DENVER -- The Rockies addressed their bullpen, as promised, with former Royals closer Greg Holland and former Marlins lefty Mike Dunn. They were creative in signing Ian Desmond, a former shortstop and center fielder, to play first base.

But in this week’s Inbox, fans are wondering if there is more that can be done before pitchers and catchers begin workouts Feb. 14 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Thomas Harding
@harding_at_mlb

More #Rockies questions? https://twitter.com/harding_at_mlb/status/827565770846658560 …

Clive Bixby @PoseidonsFist
@harding_at_mlb Rockies have a very young rotation and have signed no SP. Have they considered vet innings guy? Might I suggest a Hammel?
10:52 AM - 3 Feb 2017

Thomas Harding
@harding_at_mlb

More #Rockies questions? https://twitter.com/harding_at_mlb/status/827565770846658560 …
Right-handed pitcher **Jason Hammel** was a member of the Cubs' rotation last season, while right-handed-hitting first baseman **Byungho Park** was designated for assignment by the Twins on Friday to make room for onetime Rockies reliever **Matt Belisle**.

Short answers on both are no (or at least extremely unlikely), and no.

Hammel, who pitched for the Rockies from 2009-11 and developed into a solid starter, certainly would add experience to a young rotation. But after going 15-10 with a 3.83 ERA for the Cubs last season, even though he didn't pitch in the postseason, Hammel rates good enough to receive a Major League contract for 2017. The Rockies, believing in their young rotation, chose to spend the money in the bullpen and at first base.

In the unlikely event Hammel is left seeking a Minor League deal, then the Rockies would be foolish not to try to bring him in. But it's hard to think someone won't jump at Hammel before then.

Park hit .191 last year in his lone Major League season after coming over from Korea. He is guaranteed $9.25 million over the next three seasons, and any team claiming him would assume that contract. With Desmond in the fold, **Mark Reynolds** in camp under a Minor League deal and prospects **Jordan Patterson** and Ryan McMahon in the wings, the Rockies have no reason to make that expenditure.

**Thomas Harding**

✔ @harding_at_mlb

More #Rockies questions? https://twitter.com/harding_at_mlb/status/827565770846658560 …

**Colorado Sports Talk** @ColoradoSports8

@harding_at_mlb is there any #Rockies interest in going after Jose Q? Or another starter? White Sox are fielding offers for him.. #MLB

10:48 AM - 3 Feb 2017
White Sox lefty **Jose Quintana**'s name has been connected with many trade rumors.

I don't see the Rockies swinging a deal for him right now. A Quintana trade would likely cost multiple pitchers, and that's a bad idea for the Rockies going into a season. They want to have as many people as possible. No matter how good one pitcher is, the theory is two pitchers are better than one -- especially for a team that plays at Coors Field, where no matter who the pitcher is, there is always a question of whether he can make the adjustment.

Now if Quintana isn't dealt, the White Sox struggle and the Rockies contend the way they hope, then by all means they should explore it. They'll be at a stage where they know exactly how much of their depth they need, so they'll know if they can afford to give up multiple parts for one.

Remember, at the end of last spring, **Jon Gray** and **Tyler Anderson** were both on the disabled list. So you don't want to give up your depth at this point.

**Thomas Harding**

✔ @harding_at_mlb

More #Rockies questions? https://twitter.com/harding_at_mlb/status/827565770846658560 ...

**Matt @M5Hansen**

@harding_at_mlb since it's the last year of Bridich's contract what kind of result will the team need for him to earn an extension?

10:50 AM - 3 Feb 2017

Owner Dick Monfort approved a payroll increase, and general manager Jeff Bridich used it for Desmond for five years and $70 million, Holland for one year and $7 million with incentives for more money and an option for a second year, and Dunn, for three years and $19 million with another $1 million available each year through games-finished clauses.

A start would be for moves for established players to pay dividends. Bridich was in charge of the farm system before becoming GM, and it's hard to argue with the number of prospects that have become key contributors. But last year, outfielder **Gerardo Parra**, lefty reliever **Jake McGee** and righty relievers **Chad Qualls** and **Jason Motte** all had injuries and down years. They'll need to bounce back, and the new players will have to produce.
The big test, should the Rockies stay competitive beyond the All-Star break, will be the non-waiver Trade Deadline. Last year the Rockies were in contention, but didn't make any moves. Given that they didn't have the bullpen to stay in it, Bridich's decision turned out to be prudent. They still have young players in surplus in the outfield and depth in terms of talent among their pitchers. But this time, can he make the moves to pay off at the end of this season?

That said, there is no indication from ownership that Bridich is on the hot seat. The spending this offseason seems to fit with the gradual building the last two years, so Monfort has allowed Bridich to work his plan. But it's time to win.

Thomas Harding

✔ @harding_at_mlb

More #Rockies questions? https://twitter.com/harding_at_mlb/status/827565770846658560 …

Curtis McGrew @GliaDesigns

@harding_at_mlb is the Bridich Barrier around to stay? 

11:09 AM - 3 Feb 2017

There are no plans to change the heightened fencing in the outfield for this season. The idea was not to dramatically change Coors Field, but to give pitchers a chance to recover from fly balls that would have homers in past years. By that standard, the change was fine, as noted in an article earlier this offseason. Did it help the Rockies more than the opponent? No, but that's something that can't be controlled. It's not as if they can raise the fence when the opponent bats and lower it when they bat.
DENVER -- Two fast-rising pitching prospects, right-hander Ryan Castellani and lefty Sam Howard, will make their first appearances in Major League camp this spring for the Rockies, who announced their non-roster invitees on Thursday.

The group includes veterans Chris Denorfia, a right-handed-hitting outfielder, and Mark Reynolds, who was the Rockies’ primary first baseman last year.

In all, the Rockies invited 22 players, including nine pitchers, to bring the total number to 62. Pitchers and catchers will have their first workout on Feb. 14, and the initial full-squad workout is Feb. 20.

Castellani, who turns 21 on April 1, is a 2014 second-round pick out of Brophy College Preparatory in Phoenix. He went 7-8 with a 3.81 ERA and 142 strikeouts in 167 2/3 innings last season at Class A Advanced Modesto against older competition in the California League.

Howard, who turns 24 on March 5, was drafted a round after Castellani out of Georgia Southern. Howard went 9-9 with a 3.35 ERA, and fanned 140 in 156 innings.

In the latest ranking of top 30 Rockies prospects by MLBpipeline.com, Castellani was No. 12 and Howard was 20th.

While non-roster invitations give the Rockies a chance to look at highly touted prospects before the Minor League season, this group also includes players who could help the big squad beginning on Opening Day -- especially pitchers.

Lefty Kyle Freeland, the No. 8 overall pick in 2014, is considered a prime prospect for a spot in the Major League rotation. He was ranked as the Rockies' 7th-best prospect.

It will be Freeland's second Major League camp. A Denver native, Freeland appeared in two games (one start) last spring and posted a 3.52 ERA with four strikeouts and nine hits allowed in 7 2/3 innings before spending the season with Double-A Hartford and Triple-A Albuquerque (11-10, 3.89 ERA, 108 strikeouts in 162 innings).
Three others who could be close to their Major League debuts are making second camp appearances:

• Left-handed-hitting corner-infield prospect Ryan McMahon, 22, hit .242 with 12 home runs and 75 RBIs at Hartford and appeared in the Arizona Fall League.

• Lefty starter Harrison Musgrave was in big league camp last year, and spent the year at Hartford and Albuquerque (combined 13-8 with a 3.64 ERA in 25 starts)

• Lefty-hitting outfielder Michael Tauchman hit .286 last year at Albuquerque in his first Triple-A season.
Righty reliever James Farris, obtained from the Cubs on Wednesday for right-hander Eddie Butler, also received an invite.
First baseman outfielder Stephen Cardullo and infielder/outfielder Rafael Ynoa will be in camp this year after making Major League appearances last year.
Todd Helton has been on my mind.

That’s due, in part, because the Rockies’ former star first baseman is back in baseball. He recently joined his alma mater, the University of Tennessee, as a director of player development for the baseball team.

But mostly, I miss him.

I leave for spring training in a week and I’ll soon be roaming the Rockies clubhouse in search of stories, quotes and personalities. And nobody I’ve covered in baseball had a bigger, more complex, more maddening personality than No. 17.

Fans and TV viewers would look at Helton and see an all-American athlete — albeit a smart alec one — who on camera could be calculatingly boring. But behind the scenes, Helton was something else again. He was smart, incredibly candid (at least off the record), fun-loving, and sometimes very, very grouchy.

I once wrote that Helton was “as irascible as an old grizzly.” That afternoon, he came up to me and said, “What the (heck) does irascible mean? What kind of word is that for a sportswriter?” He knew darn well what it meant, but he just wanted to bust my chops.

Helton loved to make people uncomfortable, just to see how they would react. I would approach him in the clubhouse and he’d be sitting there wearing only a towel. He’d stand up and say, “Come on, give me a big hug.” I’d turn red, the rest of the players would laugh and Helton’s face would break into his good ol’ boy Tennessee grin.

I distinctly remember my first spring training in Tucson in 2006. I was just getting to know Helton and was trying to pin him down for an interview. I walked clear across the outfield at Hi Corbett Field trying to get something of use from him. He toyed with me. I got nothing. I walked back across the field, dejected. Jay Alves, then the Rockies head of media relations, saw me, laughed and said, “You look like the loneliest man in the world.”
But over the years, Helton more than made it up to me. Once during spring training, I brought my wife, Nancy, down to the field to watch batting practice. She met Matt Holliday and posed for a photo with Troy Tulowitzki. Both of them were nice and thoughtful, but Helton was, well, Helton.

“You’re married to him?” he asked Nancy, looking at me with incredulity. “Come here, you need a hug.”

After taking a turn in the batting cage, Helton came back, looked at me again, then asked Nancy: “You have to go home with him? Come here, you need another hug.”

Nancy loved it. Helton made her feel special.

My critics, of which I have more than a few, say I don’t utilize sabermetrics often enough in my writing. I should, they say, sprinkle a few more terms such as BABIP, ERA+, WHIP and WAR into my writing. They may be right, although many of my readers would get bored and glassy-eyed if I did so.

Besides, I got into sports writing to write about people more than statistics.

So, as I head to sunny Scottsdale, Ariz. next week, I’ll be hunting for more than raw numbers. I’ll be searching for stories and personalities, and missing No. 17.
Rockies to split time behind the plate between Tony Wolters and Tom Murphy
Could we be in store for another Catcher Wars this season?

By Adam Peterson / Purple Row | @playerTBNL | February 6, 2017, 9:00am MST

Take a stroll down memory lane with me for a moment. The year is 2009, and the great Catcher Wars are raging. Whether you were on the side of incumbent Yorvit Torrealba or the rising newcomer Chris Iannetta seemed to say more about you as a person than it did as an analyst, that is, depending on who you were disagreeing with on which should be the primary catcher. The debate ended when Torrealba left before the 2010 season, but it was an uneasy peace.

We could have another iteration of Catcher Wars on our hands, as the Rockies are set to break camp with two very talented yet very different catchers ready to split time as the primary catchers in 2017.

The Starter(s)

Gone (to the relief of many) is Nick Hundley. Despite the protestations of some, there is no Matt Wieters walking through that door. Instead, Tony Wolters and Tom Murphy (No. 6 PuRP) stand as the tandem ready to serve as the everyday catchers.

The story of Tony Wolters on the Rockies is pretty fantastic. Claimed off waivers from the Cleveland Indians right around the start of spring training in 2016, Wolters suprised many when he hit well enough to earn a spot on the Opening Day roster. While he struggled to hit in the early season (he was hitting .179/.289/231 on May 27), his defensive abilities were turning heads. He finished in the top ten in Baseball Prospectus' all-encompassing catching metrics, despite having fewer than half, or even a third, of the opportunities as other catchers on the list.

Tom Murphy took a more conventional route. Drafted in the third round in the 2012 Amateur Draft, Murphy has been high on the PuRPs lists for some time and he was expected to take over the back-up job out of spring training last year. But an anemic spring performance kept him off the roster, then some time on the disabled list only kept him far from The Show. His inability to avoid the strikeout (24% in Triple-A) made it difficult if the approach would ever catch up with the talent at the plate.

Then, in July, both players’ bats turned it on. For the rest of the season Wolters hit a Cargoian .307/.353/.496, though in just 44 games. Murphy went on an offensive tear, hitting .540/.586/1.079 in July for the Albuquerque Isotopes and
eventually earning a September call up. Both proved that they have the ability to add positive contributions to the team, and, since Wolters hits lefty and Murphy hits righty, they would make quite the duo for a catcher platoon.

Of course, there is no small amount of risk involved with this move. These two players have started a combined 78 games behind the plate in the major leagues and both have serious question marks surrounding whether they can bear a full load behind the plate going forward. This seems to be the plan the Rockies are going with in 2017 and the possibility of a high reward, whether based on Wolters’ defense or Murphy’s power (why not both?), makes it worth rolling the dice.

The major question going into spring training is how will new manager Bud Black split up their time behind the plate: by favoring the right-handed slugger, or the left-handed defensive wunderkind? And how will the Purple Row community react?

**Depth Options**

If Wolters and Murphy do end up with something resembling a 50/50 split in playing time, there won’t be much need for a “backup catcher” in Denver. But due to the inexperience of both players, as well as Tom Murphy’s injury history, it will behoove the Rockies to maintain quality depth.

Drafted in 2009 in the 19th round, Dustin Garneau has been over-matched in the box at the big league level: his .196/.258/.326 line in 151 plate appearances over the last two seasons is enough for a 47 OPS+. Dustin Garneau remains on the 40-man roster, but it is likely that he will spend the season at Triple-A Albuquerque.

**On the Farm**

The Rockies have one more highly touted prospect waiting in the wings. Dom Nunez (No. 14 PuRP) gained a lot of attention after a big .282/.373/.448 season in Low-A Asheville in 2015. He spent last year with the Modesto Nuts and, though he received great votes of confidence throughout the organization for his defensive skill and maturity, he hit just .241/.321/.362 in 105 games. He will likely continue moving up the organizational ladder, but with the major league catcher position being manned by a two-headed monster of talent, don’t expect the Rockies to press the bat to catch up with the glove.
If Catastrophe strikes

If Wolters or Murphy go on the disabled list, Garneau will slot in nicely as a back up. However, if either of them go out long term the Rockies will be facing a catastrophe.

Anthony Benboom in Triple-A has spent the past five years in the Angels organization, widely considered one of the worst farms in baseball, and was left unprotected in the minor league portion of the Rule 5 draft. His .233/.297/.339 line does not inspire confidence that he would be able to contribute at the major league level. Jan Vazquez, also likely slated for AAAABQ, spent 2014 in independent baseball as spent most of last season hitting .230/.335/.309 for the Double-A Yard Goats.

In short, if catastrophe strikes, the Rockies may be forced to bring in someone from outside the organization in order to play catcher.
The ground that sabermetrics broke wasn’t about newfangled statistics for matters nobody previously thought important. Instead, it was in providing evidence and language to things always thought significant, but without a way to show or express why. Take, for example, pitch framing. Catchers have been doing it for decades, but only recently have baseball watchers and analysts managed to capture its effects. Framing metrics didn’t invent framing (though they might have consigned the advantages of framing into irrelevance). A couple new statistics found at Baseball Prospectus continue the tradition of giving shape to what everyone knows is there; they help pin down each pitcher’s ability to control and command his pitches.

Two strike-oriented metrics do this: Called Strike Probability (CS Prob) and Called Strikes Above Average (CSAA). CS Prob deals mostly in control—the ability to throw strikes—as it estimates the likelihood for each of given pitcher’s pitches to be called a strike. Rather than working from the rulebook definition of the strike zone, CS Prob “reflects what [the strike zone] is: a set of probabilities that depends on batter and pitcher handedness, pitch location, pitch type, and count.” In other words, A pitcher with a high CS Prob has good control because the ball is usually somewhere in the de facto strike zone. Notably, that in itself is not a good thing. Batting practice pitchers probably have phenomenal CS Prob ratings.

The aim of CSAA is to capture command—locating pitches without making them hittable—by identifying “the additional called strikes created by the pitcher.” The premise is that staying away from the heart of the plate and grabbing extra strikes from the edges of the strike zone demonstrates command of pitches. This should sound like pitch framing, because CSAA was initially developed to measure just that. As opposed to CS Prob, which accounts for all pitches, CSAA only considers pitches taken, when the umpire has to level a judgment.

What do these statistics say about the four Rockies’ starters—Jon Gray, Tyler Anderson, Chad Bettis, and Tyler Chatwood—who logged more than 100 innings in 2016 and, mother earth willing, will do so again in 2017? Great question! It’s almost as if you’re here to read about the Rockies. Let’s find out.

_Jon Gray_
Gray’s CS Prob in 2016 was 48.2 percent and his CSAA was -1.62 percent. For context, the season’s high man in CS Prob was Bartolo Colón at 52.2 percent, and Wily Peralta was the low one with 41.5 percent CS Prob. There was about ten percentage points of difference between the high and low, and Gray finds himself more toward the high. Note that I’m not referring to these figures as “best” and “worst.” It’s not entirely clear what the marks mean.

Gray’s CSAA, however, is in the negative, which is something to note. Not only did Gray not add a lot of strikes around the edges of the strike zone, but his CSAA was the fourth lowest mark in baseball in 2016 (Jimmy Nelson’s -2.79% was the lowest). But again, “low” does not mean “bad” here. Gray’s not the type of pitcher who needs to locate his pitches at the edges, and that’s on account of his ability to get batters to swing at his slider, which isn’t designed to nibble. His stuff is good enough that he doesn’t need to command the edges of the zone and gain extra strikes there. That doesn’t necessarily mean he can’t. It just means that’s not the type of pitcher he is right now.

It’s also useful to see who Gray was like in 2016—who else had a pretty high CS Prob and a truly low CSAA? Gray’s closest comparison from 2016 is White Sox lefty Carlos Rodon. Rodon’s CS Prob was 48.3 percent and his CSAA -1.55 percent. Gray and Rodon also threw almost the exact same number of pitches and otherwise had similar seasons. They’re also two young starters with excellent pedigrees. For Gray and for Rodon, high control and negligent command around the edges works.

**Tyler Anderson**

Left-handed rookie Anderson posted the highest CS Prob of the four pitchers examined here, as well as the highest CSAA. The high CS Prob was 48.5 percent, a touch higher than Gray’s, but his CSAA was 1.29 percent. This is a profile of someone who exhibits control as well as command. Anderson doesn’t have the powerful arsenal Gray does, so he needs those extra strikes at the edges of the zone, and he was able to get them in 2016.

Of the 144 pitchers who threw at least 100 innings in 2016, Anderson’s CSAA is sixteenth highest in baseball. Because of the type of pitcher Anderson is, we can conclude that he demonstrated “good” command and that it benefitted him. Notably, however, it’s hard to find another pitcher with this combination of high control and high command. Among the 15 pitchers with a higher CSAA than Anderson, only Aaron Nola (1.8 percent CSAA) had a CS Prob within one percentage point of Anderson (48.1 percent to Anderson’s 48.5).
It could be telling that two young pitchers, Nola and Anderson, are somewhat distinct with their high CSAA coupled with a high CS Prob, whereas most of the other pitchers with a high CSAA have a much lower CS Prob are veterans, such as Zack Greinke, Jon Lester, and Justin Verlander. Twenty-four-year-old Zach Davies is the exception that at least supports the rule, as he led baseball with a 3.5 percent CSAA and had an extremely low 42.8 percent CS Prob.

In other words, when looking for Anderson’s maturation and improvement as a pitcher, look for him to throw fewer probable strikes and to earn more strikes from edges.

**Chad Bettis**

Bettis’s combination of control and command strikes me as a quality one that demonstrates a mature approach to getting batters out. Bettis’s CS Prob was 44.3 percent in 2016 and his CSAA 1.14 percent. His CS Prob ranked 121 out of 144 pitchers with at least 100 innings pitched, but his CSAA ranked 26th. This profile—CS Prob closer to the bottom and CSAA closer to the top—represents what Anderson might advance toward, though Bettis probably has less potential overall than Anderson does.

It’s tough to identify a comparison for Bettis. For CS Prob, he sits just below Wei-yin Chen and just above Madison Bumgarner; for CSAA, he’s just below Michael Pineda and above Patrick Corbin. The closest overall, however, is probably Ubaldo Jiménez, who had a 1.2 percent CSAA and a 45 percent CS Prob in 2016.

**Tyler Chatwood**

Chatwood is different from all of the others because he showed low control, 43.3 percent of his pitches were probable strikes, without a lot of command in the gray parts of the zone, evident in his 0.58 percent CSAA. The closest comparisons to Chatwood are not terribly enticing either: James Shields posted a similar 42.3 CS Prob with a 0.58 CSAA, and Yovani Gallardo had a 43.8 percent CS Prob and a 0.69 percent CSAA. Both Shields and Gallardo also posted below replacement level seasons in 2016.

But Chatwood didn’t post a below replacement level season. In fact, he put up 2.2 WARP, according to Baseball Prospectus. Chatwood has long been a tough nut to crack because he’s had some success while walking a lot of batters, giving up a ton of contact, and not striking very many guys out. He should turn into a pumpkin, but he hasn’t. CS Prob and CSAA may not get us closer to understanding Chatwood because the answer will probably be found in pitch movement.
instead of strike probability. These statistics won’t help, but **Baseball Prospectus’s other new analytical toys based in tunneling** just might (but that’s a topic for another article).

**What now**

We undeniably know more now about these four pitchers than we did before, even if, following sabermetric tradition, it’s primarily a matter of hanging concrete evidence on the peg of presumptive knowledge. Gray doesn’t piddle with the edges of the strike zone because he doesn’t really need to, but Anderson does. Bettis has learned a formula that works well for him. Chatwood is still mysterious.

The next step is for enterprising minds to use these figures and identify metrics that capture command, control, or both. As the four pitchers analyzed here who only have a team in common demonstrate, it’s not a matter of looking at the top and bottom of a ranking. A single metric would have to account for potential value pulled from high marks as well as low ones (and probably in between). For now, however, it’s enough to keep an eye on probable strikes and commanding the strike zone’s de facto borders, even if what we’re looking for differs for each of these four players.
MLB.com has released its 2017 Fantasy Player Review and Nolan Arenado of the Colorado Rockies has been ranked as one of the top five players in the game.

Arenado came in fifth in MLB.com’s player ranking, behind (in order) Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels, Mookie Betts of the Boston Red Sox, Jose Altuve of the Houston Astros and Kris Bryant of the Chicago Cubs. It continues a trend where Arenado and Bryant are among the best at their position and the debate continues on which one is superior. We talked about their budding rivalry in this article.

Here’s what MLB.com said about Arenado in its rankings…

*Arenado stands out in a deep pool of game-changing sluggers, ranking first among Major Leaguers in RBIs (263) and third in home runs (83) since the outset of 2015. The third baseman has also made strides to become a more well-rounded hitter, posting career-high marks in BB/K ratio (0.7), batting average (.294) and on-base percentage (.362) last year. Looking ahead to ’17, Arenado could use his stellar skills and hitter-friendly home park to deliver another exceptional effort.*

Along with Arenado, several other Rockies were also prominently featured.

**Charlie Blackmon** also finished in MLB.com’s Top 20 rankings, coming in at number 13. Following up on a career year where he earned his first-ever Silver Slugger award, Chuck Nazty is expected to once again be one of baseball’s most feared leadoff hitters.

Behind Blackmon were sophomore shortstop Trevor Story (No. 39 overall) and new Colorado first baseman Ian Desmond (No. 47 overall).

**Jon Gray** was the highest-ranked Colorado pitcher, finishing at number 135. In the bullpen, MLB.com ranked newcomer Greg Holland (No. 339 overall) ahead of Adam Ottavino (No. 378 overall).
Colorado Rockies: 3 Things You Should Know on February 6

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | February 6, 2017

The Atlanta Falcons were this close to being the World Champions. Sigh. It would’ve been another amazing story in a year of amazing sports stories. In a 365-day span where the Chicago Cubs and Cleveland Cavaliers captured world titles, we pose this question … why can’t the Colorado Rockies add their name to the list this fall? We believe it can happen.

Hey, if we’ve learned nothing this season, we’ve learned that there's always hope for a franchise to win its first title (or first title in a century). That should give Colorado fans hope right there.

Whether you were celebrating New England’s comeback win or sobbing into your Matt Ryan jersey, we now have some baseball to think about. And the beauty of it is this … it’s the last next-to-last Monday where you won’t have baseball front and center to think about.

It’s a fair question to ask, and our friends from Call to the Pen took a look at the upcoming battle between Greg Holland and Adam Ottavino for the role in this article. While those two are the leaders, don’t forget that Jake McGee, Carlos Estevez and others will be wanting to take a shot at grabbing the role as well.

It’s a battle to watch … just like these three battles we think you should be watching as Colorado’s spring training opens.

Let’s Go to the Movies with Wild Thing

Speaking of Estevez, he was one of the Colorado players who was tweeting during the Super Bowl. We know one thing, we’re as ready to see the next installment of the “Fast and the Furious” franchise as he is.

Wild Thing, we’ll see you at the movies.

What if…

MLB.com discussed some potential superstars in the making in this video. Among them was Toronto Blue Jays starting pitcher Marcus Stroman, one of the players linked to the Rockies in the offseason in numerous trade rumors involving Charlie Blackmon.
There’s no question that Stroman would look good in purple pinstripes. However, we’re glad Chuck Nazty is still manning the outfield at Coors Field.

By the way, MLB.com, you missed a couple of Colorado players you could’ve highlighted in the video, notably Trevor Story and David Dahl in the field and Tyler Anderson and Jon Gray on the mound. We’ll forgive you, but also hope you’ll come out with some midseason additions to the list when the Rockies are shaking up the National League.
Colorado Rockies History: Jason Jennings or Clint Barmes?

By Kevin Henry / Rox Pile | February 5, 2017

About a month ago, we released our all-time Colorado Rockies 25-man roster. Trust us, it wasn’t easy to whittle the list down to 25 names. We knew we would be leaving some players off and opening ourselves up to debate about who belonged and who should stay in the dugout. You can see the 25 players we picked on our roster by clicking here.

Earlier this week, our sister site at Call to the Pen released its version of the all-time Colorado Rockies 25-man roster. OK, fine. Looks like it’s time we compare notes and see where the differences lie in the two rosters. You can see their version by clicking here.

In all, our two rosters shared 21 of the 25 names. We only differed on four selections. This is the third of four articles that will let you decide which player is more deserving to be on the all-time 25-man roster.

In our first article, we looked behind the plate. Both Call to the Pen and Rox Pile tabbed Chris Iannetta as a catcher who belonged on the 25-man roster. However, after that, we differed. We took Jeff Reed while Call to the Pen selected Wilin Rosario. You can read our different reasonings by clicking here.

For our second article, we headed to the mound to debate another difference of opinion. We took reliever Bruce Ruffin while Call to the Pen selected starter Jason Hammel. Two completely different pitchers who come with completely different credentials. Who would you take? Read our thoughts here.

Today, we look at one of the ultimate decisions every manager must make … do you carry another pitcher on your roster or make sure you have depth at every position? When Call to the Pen made their 25-man roster, they added pitcher Jason Jennings. When we did our selections, we made sure there was a backup at every position so we tabbed Clint Barmes for the roster behind Troy Tulowitzki at shortstop.

So what do you think? Does a pitcher deserve a slot over another position player? Was Jennings more valuable during his time with the Rockies than Barmes? We break down the arguments on the following pages.
Jeff Bridich taking the low-risk, high reward route this offseason

By Andrew Dill / BSN Denver | February 3, 2017

The Colorado Rockies have primarily been a team that stays quiet during the coldest time of year. However, general manager Jeff Bridich has flipped the script over the past few months, putting the Rockies back on the map with notable free agent signings such as Ian Desmond and Greg Holland.

The Rockies, and their fans, agree that the team is in a position to compete not only in the National League, but in the tough NL West as well. Most agree the Rockies have the lineup to beat just about everyone, but when you go up against the likes of the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Francisco Giants, you have to have the starting rotation, bullpen, and depth to match.

The starting rotation improved mightily in 2016, leading to Tyler Anderson getting a Clayton Kershaw comparison from FanGraphs. The 27-year-old had a strong rookie season, posting a 5-6 record with an ERA of 3.54, as well as a WHIP of 1.28. Throw in Jon Gray, Tyler Chatwood, and Chad Bettis to a rotation that's primed to take the Rockies back to the postseason for the first time since 2009.

While the rotation was the least of Colorado’s concerns last season, the bullpen was a glaring hole that needed attention as soon as possible. Twenty-eight blown saves is unacceptable, regardless of injury. Just think, Colorado is potentially vying for a Wild Card spot if the bullpen was in the slightest bit functional.

Insert Mike Dunn and Greg Holland.

Dunn, 31, a left-hander reliever, was the first to touch pen to paper with the Rockies back in December, but the biggest signing of all came in January with Holland.

Holland, 31, suffered a torn ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow during the 2015 season. With that being said, Holland elected to undergo Tommy John surgery, sidelining him for the entire 2016 campaign.

During his tenure with the Kansas City Royals, Holland was an elite closer and feared across the game. In 309 games pitched, Holland collected 145 saves over that time, blowing just 12 of those — good for a 90% save percentage.

While some may fear he isn’t up to par with what he could once do, Colorado took a low-risk gamble on the two-time All-Star to help solidify a bullpen that blew 28 saves the previous year.
Colorado inked Holland to a one-year deal worth $7 million, including a vesting option in 2018 worth $15 million. Drew Creasman, editor of BSNRockies, breaks down the details.

Holland can exercise a $15 million if he reaches 50 appearances and 30 games finished in 2017. If he does both of those things, it will be good both for him and the Rockies. Like Bridich said, this deal is almost perfectly structured to make sure that if Holland never returns to form, the Rockies ultimately liability is covered. But if he returns to being one of the best closers in baseball, he gets paid accordingly.

Bridich is playing his cards right.

Moving on to the depth, which I hit on in a column in January entitled, “Do the Rockies have enough infield depth to cope with injury?”

On that exact column the infield depth was a thing of need for Colorado. After years of struggling to find replacements for Troy Tulowitzki and most recently, Trevor Story, Colorado signed Alexi Amarista to serve as a utility infielder — for cheap.

Though Amarista isn’t close to Story’s production or skill level in any way, shape, or form, Bridich is lining up guys who can play multiple positions — hence the addition of Ian Desmond who signed a five-year, $70 million deal to play first base of all positions.

Here’s the catch.

Colorado brought back first baseman Mark Reynolds on a minor league deal with an invite to Spring Training.

A minor league deal folks. That’s a steal.

Reynolds was solid during his first year as a member of the Rockies, hitting .282 with 24 doubles, 14 home runs, and 54 runs batted in. Say, for instance, someone in the outfield or infield for that matter goes down with an injury that could possibly sideline them for weeks. Desmond can slide into a middle infield position or any three of the outfield spots, leaving the door open for Reynolds to assume the first base role.

No harm, no foul.
Bridich also rolled the dice on former top prospect and All-Star outfielder Dominic Brown, signing him to a minor league deal as well. One thing to keep note of is he did not receive an invite to Spring Training.


His lone All-Star appearance came in 2013 where he hit .272 with 21 doubles, 27 home runs, and 83 RBI. Obviously another low-risk move from Bridich with perhaps a medium/high reward. You never know, Brown could wind up being a left-handed power bat off the bench later in the season if everything works out.

Jeff Bridich’s job is to ensure the Rockies are put in a place to win. Depth has long been an area of concern for Colorado, and Bridich is doing everything in his power to correct it.
Both the Marlins and Pirates have made changes to their outfield alignments this offseason, and the Rockies should follow suit, opines Jim Bowden of ESPN.com. Specifically, the club ought to flip center fielder Charlie Blackmon – who has spent most of his career manning the middle – and left fielder David Dahl, Bowden argues. Blackmon, 30, has been a plus defender in left (three Defensive Runs Saved, 3.2 Ultimate Zone Rating), albeit over only 574 innings, but a negative in center across a 3,126-inning sample size (minus-15 DRS, minus-27.1 UZR). Dahl, meanwhile, drew near-neutral grades (minus-1 DRS, 0.4 UZR) in a combined 481 innings at all three outfield positions in 2016, his rookie campaign. At the time of Dahl’s July promotion to the majors, Baseball America’s Kyle Glaser noted that the 22-year-old possesses “superb defensive skills” and should be the Rockies’ long-term answer in center.
The Rockies won’t be making a move for recently-designated Twins first baseman Byung Ho Park, MLB.com’s Thomas Harding tweets. Colorado made a big splash to sign Ian Desmond to fill its first base need and also recently signed Mark Reynolds to a minor league deal as further positional depth. Barring an injury or an outfielder trade (which would shift Desmond’s role), Park doesn’t seem like a fit for the Rockies.
Looking at this winter’s free-agent market broadly, ESPN.com’s Buster Olney writes (Insider link) that it produced generally poor results from the players’ side. The trend, he and the agents he spoke with suggest, is one of elite players continuing to earn while others are increasingly forced into one-year pacts. That could, in turn, continue to suppress the market for sub-elite players next year, since there’ll again be a larger pool of talent. This certainly seems to be an area that warrants a closer look once the market fully settles out. As of three years ago, the trend had been in favor of multi-year deals as teams competed to land talent on the open market.

Here are some more market notes:

- With southpaws flying off the board, things are “heating up” for Travis Wood, according to ESPN.com’s Jerry Crasnick (via Twitter). It’s possible he’ll choose his landing spot by the end of the weekend, per the report, though it’s still not clear whether he’ll be heading for a rotation or pen spot (let alone where that might be).

- Despite picking up Logan Morrison and Rickie Weeks, the Rays still intend to remain involved on some of the better hitters still available, per Marc Topkin of the Tampa Bay Times (links to Twitter). In particular, slugger Chris Carter and even catcher Matt Wieters seemingly remain of interest to Tampa Bay. Another righty bat, notes Topkin, might step into a platoon in the first base and DH spots. The club could take a look at Byung Ho Park, who was just designated by the Twins, and others under consideration include Mike Napoli and Franklin Gutierrez (who’d spend time in the outfield).

- The Rockies are unlikely to make further additions to their major league roster, MLB.com’s Thomas Harding suggests in response to a fan inquiry. Even if someone like starter Jason Hammel represents a screaming value, Harding hints, the organization may not have the roster or payroll flexibility to give out a MLB deal.