D-backs-Rox series has fresh new look for '17

By Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com | @castrovince | 1:10 AM ET

Two of the great players of our time -- Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado -- are on the same field for the key three-game set between the D-backs and Rockies that begins Tuesday night at Coors Field. But the relative anonymity afforded these two consistently underrated stalwarts is, thankfully, dissipating here in 2017.

Not only are both Goldschmidt and Arenado staging legitimate Most Valuable Player cases in the first half of this season, but they're finally playing on October-caliber clubs worthy of their talents.

That the National League West will provide three-fifths of the NL playoff picture has begun to feel like a foregone conclusion. Goldschmidt was a rookie coming off a 48-game campaign when the D-backs last appeared in the postseason, and he had no way of knowing he'd be approaching his 30th birthday the next time they'd be in a legit position to get back. But at least the four postseason games he's played in are four more than Arenado, the heart and soul of a Rox squad that has, until this year, been known for routinely surrendering more runs than its power-packed offense could provide.

The ugly truth is that -- especially in the era of dual Wild Cards -- a great career is incomplete, in terms of how it resonates with casual fans, without October. And when you combine Pacific or Mountain home start times with annual also-ran status while compiling a Wins Above Replacement total that ranks third overall (Goldschmidt) and eighth overall (Arenado) in the Majors over the last five seasons, you get a Mike Trout-like claim to underappreciated awesomeness.
The Esurance All-Star Game Ballot results tell us the appreciation levels are elevated in ’17, though Arenado and Goldschmidt are still being edged out at their respective positions. Here's where they ranked in Monday's voting update and their stats from that point:

First base:
1. **Ryan Zimmerman** (1.4M votes): 1.063 OPS, 171 wRC+, 19 HR, 19 2B, 54 RBI
2. **Anthony Rizzo** (1.3M): .905 OPS, 136 wRC+, 16 HR, 18 2B, 57 RBI
3. Goldschmidt (828K): 1.038 OPS, 162 wRC+, 16 HR, 18 2B, 57 RBI

Goldschmidt, on account of his defense and his still-standout agility on the basepaths despite his 6-foot-3, 225-pound frame (he has 13 steals), has been the more complete package. But because he didn't have the astounding April bounceback of Zimmerman or the Cub love being bestowed upon the North Side's new leadoff sensation, he's lagging in the vote total.

Third base:
1. **Kris Bryant** (1.6M): .919 OPS, 140 wRC+, 15 HR, 14 2B, 28 RBI
2. Nolan Arenado (1.3M): .925 OPS, 118 wRC+, 15 HR, 26 2B, 55 RBI

Though Arenado's insanely great glove is a significant difference-maker, it's hard to quibble with the reigning NL MVP here. And the wRC+ stat is important to include given that it neutralizes the park effects that certainly help Arenado's cause.

But stay tuned. On Sunday, Bryant was rested on account of fatigue and a sagging bat, while Arenado, who has a 1.056 OPS this month, turned in what was quickly and accurately dubbed a "cycle for the ages" in a thrilling win over the Giants. So Arenado's All-Star starting arrow might be pointed upward.

Anyway, no matter where the vote totals wind up, the status Arenado and Goldschmidt hold inside our sport is secure.
Goldschmidt's quiet and low-key public persona is his calling card, disguising what teammates describe as a dry and devastating wit behind the scenes. But the consistency of his play speaks volumes. His 2016 constituted a "down" year, yet Goldschmidt still had a wRC+ mark identical to that of Edwin Encarnacion.

This year, Goldy's gone next-level. He's got the highest isolated power mark (.272) of his career, to go with a career-low strikeout rate (18.8 percent). He's following the industry trend of more fly balls (a career-high 38.3-percent rate) without the accompanying K's -- a man after our homer-loving hearts.

Arenado is more edgy, and his bloodied countenance from Sunday's walk-off cycle celebration is, now and forever, the indelible image we'll associate with a young man who, in the sage words of former Giants coach Tim Flannery, "plays obsessed."

This year, both Arenado and Goldschmidt got what they've long wanted. What once was a casual meeting between West clubs all-too-accustomed to looking up at the Dodgers and Giants is now an epic affair. The stakes have been raised in Arizona and Colorado, and so too, thankfully, have the profiles of these two corner kings.
Rockies eager to face Diamondbacks as torrid NL West race heats up
Nolan Arenado on the NL West: “It’s going to be a battle, for sure”

By Patrick Saunders / Denver Post | June 19th, 2017

Yes, the first official full day of summer isn’t until Wednesday. And yes, the season hasn’t even reached the halfway point.

And no, this isn’t Rocktober 2007, when the Rockies swept Arizona in the National League Championship Series to advance to their first and only World Series.

But the Rockies, Diamondbacks and Los Angeles Dodgers are setting such a torrid base in the National League West that every game within the division is important. That gives the Diamondbacks-Rockies series some extra spice.

The three-game set begins Tuesday night at Coors Field with ace Zack Greinke on the mound for the D-Backs and rookie right-hander German Marquez throwing for the Rockies.

“We know how well those teams are playing,” Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado said Sunday after hitting a walk-off home run to complete his first cycle and beat San Francisco 7-5. “Obviously, it’s a tight division, but we are a good team and we’re playing at home and we need to take care of home field. But it’s going to be a battle, for sure.”

The division-leading Rockies swept a four-game series from the Giants for the first time in franchise history to improve to 46-26, a .639 winning percentage. But the D-Backs (44-26, .629) and Dodgers (44-26 entering Monday night’s game against the New York Mets) are allowing no breathing room. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, this is the first time since divisional play began in 1969 that three teams in the same division had winning percentages of .620 or higher on or after Fathers’ Day.

And while the NL West race is shaping up to be wild one, Dodgers manager Dave Roberts clearly believes his team has the edge.

“We realize we’re the best team in the division,” he told reporters over the weekend.

After the Diamondbacks series, the Rockies travel to Los Angeles for a three-game weekend series against the Dodgers. Then on June 30-July 2, the Rockies are in Phoenix for a three-game set against the D-Backs.
Arizona, one of the biggest busts of the 2016 season, is loaded. All-star first baseman Paul Goldschmidt, a legitimate MVP candidate, is on pace for 37 homers and 30 steals. Third baseman Jake Lamb has built on his 2016 season to become a dynamic offensive force. He's batting .281 with 16 homers, and his 59 RBIs lead the majors.

Second baseman Brandon Drury, right fielder David Peralta and shortstop Chris Owings are integral pieces of an Arizona lineup that stacks up with Colorado and Washington as the most potent in the National League.

And that lineup is about to get better. All-star outfielder A.J. Pollock, who has been on the disabled list since May 15 because of a strained right groin, was scheduled to continue his Triple-A rehab progression with Reno on Monday night, and he’s close to rejoining the Diamondbacks.

“The names are good names. They have talented players” Colorado manager Bud Black said of Arizona. “They are playing solid baseball, and they are believing it.”

The Diamondbacks have a 3.43 ERA, second in the National League to the Dodgers’ 3.39. The Rockies rank third with a 4.41 ERA.

Greinke has bounced back from a disappointing 2016, but he has not been the D-Backs’ best starting pitcher. That would be left-hander Robbie Ray. Over 14 starts, he’s 7-3 with a 2.87 ERA. He’s striking out a career-high 11.7 batters per nine innings.

Arizona’s bullpen, a disaster last year, has a 3.38 ERA, second in the NL behind the Dodgers’ 3.11. Right-handed closer Fernando Rodney and right-handed set-up man Archie Bradley throw a wicked one-two punch. Rodney has an unimpressive 4.73 ERA, but he has 20 saves in 23 opportunities and hasn’t allowed an earned run over his last 17 appearances. Bradley has a 1.13 ERA and a minuscule 0.84 WHIP (walks plus hits per inning pitched).

Diamondbacks utility man Daniel Descalso, who played two seasons in Colorado before signing with Arizona, envisions a fight to the finish.

“Our division is tough,” he told The Arizona Republic. “It's three really good teams right now that we’re going to battle with and are going to be playing a lot down the stretch. We’re going to have to keep playing the way we are, keep grinding, because those two teams are playing really well right now, too. We’re right up there with them.”
Rockies' Bud Black optimistic CarGo will find groove in second half. “He'll be there at crunch time.”
The three-time all-star is hitting .219 this season, the lowest of his nine-year career

By Benjamin Arthur / Denver Post | June 19th, 2017

Just about everything has gone right so far for the 2017 Colorado Rockies.

They sit atop the National League West. A rookie-dominated pitching rotation has been fantastic from the mound. Charlie Blackmon and Nolan Arenado are likely to play in the All-Star game; the latter, coming off his first cycle in a dramatic victory over the San Francisco Giants on Father's Day, is a frontrunner for NL MVP, too.

But one person who has noticeably struggled amid all the success? Right fielder Carlos Gonzalez. Team manager Bud Black is hopeful that the club’s longest-tenured player will find his groove as the regular season nears its intermission.

“I keep saying it, but I believe it,” Black told 104.3 The Fan. “The coaches believe it, the front office executives believe it: (Gonzalez is) gonna get this going in the second half (of the season)... He'll be there at crunch time.”

CarGo batted 0-for-20 with six strikeouts on the last road trip. Black sat the struggling Gonzalez last Wednesday against the Pittsburgh Pirates for Raimel Tapia. And after returning to fourth in the batting order June 16, he was demoted to sixth for the final two games of the series against the Giants.

The three-time all-star is hitting .219 this season, the lowest of his nine-year career. His career-average is .287.

“(CarGo) hasn’t hung his head one bit through this first couple months of struggling at the plate,” Black said in the radio interview.

Gonzalez has just five home runs and 19 RBIs on the season, with a .335 slugging percentage.

“We get CarGo going the way we know CarGo can get going, I think we have a chance to be the most dangerous team in the major leagues,” Arenado said last week.

Gonzalez and the Rockies will be back in action Tuesday for the start of a three-game series against the Arizona Diamondbacks (44-26).
Rockies’ Nolan Arenado second in All-Star Game fan voting; Charlie Blackmon looking like a starter

Colorado Rockies third baseman leads the majors with 26 doubles, while batting .299 with 15 home runs and 55 RBIs

By Patrick Saunders / Denver Post | June 19th, 2017

The latest All-Star Game fan vote count was revealed Monday and it showed that Rockies third baseman Nolan Arenado remains in second place behind Cubs’ fan favorite Kris Bryant.

Arenado is having a monster season for a Rockies team that leads the National League West with a 46-26 record, marking just the second time in franchise history that they’ve been 20 games over .500.

Arenado leads the majors with 26 doubles, while batting .299 with 15 home runs and 55 RBIs. He had perhaps the best day of his career Sunday, hitting for his first cycle and topping it off with a dramatic, three-run, walk-off homer in Colorado’s 7-5 win over San Francisco at Coors Field.

Bryant, the 2016 National League MVP, has received 1,603,326 votes, while Arenado is relatively close behind with 1,300,612. Bryant is batting .264 with 15 home runs, 28 RBI and 14 doubles.

Bryant is trying for his second consecutive fan-elected start, while Arenado, a two-time all-star, is trying to become the first Rockies third baseman to start an All-Star Game via the fans’ vote.

At first base, Washington first baseman Ryan Zimmerman (1,404,251 votes) holds a slight edge over the Cubs’ Anthony Rizzo (1,247,219). Colorado’s Mark Reynolds, despite having one of the best years of his career, is not in the hunt at first base.

The good news for the Rockies is that center fielder Charlie Blackmon remains in place to start for the National League outfield. Washington superstar Bryce Harper, with a major-league high 2,827,330 votes, is No. 1 among the outfielders, but Blackmon (2,259,867) ranks second, followed by the Cubs’ Jason Heyward (973,333).

The Esurance MLB All-Star Game ballot is available online until June 29th at 9:59 p.m. (MDT). Fans can vote up to five times every 24 hours, up to a total of 35 ballots.

National League all-star votes

The latest update for the National League all-star fan vote, released Monday:

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It’s the Bermuda Triangle of baseball.

The Colorado Rockies, Arizona Diamondbacks and Los Angeles Dodgers have put a death grip on the National League wild-card race.

It’s all over, thanks to the supremacy of the NL West.

Don’t believe me? Through Sunday, the Rockies (46-26), Dodgers (45-26) and Diamondbacks (44-26) had the three best records in the National League, and all happen to reside in the West.

This is the latest since 1962 that three NL teams, whether battling within the same division or for the pennant before divisional play began in 1969, had a winning percentage of .600 or better. And not since 1941 have three NL teams — the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants and Cincinnati Reds — had a .600 winning percentage on this date.

“That’s just amazing,” Andrew Friedman, Dodgers president of baseball operations, told USA TODAY Sports.

“Scoreboard watching in May or June, it just speaks to the talent that we have in this division. It seems like we are matching each other in this recent stretch.”

These three teams, who entered Monday separated by just one game in the standings, are all on pace to win 102 games. They are playing at such a break-neck speed that according to FanGraphs’ calculations, the Dodgers have a 99.8% chance to reach the postseason, with the Rockies at 88% and D-backs at 83.5%.

While no team in the American League is further than 4 1/2 games out of a playoff berth, the Dodgers and D-backs have a nine-game lead over the Chicago Cubs in the NL wild-card race, and 12 games over everyone else.

It could be the first time since Major League Baseball implemented the two-team wild-card format in 2012 that three teams from the same division could all reach the playoffs with a .600 winning percentage. The NL Central came the closest in 2015 when the St. Louis Cardinals, Pittsburgh Pirates and Chicago Cubs qualified for the playoffs, with the third-place Cubs finishing with 97 victories and a .599 winning percentage.
It’s a staggering pace considering the 2015 Pirates are the lone National League wild-card team to produce a .600 winning percentage. It happened three times in the American League, but not since the Boston Red Sox in 2004 - 10 years after the advent of the wild-card format.

This three-headed monster resurrects memories for Friedman, the former GM of the Tampa Bay Rays. They won the AL East twice, staving off the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees when all three teams finished within eight victories of one another.

“I was just thinking about that the other day,” Friedman said, “there are a lot of similarities.”

There’s little to suggest this power trio’s pace can’t continue. They have outscored the opposition by a combined 262 runs, and are a staggering 75-37 outside their own division. The Washington Nationals, Milwaukee Brewers and Chicago Cubs are the only other NL teams with winning records.

Oh, and the Rockies-Dodgers-D-backs triumvirate still have 61 games against their two divisional patsies, the San Diego Padres and San Francisco Giants. They’re already 37-19 against them and those clubs may delete talent by the trade deadline.

The only drama left may be determining who wins the division and who hosts the wild card game. No wonder the Rockies’ three-game series Tuesday against the D-backs at Coors Field suddenly is looming large for a June matchup, with both teams off to franchise-record starts. It will be the beginning of 12 consecutive divisional games for the Rockies, including nine against the Dodgers and Arizona.

“These games should be good; we’re pushing each other in quiet ways,” Rockies GM Jeff Bridich says. “It’s a push to September. If you’re going to be the best, you’ve got to beat the best.”

And the best in the NL West this decade has been the Dodgers and the Giants. The Giants, who are on pace to lose a franchise-record 103 games this year, won three World Series championships in five years while the Dodgers have won the last four division titles.

The Dodgers certainly are playing as well as anyone in baseball, winning 29 of their last 41 games, but just not better than the Rockies or D-backs. The Dodgers were in third place, 2 1/2 games out of first on May 3, but have picked up only 1 1/2 games in the standings.
The D-backs, who have won seven in a row, and 23 of their last 31, have picked up only two games in the standings since May 14.

And the Rockies, who just completed their first four-game sweep of the Giants in franchise history, are 13-4 in June, have won 23 of their last 34 games since May 13, and increased their division lead by just one-half game.

So is it rewarding to play this well, or exasperating, unable to shake off the two other NL West powers no matter how many games you win?

“I think it’s a good thing staying hyper-competitive throughout a season,” Friedman says. “There’s a lot of depth in the division, so it helps you keep on edge, and it heightens the competitive dynamics. The D-backs and Rockies are playing extremely well, and the Giants are scary.”

Friedman likely isn’t as surprised by his own team’s success as his counterparts to the east.

“But first, you’ve got to get there. There’s a difference between talented and good,” says Bridich. “We’re similar to the Diamondbacks where both organizations are in similar stages. The talent was definitely there, but the question was whether the organization would take the next step in being good.”

The Diamondbacks envisioned playing this well a year ago, only to go 69-93, and overhaul their front office and coaching staff. Now, they’re off to the finest start in franchise history, vying for their first playoff berth in six years.

“I’m not too concerned what is happening elsewhere,” D-backs new GM Mike Hazen said, “but when you have teams play like this in the division, it creates a fun atmosphere. We just have to play our game, and control what we can control. If we keep doing that, it should make for an interesting rest of the way.”

It will now be fascinating at the trade deadline to see how each of the front offices react, pulling the trigger on the trade that potentially separates them, or keep dancing with those that carried them this far.

The Dodgers have the deepest farm system, and the financial resources with a $215 million payroll, but have mostly avoided trading prospects for veteran help in recent years. They would be willing to trade for the likes of Chris Archer of Tampa Bay or Gerrit Cole of Pittsburgh, but won’t trade prospects unless they’re receiving controllable and not rent-a-pitchers in return.
The D-backs went into the season wanting to restore their farm system and shed payroll. Yet, while they could recoup most of their money by trading ace Zack Greinke and the remaining $142 million in his contract before July 31, they certainly have no intention of moving him now while in the playoff hunt. They will stay pat, knowing that center fielder A.J. Pollock is returning within the week to bolster their lineup. Greinke, of course, can always be traded in the winter.

The Rockies may be the most ambitious of the trio after already shelling out in excess of $90 million in the free-agent market. They want to seize the moment after six consecutive losing seasons. If anyone is willing to gamble and go for the jugular, it could be the Rockies, whose farm system is deep. Yet, with ace Jon Gray scheduled back this weekend, starter Tyler Anderson returning next week, and Chad Bettis expected by the All-Star break, they'll have an influx of fresh arms.

"It would obviously be a huge shot in the arm for us," Bridich says, "in terms of depth and added talent to the roster. It's no different than going out and trading for very impactful pitchers."

Ah, life inside baseball's Bermuda Triangle, where you just never know what might happen next.
The **Colorado Rockies** are 46-26. That's good for the best record in the National League and the second best record in all of baseball behind the **Houston Astros**. There's one big difference, though: the Astros are enjoying a 12-game lead atop the American League West, while the Rockies are just half a game up on the **Los Angeles Dodgers** and one game up on the **Arizona Diamondbacks**.

The Rockies are preparing for a 12-game stretch in the division that includes six games against the Diamondbacks and road series against the Dodgers and **San Francisco Giants**. These would be crucial games no matter what, but they are especially so given the fact that it is already such a tight race.

*The Context*

It's not early anymore, at least not to where any of these teams need to prove they are for real. All three NL West powers will be in the playoff race; that was expected for the Dodgers, not so much for the Rockies and Diamondbacks. Even still, this isn't about proving the Rockies are ready to contend. Now it's about identifying the spots in the schedule where the team has opportunities to make a real impact on the standings. These next 12 games are exactly that.

The Diamondbacks, currently the second wild card team, have an 8.5-game lead over the **Chicago Cubs** in the Wild Card standings. The Rockies, like their opponents in Los Angeles and Arizona, will be trying to avoid any losing skid that might put them closer to the pack as much as they will be trying to take the spot as king of the mountain.

*These teams are even hotter*

Nobody's hotter than the Rockies, right? Wrong. The Dodgers are. So are the Diamondbacks. Both teams have gone 9-1 in their last 10 games, including a seven-game win streak for the Diamondbacks.

Start with more wins at Coors Field
Colorado opens with three games against Arizona in Denver starting on Tuesday night before heading out on the road. It feels especially important that they win this series, because both the Dodgers and Diamondbacks are dominant on their respective home fields. The Dodgers are 26-10 at home while the Diamondbacks are 26-9 in Arizona.

Stealing a game in those series might be enough for now, but it makes winning at Coors Field more important.

Don't overlook the Giants

Yes, the Rockies just humiliated the Giants to the tune of a four-game sweep, walk-off wins, and Nolan Arenado auditioning for a role in some sort of Braveheart spin-off. Yes, the Giants look like a beaten down doormat of a team this year, and yes, the Rockies have done well against them in recent years even before this one.

I know better. You know better. A series at AT&T Park is daunting no matter what, and the Rockies would be wise not to overlook that series and risk stubbing their toe at the stop between Los Angeles and Arizona.

Can you name the Diamondbacks manager?

You liar.

The bullpen needs to bounce back

The Rockies have enjoyed success in close games this year, but that feels like it might take a turn soon if the bullpen doesn't get back on track. The bullpen ERA has jumped up to 4.73 for the month of June. For this stretch, it feels like guys like Chris Rusin and Jake McGee need to offer a level of stability; despite getting roughed up this weekend, they have been two of the more consistent guys in front of Greg Holland.

Otherwise, the Rockies will keep riding the ups and downs of those fickle creatures who are relief pitchers, hoping to find some more reliable bridges in the bullpen when they need them. As we know, the margin for error in the bullpen in close games really tightens up when you're out on the west coast.

What strings will Bud Black need to pull?

It will be interesting to see how Black treats things and how much he goes with the hot hand, especially if the Rockies find their offense cooling off out west. He'll be watching for answers to the same questions as us, including:
• Can Carlos Gonzalez get on track?
• Can Raimel Tapia stay hot?
• Can Ian Desmond continue to hit the ball hard?
• Can he get enough length from his young starting pitchers to put his bullpen in the best spots to rebound?

The answers to these questions, among others, will go a long way towards deciding how this stretch of games goes. Thankfully, it’s Black, and not us watching, who has to decide what to do with that information.

Which superstar will come through?

Nolan Arenado is gaining his deserved appreciation beyond the division as a superstar. This is also happening for his underappreciated peer: Paul Goldschmidt is a stud once again. And Dodgers’ rookie Cody Bellinger is entering the national conversation as well with 21 home runs in his first 51 career games. As these games get more attention, so too will these star players. Here’s hoping that Nolan is the one to continue delivering the big moments.

Treading water is OK

Obviously it is tantalizing to think about the Rockies building on their 13-4 start to the month and tearing through these games, taking hold of the top of the division. Of course we’ll all be cheering for that, but it’s a tough road ahead. Given how the NL West cluster has distanced itself from the rest of the league, staying in the cluster will be good enough for now.
The Colorado Rockies have put themselves in a great position
It’s becoming more and more likely the Rockies’ season won’t end after game 162

By Ryan Freemyer / Purple Row | June 20th, 2017

Sunday’s dramatic win did a lot of things for the Colorado Rockies. It kept them in first place in the intensely competitive National League West (the league’s top three records all currently reside in that division); it gave them their best 72-game start in club history by a whopping six games; and it provided a signature moment that we’ll all be looking back on if and when the Rockies make some postseason noise in 2017. If you extrapolate their current home and road win percentages out to 81 games each, it comes to a final record of 103-59. This, obviously, would be the best record in franchise history.

In addition to that, the winning also gives the Rockies some pretty strong postseason odds. Let’s take a look at those odds, entering Monday’s games, moving from most pessimistic to most optimistic in terms of their actual chances of making the playoffs.

FanGraphs is the most pessimistic about the Rockies moving forward, giving them only an 88.4 percent chance of reaching the postseason and projecting a final record of 91-71. Those numbers alone aren’t particularly discouraging, but what is potentially disheartening is their projection that the Rockies still have only a 10.2 percent chance at winning the division and avoiding the wild card game. Nevertheless, this is quite a fun playoff odds graph:

Five Thirty Eight is only slightly more optimistic about the Rockies’ overall playoff odds at 89 percent. However, they’re actually the most optimistic about their chance to win the division at 22 percent and also project the best overall record at
95-67. This, of course, is good news. If the Rockies are able to avoid the wild card game, which essentially amounts to a coin flip, it will significantly improve their chances of making a deep playoff run.

The most optimistic in terms of playoff odds is Baseball Prospectus, where the Rockies come in with a whopping 92.9 percent chance to make the playoffs. In terms of their projected record and chance to win the division, they’re in the middle of the pack. They think the Rockies will finish 92-70 and have a 14.5 percent chance to win the division. This is another fun playoff odds graph:

![NL West Playoff Pct by Date, 2017](image)

It isn’t only the playoff odds from projection systems that provide reason for optimism. We can also look at similar teams from the past to see how they finished. These are the last 20 teams to have a 72-game start within a game of what the Rockies have done so far, along with how their respective seasons ended:
Those are some pretty good teams. All 20 teams won 87 or more games, they combined to average 96 wins, 18 out of 20 won at least 93 games (which would set a Rockies’ franchise record), and 17 out of 20 reached the postseason. Under today’s postseason rules, the 2006 White Sox would’ve reached the playoffs as the second wild card, while the Red Sox and Mariners in 2002 would have tied for that spot.

This bodes extremely well for the Rockies’ playoff chances. Even if they match last year’s Giants with only 87 wins, that will likely be more than enough for a wild card spot. Aside from the Rockies, Dodgers, and Diamondbacks, Baseball Prospectus projects the next closest wild card contender to be the Brewers at 82.6 wins.

We still have a long way to go this season, and at the end of the year, nobody will remember that the Rockies were the first National League team to win 46 games. There’s still a lot of work to do. That being said, there’s a strong possibility that 2017 is the return of Rocktober that Rockies fans have been waiting for.
Gerardo Parra is a key contributor to the Colorado Rockies even on the DL

By Ben Macaluso / Rox Pile | June 20th, 2017

The 2016 election was a no-brainer for the Colorado Rockies players. There was only ever one candidate in the running. “Parra for President” t-shirts were ubiquitous in the clubhouse like it was the only available clothing for the players. This level of support never wavered even after Gerardo Parra struggled to come back after he went down with a sprained ankle after a collision with Trevor Story.

With the full backing of the Rockies brotherhood, **Parra literally grabbed the 2017 season by the horns when he hoped on top of a giant longhorn in spring training.** His determination to bring his lightning energy from the clubhouse to bounce back on the diamond was under way.

This season Parra has been playing better hitting .520/.571/.800 in his last 10 games before he went down with with a quadricep strain after attempting to steal on June 6 against the Indians.

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On Father’s Day, for the first time since his injury, Parra starts sprinting outside. He has done work on the treadmill and the pool to start recovery. But this is different. He lines up on the foul line in shallow right field just behind first base. While this is just an early step, Parra seems relieved. It is a positive step that brings a smile.

He extends it to the fans in the crowd waiting to get their memorabilia signed. But those sprints and that smile aren’t the most impressive things on display this morning. Parra is eager to get back to baseball any way he can and when he sees a ball near by he takes advantage.

He starts interacting with fans. But the fans he chooses aren’t anywhere near him. He picks up a ball from right behind first base and throws it past the right-field foul pole past all the seats to the concourse heading toward the Blue Moon tap room. One thing is for certain, Parra’s arm is at 100 percent.

“I’m just bringing work out there playing with the fans,” Parra said. “I feel good today. Just brining the work outside and I’m feeling happy. I’m running a sprint like 45 to 50 percent. I feel that’s good for me right now.”
Manager Bud Black often knows exactly when Parra is coming down the hall of the clubhouse. How could you miss him when he’s riding down the hall ringing the bell on his scooter?

“[He contributes] the same as when he is active,” Black said. “He comes in with energy. He is great in the club house. He keeps guys loose. He keeps guys positive. He talks about winning he talks about the team. He is good in game in the dugout and encouragement. Solid contributor even while injured. [He is a character] in a great way. He puts a smile on my face.”

When the Rockies were down 5-3 headed into the bottom of the ninth against the Giants on Father’s Day, Parra was as vocal as any player in the dugout with encouragement. Before Nolan Arenado went up to the plate with the opportunity to hit for the cycle, Parra told him if he hits a single, he should just run home anyway. Arenado laughed and walked off a hero. The outfielder knows how to make this clubhouse loose and confident.

“You know, I don’t want to talk too much about last year. I don’t think I’m just [on the] DL. I’m just looking to the end of the road and the clubhouse,” Parra said. “Just say play together with the guys and want to do it like we do it and play hard over there. You know, take everything positive and don’t think back because we’re playing in Colorado. You know, the Colorado Rockies are the best. I’m happy to be here.”

Carlos Gonzalez sure is happy that one of his best friends is here too. Nothing about this season is what Gonzalez is accustomed to. Parra is a supporting teammate in the face of adversity.

“When [Parra] came back he wasn’t at 100 percent so he went through adversity. Went back home this offseason and worked really hard and then he was off to a good start. It’s nice to see a guy bounce back after a down year. It’s too bad that he’s on the DL. He was having a good time he enjoyed the game after missing a lot of time last year,” Gonzalez said. Parra’s experience gave Gonzalez some perspective on his own game.

“Just stay in the game,” he said. “Going bad or going good it’s just part of the game. I think the one thing we can control is work hard. We work hard we show up every day to prepare ourself to do the best we can on the field. If it doesn’t work then there’s nothing else you can do. Just keep the same attitude and show up the next and try to start over. Sometimes you have to go through a little adversity to really discover all the things you can do on the field.”
A way that Parra has been responding to adversity is helping the younger players develop. Ramiel Tapia has taken every opportunity to listen to Parra in the longest major league stint of his young career.

“He’s a veteran player and he has been in the big leagues awhile now so he’s been able to help me a lot. Help me with the pitches that the pitchers throw and kind of letting me know what to expect. Helping me with a lot of different things. A lot of simple things. But just helping me out,” Tapia said through an interpreter.

But Parra does not see any distinction between the young players and the veterans on this team.

“We don’t have any young players here,” Parra said. “I think everyone stays on the same level. You know everybody prepare the same high level. We just play best like we’re playing. Playing hard. And a big point we stay as a family.”

There is always uncertainty after an injury and Parra is hoping to bounce back from this DL stint faster than he did last year. One thing that is certain is that this presidential candidate will always have the full support of his family.
Colorado Rockies: Ryan McMahon earns PCL Player of the Week honors

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | June 20th, 2017

The future just seems to keep brighter and brighter for the Colorado Rockies.

Infielder **Ryan McMahon** has made quite an impact on Triple-A and the Pacific Coast League since being assigned to the Albuquerque Isotopes from the Double-A Hartford Yard Goats on June 1.

In just his second week in Triple-A, McMahon earned the Pacific Coast League Player of the Week for the week of June 12-18, it was announced on Monday. He is the first Isotopes player to receive the weekly honor since **Stephen Cardullo** (the week of July 27-August 3, 2016). As a side note, **Jeff Hoffman** also received **Pitcher of the Week** honors from the League earlier in the 2017 season.

McMahon logged a .593 batting average (16-for-27) in six games last week. That hot streak included four doubles, five home runs and 14 RBI. McMahon’s nine extra-base hits tied for most in the league during the week, while his batting average, hits, home runs and RBI all led the PCL during the period.

The native of Yorba Linda, Calif., turned in multi-hit games in four of his six outings. The 22-year-old McMahon posted a 1.296 slugging percentage and a .586 on-base percentage, resulting in an eye-popping 1.883 OPS.

Before joining the Isotopes, McMahon compiled a .326 average (59-for-181) with Double-A Hartford, blasting six home runs while recording 32 RBI in 40 games.

A 2013 second-round selection by the Rockies, McMahon is now hitting .359 with 11 home runs, 51 RBI, nine stolen bases, a .414 on-base percentage and is slugging .609 combined between Double-A and Triple-A on the season.

McMahon was detailed extensively in this article before the season began, being ranked as the ninth-best prospect in the Rockies farm system. We also talked about his success in the Arizona Fall League in this article. Interestingly, one of the other Salt River Rafters players discussed in the piece was **Pat Valaika**, who has made a big impact on the Rockies this season.
The Colorado Rockies are off to a franchise-best 45-26 start through 71 games, and while just about everything has gone right for the Rockies, the exact opposite has happened for cornerstone Carlos Gonzalez. Yet despite being on pace for career-low numbers, neither Gonzalez nor the Rockies have lost faith.

Coming off a plus 2016 season, the bar was set high for Gonzalez entering 2017, especially with his impending free agency.

So far, Gonzalez has struggled a great deal at the plate. His .219 batting average on the season is significantly down from the .298 average he posted last season. He has batted below .270 only once in his career, as a rookie in Oakland.

Gonzalez has built a reputation over his career as a streaky hitter, but the cold spell he’s going through this season has been the worst of his career. Prior to Friday night’s victory, Gonzalez was 0-for-27 in his previous 27 at-bats, a career-long hitless streak for the slugger.

Since then things have not been much better for the 32-year-old, who only has three hits in his last 11 games.

Despite his prolonged struggles at the plate this season, Gonzalez is confident that his stroke will come around in the near future.

“It's a nonstop thing,” Gonzalez said. “This is a long season; you are going to go through ups and downs. Right now things are not going well, but I always believe that they are going to be [good]. Mentally, I'm ready. I'm trying to help this club. I'm working as hard as I can, so that's all I can control.”

Gonzalez is too talented to slump for this long. Sooner or later he will have to find his swing, but for now, the Rockies will keep trying to find ways to get him up to speed. In an attempt to jumpstart Gonzalez, Rockies skipper Bud Black opted to sit him for two consecutive games, something that rarely happens to the biggest names in the game.

The time off helped Gonzalez clear his head somewhat, but what he wants more than anything is to get on the diamond and produce for his team.

“It doesn’t matter,” Gonzalez said of the time off. “They can say we are going to give you plenty of days off or whatever, but you still show up every day. You still want to be a part [of the team], you still want to hit in the cage, do your routine trying to get better, so I think it's good that sometimes they give you a little time to take a breather. It's not always the case
you always want to continue to work. You don’t just want to sit around and wait until God sends you hits or whatever, you still got to go out there and compete and prepare yourself every day to go battle.”

Gonzalez’s biggest struggle at the plate in this down stretch seems to be his patience. Too many times he chases balls out of the zone early in counts, tries to hit the ball over the fence, or simply is just off in his timing and rhythm.

The big leg kick in his swing doesn’t make fixing the problem any easier, but it’s a CarGo staple – one that has worked for him his entire career.

“In his desire to get hits, there’s been a little expansion of the strike zone,” Black said. “When Carlos is on, he’s taking his walks and hitting balls in the strike zone whether they’re fastballs or off-speed pitches.”

Although he’s struggled, Gonzalez remains an essential part of the Rockies organization. The longest-tenured Rockies player, Gonzalez’s veteran presence alone makes his value nearly irreplaceable for this year’s squad – a team made up primarily of youngsters who have little to no playoff experience.

He may not be hitting currently, but he will at one point during the season, and everybody around the sport knows that when Carlos Gonzalez is locked in at the dish, he’s one of the most lethal hitters in the game.

“Carlos is an integral part of our team now and in the future,” Black reaffirmed. “He is going to help us get to where we want to go; there’s no doubt about it. Is he paying Carlos like right now offensively? No. We have all the confidence in the world that Carlos [can do] what he’s capable of doing.”
With 1,000 guesses you might not choose Sandra Bullock's iconic character, Gracie Hart, from the film "Miss Congeniality" as the closest parallel to the upstart 2017 Colorado Rockies. But that's the connection Rockies new Swiss Army knife Ian Desmond made.

"You ever seen 'Miss Congeniality?' Desmond asked Eric Goodman on Friday in the Rockies clubhouse. "I mean, it's like that. You don't know what you got until someone brings it out of you."

Of course, Desmond was referring to the "ugly duckling" story in which Bullock's character is turned from a gun-wielding FBI tomboy into a competitor in the Miss United States (not to be confused with the trademarked Miss America) Pageant. But beyond the physical transformation, Bullock's character also undergoes a psychological transformation – and helps her fellow contestants do the same.

The Rockies, with Desmond and other key additions to the roster, have undergone a transformation of their own in 2017. Tied for the most wins in baseball, they're one of the most clutch teams in the game and have a stellar starting rotation and bullpen. Desmond says one of the big catalysts for their transformation is manager Bud Black and the coaching staff.

"I'm not saying I [brought it out]," Desmond told Goodman, "but I believe in Bud Black. I believe in Mike Redmond. I believe in the grit and the grind of these guys in here and their passion to work and get better and that's all the stuff that you know."

But credit to Desmond, who saw that from the outside looking in, well before many other saw it.

"I was fortunately able to have an outside looking in kinda view of and I still don't think that we're like all the way there yet. I think we're only getting better," Desmond said.

When asked if he thought this team would be this good – so far above .500 this late in June – Desmond didn't hesitate.
“Absolutely or I wouldn’t of signed here otherwise to be completely honest. I believe and believed in this team. I believe in what we can do. I believe in the players. I believe in the organization. I believe in the player development. I believe in the prospects. I think we are going to be good for a long time.”

“Miss Congeniality” has certainly stood the test of time with movie fans, so maybe Desmond is on to something.

Listen to the full interview with Ian Desmond, including his take on Colorado’s dramatic walk-off victory against the Giants last Thursday, in the podcast below.
Decisions Await Rockies

By Tracy Ringolsby / Inside the Seams | June 19th, 2017

Things are changing for the Rockies. They are off to the best start in franchise history, sitting atop the NL West, and about to embark on back-to-back series against the two teams chasing them in the division. Oh, and they have some big decisions looming.

Arizona, which is in third place in the NL West, a game back of the Rockies, opens a three-game series at Coors Field on Tuesday night. after that the Rockies fly to Los Angeles for a three-game weekend series against the Dodgers, who are a half-game behind the Rockies.

Tyler Anderson | Jon Gray

Meanwhile, Jon Gray and Tyler Anderson are on the verge of coming off the disabled list. Gray, out with a broken bone in his left foot, made his second rehab start on Monday, allowing five runs, one of which was earned, in 4 1/3 innings against Sacramento, the Giants’ affiliate. He gave up five hits, but struck out seven and walked one. The Isotopes won the game 11-6.

Before he left on the assignment Gray had said he was hopefully he would be ready to come off the disabled list following the start. That's a decision the Rockies figure to make after meeting with him in Tuesday or Wednesday.

Anderson, meanwhile, made his first rehab assignment appearance on Sunday, also in Sacramento. He suffered a 1-0 loss, giving up the game’s lone run and five hits in five innings. He walked one and struck out six.

Anderson and Gray were both in the Rockies rotation to open the season. Their injuries, however, opened the door for the Rockies to look at some of their top pitching prospects, and that’s where the interesting decision enters.

Antonio Senzatela | Kyle Freeland

The rookies have been impressive. Antonio Senzatela (9-2) and Kyle Freeland (8-4) are the first rookie teammates to have eight or more victories apiece the first 75 games into a season in 80 years. And the Rockies duo has done it working
on a five-man rotation, instead of the four man that was in use 80 years ago. Lou Fette and Jim Turner both wound up winning 20 games for the 1937 Boston Braves.

German Marquez | Jeff Hoffman
Senzatela, Freeland, German Marquez (5-3) and Jeff Hoffman (4-0) are a combined 26-9 as starting pitchers for the Rockies. The 20 other rookies who have started a game in the NL this year are a combined 23-38.

So who goes to make room for Gray and Anderson when they return?

Chad Qualls | Carlos Esteves
The first move could be to put Marquez back in the bullpen, where he opened the season. With dominating fastball and big curveball he has a 1-2 combo that could be impressive as a reliever. He could step into the spot opened up by veteran Chad Qualls going on the disabled list with back spasms. The Rockies could use the time Qualls is out to see if Marquez can adapt to the role. Carlos Esteves was initially called up to take Qualls spot.

Then there will be the Anderson decision. After being called up to make two spot starts because of doubleheaders earlier in the season, and winning both games, Hoffman got the call to step into the rotation when Anderson was placed on the rotation. He is 2-0 and the Rockies are 3-0 in his starts since replacing Anderson.

Hoffman has allowed three runs on 14 hits and four walks while striking out 19 in 18 1/3 innings of the three starts, and is scheduled to start Wednesday's game against the Diamondbacks.

When Anderson is ready to be activated the Rockies will have to decide whether a second rookie starter is moved into the bullpen along with Marquez or sent to Triple-A to continue starting. The challenge is that the rookies have pitched so well.

Tyler Chatwood
Long-term, if the rookies continue to stay strong, the Rockies could consider checking the trade market for Tyler Chatwood, who would stir up interest from other contenders and bring the Rockies a solid return prior to the July 31 non-waiver trading deadline.
While Chatwood was dominating at Coors Field before undergoing Tommy John surgery and missing the 2015 season, but has struggled at home since. Before the injury he was 10-4 with a 3.83 ERA at Coors Field compared to 4-7 with a 4.20 ERA on the road. Since his return last year, he is 6-12 with a 6.21 ERA at Coors Field and 12-4 with a 1.97 ERA on the road.

The fact Chatwood is a potential free agent at season’s end, and the emergence of the young starting pitchers on the Rockies roster could make for interesting talks between the Rockies and other contenders as the deadline nears.

Right now the Rockies focus is on the Diamondbacks and then the Dodgers. They have won two out of three from Arizona in series at home and on the road so far this season. As well as the three-game series beginning Tuesday they have a three-game visit to Arizona June 30-July 2, but then won’t play Arizona again until Sept. 1.

The Rockies are 5-4 against the Dodgers, having won two of three from the dodgers at Coors Field April 7-9, and splitting a two-game series at Dodger Stadium April 18-19, and a four-game series at Coors Field May 11-14.

Following the weekend visit to Dodger Stadium the Rockies won’t play the Dodgers again until a four-game visit to Dodger Stadium Sept. 7-10. The two teams conclude the regular season with three games at Coors Field. Sept. 29-Oct. 1.
Carlos González remembers his path to the big leagues

By Jerry Crasnick / ESPN.com | June 19th, 2017

At 15, Carlos González left his family in Venezuela to pursue his dream of playing in the big leagues. Now a three-time All-Star, the Rockies outfielder reflects on those early days in the minors, from missing family to dating across the language barrier.

How did baseball influence your decision to come to the United States?

I had the opportunity to come to the United States when I was 15. I played in a little league tournament. There were a bunch of scouts and agents in the stands. The person who signed me was Miguel Nava, who at the time worked for the Diamondbacks.

When did you feel like you 'made it'?

I was telling everybody that as soon as I had the chance to play in the minor leagues. I knew because I came from nothing. I was a poor kid who was fortunate enough that my mom and dad raised me the right way. I thought it was perfect that I had the chance to go to Missoula, Montana, which was a beautiful place, but no one speaks Spanish over there.

How long before you could communicate in English with your teammates and coaches?

A month. When I was in school in Venezuela, we were forced to take English, just as here, you guys take Spanish, so I knew the basics of the language, and it didn't take me long.

How did you get your first apartment?

In rookie ball we had a three-bedroom house, and it was one American and seven Latino players. It was $50 apiece for the rent.

Do you remember your first experience ordering at a restaurant?
I used to go to the same place, Denny's. I liked going there because they had menus with pictures. I would point out what I wanted to eat. That was my spot, since they had breakfast, lunch ... whatever you want.

**How long before you started dating?**

[In Montana] I had an American girlfriend. We were together for a couple of years. She really helped me with the language. I used to have a roommate who was Puerto Rican but born in the U.S., and he spoke both languages. I would ask him, 'What would I say to her?' He would tell me in English, and I would say it over the phone.

**How much of your social circle is composed of American players or Latino players?**

I hang out with everybody. Actually, there are times in which the Latino guys get a little jealous. They're like, 'Oh, you're American now and you don't spend time with me?' That doesn't matter; I'm fine with everybody. I'm 31 years old; I came here when I was 15, so I have spent more than half of my life in the United States.

**When was the last time you saw your family back in Venezuela?**

When I was in the minors, I had the opportunity to see them only when the season was over. I remember the first time my mom had the opportunity to come over here. It was in 2006, when I was invited to the Futures Game in Pittsburgh. That was a great experience, since my mom knows I follow Roberto Clemente's life. I had the chance to play for the first time in a big league field at PNC Park. She took a picture at the ballpark next to the Clemente statue, and she has it at home.

**When you have to be separated from them for a long time, is it hard for you?**

It's the hardest thing to do. Not a lot of kids can do it. I know a lot of guys from Venezuela who missed their families so much that they couldn't play well, so they got released. But this is what I love to do; I knew from the beginning that if I wanted to be a big league player, I needed to make the sacrifice to leave my family behind.

**How often do you talk to them?**

Almost every day. Whenever I don't call my mom for a couple of days, she gets mad at me. She loves baseball, so we talk baseball a lot.
How does 'the code' affect the way you play baseball?

That's part of our culture. You enjoy the game, you celebrate when you do something well, and you keep your head up when things don't go the way you expect. It's different when you come to the United States; there are some rules. I understood that right way. Maybe for guys from Cuba and the Dominican Republic there's a larger difference because they put a little more flair into the way they play, and they come to the United States and people don't really like that. You see a lot of issues with guys like [Yoenis] Céspedes or [Yasiel] Puig when they're celebrating. However, that's the only way they know, and I get it. Everyone comes from different situations, so you have to be open-minded. You've got to understand why they do that kind of stuff. You can't just judge people because of the way they play.

Do you follow American politics at all?

Not much. I'm too busy playing baseball; I don't have the chance to follow a lot of things that happen in the world. What people don't realize is all the sacrifices we have to make. We have to spend a lot of time away from our families. We don't spend a lot of time watching TV. We can't be with our loved ones on Mother's Day or Father's Day -- we have a game to play.

What about in your country, Venezuela? Do you follow developments there?

It's bad down there. My family still lives there. But the only way to help our families is to do what we do. I try to stay locked in and put my mind on the stuff I know how to do, because at the end of the day, what brings food to our table is this game.