Martinez and the return to prominence of Justin Upton) can still roll out the barrels. What is a barrel? For those unfamiliar, that's Statcast™'s definition of a well-struck ball -- an exit velocity and launch angle combination that generally leads to a minimum .500 batting average and 1.500 slugging percentage.

As of this writing, the Tigers have the highest percentage of barreled balls in play (9.87) in the game, by a full percentage point over the A's (8.89) and at least 2 percentage points over everybody else.

The Angels’ center fielder

His name's Mike Trout. Ever heard of him? Obviously the goal of this piece is not to harp on specific individuals, but Trout presents a downright comical statistical advantage here. He has already been worth 3.4 Wins Above Replacement, according to Baseball Reference. For the sake of perspective, Yoenis Cespedes was worth less than that (2.9) over the entirety of 2016.

Because of Trout, Angels center fielders (Cameron Maybin has logged 36 plate appearances there) have been worth 2.4 WAR. The next-closest club is the Blue Jays, at 1.2. So the Halos have at least doubled everybody else at this particular position, giving them by far the biggest single positional advantage in the sport.
Three strikes: Chris Sale misses a record, while Rockies keep rolling Wednesday

By Albert Chen / Sports Illustrated | May 25th, 2017

What you missed Wednesday night in baseball

1. The Rockies keep rolling

Surprise: The pitching performance of the night belonged not to the AL ace on the cusp of history (more on Chris Sale below) but to a Colorado Rockies pitcher with a 5.09 ERA entering Wednesday. Tyler Chatwood tossed seven scoreless innings, allowed one hit and struck out eight on a dreary evening at Citizens Bank Park where nothing went right for the spiraling Phillies—not even the Phanatic’s attempts at lightening the mood.

Yes, Colorado was a popular sleeper pick before the season. And yes, we’re barely a quarter of the way into the season—still plenty of time for the Rockies to resemble the Rockies. Still, it’s somewhat jarring to see Colorado at 31-17, atop the NL West and with the league’s best record, after a 7-2 win over Philadelphia. They’ve now 18-7 away from Coors, the best road record in the majors. They’ve done it with the youngest roster in the majors, and with their ace, Jon Gray, having made just three starts (he’s expected to return from his foot injury in late June).

Chatwood’s performance keeps the storyline front and center that the Rockies are for real because of an improved pitching staff under pitching guru Bud Black, in his first season as manager in Colorado. (The team’s 4.20 ERA ranks sixth in the NL.) Tuesday in Philly, I asked reliever Adam Ottavino—in his sixth season in Colorado, the longest tenured Rockies pitcher—about the Buddy effect.

“Being that he’s a pitcher, it’s a different perspective,” he said. “Buddy’s very in tune with all of his pitchers, whether they’re young or they’re old—very quickly he’s able to put himself in each pitcher’s shoes and that’s been very good for us. We have a lot of young starters but he’s been able to kind of pull them out when they need to come out and leave them in when things are going good, he’s got a really good sense of that. I think that’s hard to do if you’ve never done it, as a pitcher. And he pitched a long time. The other thing is that he had a team in San Diego that needed to win a lot of close games, so he’s been doing that type of managing for a long time.”

Last season, Rockies were 12-20 in one-run games. Colorado’s record this year is 9-0—evidence that they have benefited from some good luck. Or that Buddy Black is doing something.

2. Jake Lamb, MVP Candidate?

Speaking of emerging NL West teams with color schemes that cause a traditionalist’s stomach to churn...
... out in that space-age launching pad in the Arizona desert, Jake Lamb ripped his 13th home run of the season—his sixth in eight games—as Arizona rolled to a 8-6 win over the White Sox. For the first time since 2011, the Diamondbacks are 10 games over .500.

Lamb’s scorching start isn’t a mirage. He broke out last season, slashing .249/.332/.509 with 29 home runs in his first full season, as the Diamondbacks’ inspired push to get Lamb into the All-Star game fell just a bit short. Lamb has always struggled against lefties, and, despite his big numbers, this season has been no different: entering Wednesday night, Lamb’s splits were .342/.435/.701 against righties and a ghastly .152/.250/.261 against lefties. That’s why his homer off lefty Jose Quintana was particularly noteworthy.

The 26-year-old third baseman, who has eight home runs in May, still has a ways to go before becoming a legit MVP candidate, of course. For starters, he’s not even the best position player on his own team. (Paul Goldschmidt is off to the best start of his career.) But if tonight is a sign that Lamb is beginning to figure out things out how to hit lefties, you can be sure the D-backs’ media relations team will be feverishly pushing a different kind of campaign for him come September.

3. Chris Sale is good (still)

The stars were aligned for a history-making night at Fenway Park, where Sale took the mound with the chance to become the first pitcher in the modern era to strike out 10 batters in nine straight games. He seemed to be on his way to owning the night, striking out four through his first three innings. Sale still had not allowed a hit when the Rangers scored their first run in the top of the fourth, on an Elvis Andrus sac fly.

Mike Napoli’s fifth-inning home run—Sale’s first hit allowed—gave Texas a short-lived lead. With a seven-run onslaught in the bottom of the seventh, the Red Sox turned the game into a rout, and writers held off on those John Farrell job security stories—for one day, at least.

Sale, now 5-2 with a 2.34 era and 101 strikeouts on the season, did become the fifth pitcher since 1900 with 100 Ks in his first 10 starts. The Red Sox are now 7-3 in games he’s started, 17-18 otherwise. In his first season in Boston, he’s still having the kind of year that will garner him some AL MVP votes at season’s end. In a universe without Mike Trout, the AL’s best pitcher—it’s not even close right now—might even have a chance winning it.
The dream start to the 2017 season continued Wednesday night for the Colorado Rockies.

Thanks to a dominant outing by right-hander Tyler Chatwood, the Rockies bested the Philadelphia Phillies at Citizens Bank Park (COL 7, PHI 2) and improved their MLB-best road record to 18-7. They lead baseball in road wins and road winning percentage. The Rockies have won four straight games overall, and they've outscored the Phillies 23-5 in the first three games of their four-game series.

Chatwood held Philadelphia to one hit in seven scoreless innings, striking out eight. At 27 years and 159 days, he is the oldest starting pitcher the Rockies have used this season. Their current rotation is really young and really impressive, and that's even though staff ace Jon Gray has been limited to three starts by a foot injury. Never before in franchise history has Colorado had this many young power arms in the organization at once.

The Rockies broke Wednesday's game open with Carlos Gonzalez's third-inning three-run home run against Jeremy Hellickson. They scored seven runs in the inning to put the game to bed early. CarGo's swing-plus-bat drop combination is easily my favorite in baseball. It's perfect:

Charlie Blackmon went 1 for 5 and drove in two runs, giving him an MLB-best 42 RBI. Yes, their leadoff man leads baseball in runs batted in. That's pretty amazing, especially since he is primarily batting behind the pitcher in the National League.

Here is the updated RBI leaderboard:

1. **Charlie Blackmon, Rockies**: 42
2. Jake Lamb, Diamondbacks: 40
3. Ryan Zimmerman, Nationals: 39
4. Mark Reynolds, Rockies: 39
5. t-Bryce Harper, Nationals & Joey Votto, Reds: 38

As I mentioned earlier, the Rockies currently have baseball's best road record -- they are 7-2 on their current road trip with one more game remaining -- and they've yet to lose a road series all season. That's usually the opposite of how it goes for the Rockies. They tend to play better at home, in the extreme hitter's environment of Coors Field, then come back to Earth out on the road. Here are the numbers this year:
Now here's how the Rockies have performed at home and on the road over the previous two seasons:

- **2015-16 at home:** 78-84 (.481) with a minus-3 run differential
- **2015-16 on the road:** 55-87 (.340) with a minus-46 run differential

Yikes! The Rockies were much better at home (though still bad overall) than on the road from 2015-16. This year it's the exact opposite. They've been far better away from Coors Field.

Who is this team? The Rockies have never been this good on the road.

The Rockies are off to the best start in franchise history thanks to leadoff hitter Charlie Blackmon. USATSI

I've long believed that Coors Field is one of the biggest competitive disadvantages in baseball. It's incredibly difficult to build a consistently reliable pitching staff at altitude, and evaluating pitchers is damn near impossible. You can scout guys and run all the analytics all day, but until you get him on a mound a mile above sea level, you have no idea how his pitches will move.

Furthermore, Coors Field creates a disadvantage for hitters too. Sure, hitting at altitude is wonderful, but coming down to sea level creates a problem too. Pitches move differently in the thin mountain air, right? Of course they do. The air is less dense, so the interaction between the air and the seams creates different spin. Well, that means the pitches look different to the hitters too. They see one set of pitches at home and an entirely different set on the road, even from the same pitchers.

Despite the Coors Field effect, the Rockies are off to the greatest start in franchise history right now, because of their strong play on the road. They're in first place in the NL West at 31-17, the best 48-game start in team history. The previous best was the 27-21 start by the 1995 squad. A deep offense -- again, their leadoff hitter leads MLB in RBI! -- and a talented young rotation combined with a rebuilt bullpen gives these Rockies legitimate staying power.
Chatwood allows 1 hit in 7 innings, Rockies top Phillies 7-2

By Anthony Sanfilippo / Associated Press | May 24th, 2017

PHILADELPHIA - (AP) -- Colorado manager Bud Black said recently that Tyler Chatwood has the stuff to be one of the best pitchers in the National League.

Chatwood made a convincing argument Wednesday night.

Chatwood allowed just one hit in seven scoreless innings and struck out a season-high eight batters, helping the Rockies beat the Philadelphia Phillies 7-2 to win their fourth straight game and their major league-best 18th on the road.

"I thought he had really good stuff all the way through to his last pitch," Black said. "His pitches were running in on righties and tailing away from lefties. He's got good stuff man."

Chatwood befuddled the Phillies, allowing only a two-out single by Andrew Knapp in the fifth inning. It was the third time Chatwood (4-6) earned a win in his career while allowing just one hit. He threw 112 pitches, the most since 2011 when he was with the Los Angeles Angels.

The Rockies pounded starter Jeremy Hellickson (5-2) for seven runs in the third. Colorado hit for the cycle in the inning -- a triple by Ian Desmond, a double by Trevor Story and singles by Charlie Blackmon, DJ LeMahieu and Nolan Arenado surrounded Carlos Gonzalez's fourth homer of the season.

It was the second homer in four games for Gonzalez after going 19 games without one.

"I've had slow starts before," said Gonzalez, who finished the game with three hits and is now 20 for 51 (.392) in his last 13 games. "But I keep telling myself that I'm a good player and I've been in worse situations before. It's just nice to get my bat going again to help this club."

Blackmon drove in a pair of runs, increasing his major league-leading RBI total to 42. He has 15 RBIs in his last 11 games.

All 10 Colorado batters who stepped to the plate -- including Chatwood and pinch hitter Pat Valaika -- had at least one hit.

The Rockies have outscored the Phillies 23-5 in the first three games of the four-game series.

The Phillies lost their fifth straight game, matching their longest losing streak of the season. They have now dropped 20 of 24 and have the worst record in baseball at 15-29.

The Phillies offense, which has only eight runs during this five-game skid, was blanked until the eighth inning when Michael Saunders snapped an 0-for-15 slump with a two-run home run, his fifth of the season, off reliever Mike Dunn.
"We only had three hits again," Phillies manager Pete Mackanin said. "The team is scuffling. We're not playing well. (Chatwood) is effectively wild and that helps him, but I don't know if he was that good or we were that bad."

TRAINERS ROOM

Rockies: Story was back in the lineup after missing the last 13 games with a left shoulder strain. Story was activated Tuesday but did not play in the Rockies 8-2 win. He was back at shortstop and batted seventh.

Phillies: Howie Kendrick, who has been on the DL since April 15 with an oblique strain, began a four-game rehab assignment Wednesday with Triple-A Lehigh Valley. Kendrick will play left field, third base and first base while there and may become a utility guy when he gets back to the Phillies now that Aaron Altherr has solidified a regular spot in the Phillies outfield.

Mackanin sat usual starting 3B Mikael Franco and C Cameron Rupp for the second straight game. It was the first time this season both players sat consecutive games. Franco is hitting just .221, and Rupp has struggled defensively lately with a couple costly errors and garnered public criticism from pitching coach Bob McClure about the way he calls a game.

THREE AND OUT

After throwing three scoreless innings in relief, Phillies LHP Adam Morgan was optioned to Triple-A Lehigh Valley. A corresponding roster move will be announced by the team Thursday.

UP NEXT

Rockies: LHP Tyler Anderson (3-4, 6.00) has been really good for Colorado in his last three starts (2-1, 3.06) but has struggled on the road this season in five outings (2-2, 6.66).

Phillies: RHP Vince Velasquez (2-4, 5.98) looks to rebound following a shaky start in his last game where he allowed five earned runs in just 5 1/3 innings. Velazquez has only thrown seven innings in a game four times in 32 career starts for the Phillies.