

MLB Winter Meetings

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Colorado Rockies

Bud Black

Press Conference



2024 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS DALLAS

Q. Billy Schmidt has told us that some of the young guys were talking to Carson Palmquist and Chase Dollander and might have a little shot to compete in Spring Training and we'll see what happens. How excited are you about the young starting pitching coming up, the depth it provides you?

BUD BLACK: I think we're getting to that point where the young pitchers in general, both starters and relievers, and we saw a few of the relievers last year, but the young starters that we've drafted relatively high and young starters that have been developing for a couple of years are getting near the Major Leagues, and I think the development part for a lot of these guys is -- I don't want to say coming to a close because you're always developing no matter who you are. Greg Maddux in his last year was still developing, still working.

The development piece for these guys, whether it's mechanics, pitch development, the mental side is getting to the point where beyond thinking that they need more, that they're getting close to the Big Leagues, and that's exciting.

Different types of talent, different stuff, but the exciting part is that I think the talent level and the depth of talent is getting to the point where we feel much better about these guys competing night in, night out against the National League.

Q. Billy mentioned the four catchers going into camp with Austin (indiscernible) on the Minor League deal. It sounds like there's going to be a battle for two spots. Do you see it that way? Is Stallings the incumbent starter?

BUD BLACK: With Jacob we re-signed him. He had a good year last year. He figures to get his starts. We don't know how many. But last year he did a really good job. He did a nice job. He had a really good year. Had a good with year with the balance. Got to know our staff quickly. Did a good job on the defensive side. Had a good all-around year.

Nola adds a piece, a veteran piece. I always liked him from the other side, so he comes in. He'll come into camp, and we'll get to know him. He'll get to know us. There's a comfort level knowing what he's been and what he's done.

Romo, Goodman, Fulford, three young catchers who have been in the Major League camp with us. Goodman and Fulford for a year longer than Romo, but all in their own way I think have shown that they're capable of being Major League catchers.

Those three young guys have some things they have to clean up, but nevertheless they're closer. This winter they each have their own set of goals and things we've put in front of them to handle and work on. They'll continue to work on that into Spring Training.

We feel good about those three guys. For me there's five, right? I'll throw Fulford in there because he had a good year in Double-A, especially the second half. He can catch, so don't discount him. But Goodman with his power and his instincts and his feel, and Romeo, the all-around talent I think is something that we feel good about on the catching side.

Q. Spring will obviously tell us a lot, but could you see a scenario where maybe you're carrying three guys at catcher?

BUD BLACK: Potentially, but I would think not, but you never know. Depending on how the other position player groups look.

Q. How do you feel about your veteran pitchers Freeland (indiscernible) finish out their time here (indiscernible)?

BUD BLACK: I think with 2017 we look back to -- that was a long time ago. Freeland, Marquez, and Senzatela were rookie pitchers. They've all changed in a lot of ways, as you do. You make adjustments. I think those guys have been through -- all of them now have been through different types of injuries, and I think they're ready, again, to get back on the horse and be major contributors, again, as starting pitchers.

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By that I mean durability, go to the post, pitch innings, perform well, keep us in games, and get wins and get team wins when they start games.

Feltner and Gomber, different careers, where they are, but nevertheless I think accomplished Major League starting pitchers. Feltner long ways, the second half. Gomber has been pretty steady in a lot of ways. He's ready to, again, take another step forward in his performance.

Q. What was your reaction yesterday when you heard what Soto signed for?

BUD BLACK: I think I was -- I think we all knew it was going to be a big sum. That's where it was tracking. I think publicly you heard the \$600 million figure, thereabouts, 12, 13 years, whatever. The over 700 was I think at the moment a little alarming when I first heard it. Right then I saw the number of years, but again, I think as I sat back and looked at it, the free market system was in play, right?

Very talented player with very strong-willed, competitive organizations going for him. That's what happens.

Q. Ryan Feltner is a pitcher that he really intrigues me seeing what he did in the last two months of last year.

BUD BLACK: Last 15 starts. Right?

Q. What's the next step for him beyond what he showed us?

BUD BLACK: Well, I think the entire year of consistent performance, right? Are there going to be a few hiccups in there? Everybody has them, even the good ones.

30-plus starts. Innings pitched, E.R.A., which is viewed a little bit differently in our park, but still a level of pitching performance from April to the end of the season. That's the next step.

And he showed it in a real big sample. Like I said, those last 15 starts, you know, he was -- again, I think the same guy was in there early in the year, but you could tell the confidence and a little bit of the, for lack of a better term, the mental tiger came out, right? A little bit of a mental tiger came out that was really good to see. I was impressed.

Q. Do you think he's slayed, so to speak, his demons a little bit?

BUD BLACK: He showed it. He showed it for me in some of the big inning stuff we talked about. Late in the year we

didn't see it. He got through innings. He got through innings where there was crisis. He got through all lineups, all teams. There was a big hurdle. There was a big hurdle that he cleared. Proud of him. So are the guys. Teammates were impressed. Obviously those of us who are around him every day were really impressed by how he did.

Q. Do you feel that Gomber getting through a season, showing some durability, pitching well over the six-month period, maybe that was a hurdle for him to --

BUD BLACK: The hurdle for him was to finish the season and make his start. The previous two years at the end with the back injury, I think he has that figured out in his offseason programs, which is something that he took to heart, something he worked really hard on last offseason. He's going to do the same this year.

It's a big year for him. Every year is a big year for players, but I think he's now matured. I think he knows who he is, and I think he knows his style and how he gets his outs and how he works through innings and lineups. That's comforting.

He's still pushing. He's still -- like I said, as far as the younger pitchers in our program, so is Gomber. I think he truly knows what he needs to do, and he's quick to make adjustments in-game because he knows his delivery. He knows his stuff. Knows his body. He's in a good spot.

Q. You were talking on MLB Network that you expect the veteran slugger to be Kris Bryant this season. Talk to me about how you plan to utilize him this upcoming year.

BUD BLACK: Well, you're right. For us to go offensively, you need everybody, but there are certain players who have talent that need to do what they're capable of doing. Kris has been hampered by injuries. He's been hampered by a number of couple of things physically that have kept him from being Kris Bryant. So we need him to do that.

I envision him just strategically lineup-wise to primarily get probably most of his at-bats as a designated hitter. I see him in the outfield. In right field specifically. I see him potentially a little bit at first base.

But we have a slew of young outfielders. A slew of them. They're going to get an opportunity. I'm counting Nolan Jones in there too. I'll count Sammy Hilliard in there too at age 30. We have a slew of outfielders, and Billy has talked about the young guys.

But we need Bryant to be Kris Bryant, and he still is in our

opinion very capable of that, and he'll be the first guy to tell you he is very capable.

Now, the proof will be in the pudding once we get going, but he's having a great winter so far. Again, he's very adamant about this offseason conditioning program. He's staying on top of that. Routine checks with our medical staff, our training staff. I talked to him about ten days ago. He's in a good spot.

Q. Two questions about your first series. First of all, what do you think about the situation of you'll be the first team to play an outdoor game in Florida? Minor League, Spring Training stadium.

BUD BLACK: I've thought about it, but I haven't thought about it a lot. I know that the Rays and MLB will do everything in their power to make it feel as though it's a Major League -- it will be a Major League game.

I haven't been to this facility. I haven't, so I don't know. I've seen it on TV. Just from what I've seen visually through TV, it's a nice ballpark. Like I said, as far as the clubhouses, how it's run, all the things outside of the game itself, they're going to be up to Major League specifications.

I've never been there. Will it be cozy, intimate? I don't know.

Q. Same dimensions at Yankee Stadium, so your lefty hitters should like it.

BUD BLACK: Yes. We've got a few of those. Yes. Sam. We got some. The playing surface is going to be great, but I think baseball has done this before, whether during COVID with Toronto, games in Puerto Rico, games in Mexico, games in the Far East. We make it work.

For us it's going to be three games. For Tampa it's going to be 81? So they're the ones who I think have to work the adjustment. It will be a nice little diversion from the Trop. In a good way. It is.

Q. Just as a quick follow-up, do you have any compassion for them?

BUD BLACK: Yes.

Q. You want to beat them, but...

BUD BLACK: Yeah, I mean, yeah, obviously it was tragic what happened to the Trop, but, you know, life stuff happens, and you move on. I know that everybody is going to put their best foot forward to get this done the right way. I don't have any apprehension about this not going

well. I think it's going to be fine.

Q. When you first came you saw pitching that was better than people thought as far as the young guys coming through. Do you feel like you are at a point where especially with the young guys coming and who you have coming back that maybe your starting pitching is better than people think?

BUD BLACK: Yeah. When I first got here, we didn't know about those guys and how they were going to do, but they stepped up and did a great job. Now I think we're to that point where we feel better about the group.

Knowing these guys a little bit like I do, whether it's Gabriel Hughes, Dollander, Palmquist, Sullivan, and the relievers, the talent level has risen, so that's encouraging. That's the encouraging part about this.

Q. Billy mentioned Tyler Kinley obviously has closer experience, but the young guys, Vodnik, Zach Agnos, you see there being any battle there?

BUD BLACK: Oh, yeah, for sure. Yeah, there is -- I think that's the thing that stands out for me is the competition amongst I would say the -- a couple of things. The bullpen competition is going to be fierce. It's going to be fierce. The outfield competition is going to be fierce.

When you talk about Veen, Fernandez, I mean, Benny Montgomery will be at camp. He will probably more likely go back to the minors. Fernandez, Beck, Jones. You know, these are guys that are trying to put their -- again, put their best foot forward.

But the relievers as far as our dedicated closer just yet, we don't know. I thought Halvorsen did a nice job. There were a couple of slip-ups, but I have the memory of him striking out Max Muncy with the bases loaded in Dodger Stadium for a save. I also have memories of the next night too, but you learn from that.

I like the stuff, and I like what our player development people have said about him.

Victor, you know, Victor got some saves. Victor has a good arm. I remember the check swing, no check swing to Oscar Hernández. These are things that closers are built on. Agnos, haven't seen him. Can't wait to see him. I hear great things. Jaden Hill, Peralta (indiscernible) Jimmy Herget, Tyler Kinley, Justin Lawrence. It's a better group. It's better. It's a better group.

Q. You said I get Kyle Karros at camp as well?

BUD BLACK: I think he's coming. Most Valuable Player of the Northwest League. It's like winning your conference championship in football. It's an automatic invite when you're league MVP.

Q. We've talked a lot about pitching this afternoon. Beyond cutting down the strikeouts and the chase offensively, beyond that because we talked about it --

BUD BLACK: Other clubs are talking about that too.

Q. Exactly. What would you like to see the offense do in 2025 beyond --

BUD BLACK: Those two things?

Q. Yeah.

BUD BLACK: It sort of goes hand in hand a little bit, but I think I would like to think that we can push the envelope a little bit more in the bases. I think we run the bases well. I think we run better.

I would like to see us try to steal more, but again, that's a little scoreboard-dependent. Last year it was a little bit difficult. I like to push it more there if possible, but again, it's going to depend on the personnel.

Of the traditional stats on-base percentage, that goes hand in hand with a little bit of the chase and the strikeouts. Situational hitting, 30 teams talk about it. Being more proficient, improve our rate there. Men on third less than two, getting guys over. Moving guys along. That's probably the meat and potatoes of every team.

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