



COLORADO ROCKIES

Farm Report

MAY 2012



McCormick Field - Asheville, NC

Photo courtesy of Matthew Muzia

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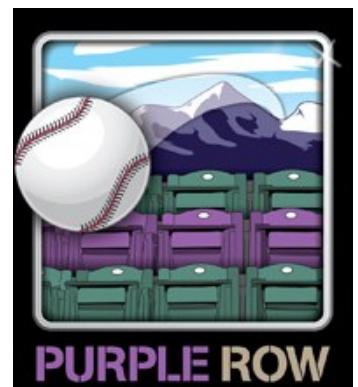
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**SB NATION
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Introduction

After the *Rocky Mountain News* published their final issue in May 2009, beat writers Tracy Ringolsby, Jack Etkin, and Steve Foster created [Inside The Rockies](#), an independent and fan supported hub for Rockies coverage.

That site's monthly Farm Reports (distributed via email to financial supporters of the site) were a treasure trove for Rockies fans who intensely followed the farm system. Filled with player interviews, feature articles, and feedback from scouts and coaches, these Farm Reports gave unprecedented access inside Colorado's minor leagues.

Unfortunately, that experiment came to an end in December 2011 as Inside The Rockies updated for the final time. With it, the prized Farm Reports also ceased, forever closing this vital window to the minors.

With so many former Rockies regulars traded this past season, there is a new emphasis on the farm system and on the prospects within the Rockies organization. Yet at a time when the Colorado farm system has once again become a priority, there is a disheartening lack of coverage surrounding the system.

With this mindset, Andrew Fisher of [Purple Row](#) and Matthew Muzia of [SB Nation Denver](#) have decided to carry on the torch, still lit by the embers of those ITR farm reports. This issue, the first of (hopefully) many in the series, will strive to bring you high quality content including interviews, insider information, and players to watch.

This is a labor of love. All of the content created in here is based on contributions from the Purple Row community and will be provided completely free. You can look for it during the first week of every month during the baseball season.

We hope that you enjoy it!

—Andrew T. Fisher and Matthew Muzia

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Matzek and Friedrich Provide Hope

By Andrew T. Fisher

It was good to be a Rockies fan two years ago. Built from a strong core, Colorado had just completed a season with 92 wins, a franchise record. The farm looked rosy as well, as the Rockies were the owners of arguably the best duo of lefty starting pitching prospects in the game. Tyler Matzek and Christian Friedrich ranked 1st and 2nd in the entire system, 22nd and 33rd league-wide, according to Baseball America. Two years later, neither southpaw even sniffed Baseball America's top 10 prospects.

Tyler Matzek had a disastrous 2011, getting demoted and sent across the country to Asheville after taking a four week leave of absence due to completely losing his mechanics and control. Meanwhile, in the middle of the continent, Christian Friedrich posted an ERA over 5.00 in AA Tulsa - for the second straight year.

Both southpaws have been left for dead by many, but April 2012 saw both former 1st round picks hurdling back into relevance. Tyler Matzek seems to be back to his 2010 form at Asheville, battling moderate wildness while striking out batters with ease. Almost as importantly, his velocity is back.

Modesto Nuts radio play-by-play man Alex Margulies told Purple Row "Matzek's velocity has been ...from the mid-to high 80's, sitting mostly in the 90-93 range, occasionally topping 94 and as high as 95mph."

Matzek's velocity has been ...from the mid-to high 80's, sitting mostly in the 90-93 range, occasionally topping 94 and as high as 95mph.

- Alex Margulies

After struggling to consistently pitch in the 90's last season, the repeated velocity around 92 is very important for Matzek. [As Nathaniel Stoltz recently wrote for Beyond the Box Score](#), left-handed starters with a fastball averaging 92mph or more tend to be very successful.

His erratic mechanics have found a groove as well. "Darryl Scott (pitching coach) and Lenn Sakata (manager) have told me his mechanics are much improved, and more consistent than last year," said Margulies. "He hasn't had great defense behind him in any of his starts, and he really hasn't let it bother him so far."



Friedrich at Spring Training 2012— courtesy of Charlie Drysdale

That mental aspect of Matzek's game might be the most difficult to project, yet also the most important. "Scott has told me that he sees big improvements both on the mound and from the mental side this season. He thinks he's more open minded and confident, putting less pressure on himself - with more realistic expectations put on himself," Margulies said. "Scott still thinks that Tyler will end up in the big leagues, and has the stuff and makeup to be successful."

Christian Friedrich's April has been even more encouraging. His first three starts were utterly dominant, with one poor inning mixed in. After a hamstring injury shelved him for nearly two weeks, he returned to the mound Sunday and allowed two runs on four hits in five innings.

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Through four starts, Friedrich is walking fewer batters than he has in his pro career, posting peripherals he hasn't produced since 2008 in Asheville.

"I put myself in a good position mentally and physically this off season and I wanted to make sure I stay the course," Friedrich told Purple Row. "My focus has been to stay aggressive. Throwing inside more often has opened up a lot more doors. The first three outings the defense was outstanding. It's fun to have these guys playing behind me."

I put myself in a good position mentally and physically this off season and I wanted to make sure I stay the course. My focus has been to stay aggressive. Throwing inside more often has opened up a lot more doors.

- Christian Friedrich

After throwing primarily to Wilin Rosario the past two years in Tulsa, whose receiving skills remain a work in progress, Friedrich has also enjoyed throwing to a veteran backstop. "So far one of the better relationships I've created is with one of our catchers Wil Nieves. I might have shaken him off 4 times in 260 pitches."

Naturally, veteran pitchers are also a help to young pitchers. "Talking to (Jamie) Moyer was one of my highlights. He is one of the nicest guys I've come

across, he will answer any question you have and add things you should have asked. (We shared) some of the best conversations in baseball I've ever had."

Even when Friedrich was going well as a prospect, there were doubts about how his curveball would play at altitude. Now that he is pitching there for the first time, it appears Friedrich has the proper attitude.

"[After only] one start in [Colorado] Springs and a few bullpens, I haven't noticed too much of a difference with the curve. If it doesn't break the way I'm used to it's my fault, not the altitude."

One month into the season, Christian Friedrich finds himself a leading candidate (likely slightly behind Alex White) to replace Jhoulys Chacin in the Rockies rotation, who was optioned to AAA May 2. That statement would have been unfathomable four weeks ago, as Friedrich opened 2012 around 12th on the rotation depth chart. But a strong spring training followed by a stand-out 5-start stretch to debut at Colorado Springs has gotten him noticed.

Neither Matzek nor Friedrich has guaranteed themselves anything with their recent past. As first-round picks who have fallen out of favor, it is impossible to count past accomplishments as assurances of anything. Both have provided fans, and more importantly, the organization, a reason to pay attention again.

	GS	W-L	ERA	FIP	WHIP	BABIP	GB%	BB/9	K/9
Christian Friedrich	4	2-1	2.59	2.94	0.82	.242	50%	1.48	7.77
Tyler Matzek	5	1-3	3.28	3.71	1.58	.361	49%	5.84	11.68

Trevor Story's Opening Act

By Andrew T. Fisher

With third base in turmoil at the big league level, Nolan Arenado has become a popular name even among casual Rockies fans. Just twenty-four months ago, Arenado was 19 years old, biding his time in extended spring training. He didn't even debut in A-ball until May 21, 2010.

The ascension of Arenado from relatively obscure 2nd round pick to arguably the top third base prospect in the minors is the backdrop for appreciating the white-hot April that 2011 45th-overall pick Trevor Story just put up.

Whereas Arenado's debut was delayed until late May, Story was in the Opening Day line-up for Asheville. He started hitting seventh, but with consistent production and a mature approach, manager Joe Mikulik has already put Story in the two-hole.

"It's such a privilege to play for 'Mik,' he's definitely a players' manager," Story told Purple Row. "He brings just as much energy and excitement to the field everyday as we do and that really is something special when you see that in your manager."

Joe Mikulik has had the pleasure of seeing every day the scorching April Story produced, which simply cannot be missed in his statistics. Story currently ranks sixth in the entire South Atlantic League in OPS and third in home runs, this despite being more than two years younger than the average Sally League player. The age difference impresses arguably more than the statistics, but it means nothing to Story himself.

"I really have never thought about (the age difference). I just try to go out every day and play the game regardless of age."

Naturally, defense is a part of the game though as well. Whereas Arenado was very rough defensively at third and expected to move to first base while in Asheville, Story has performed well defensively at a far more vital position – shortstop.

"His arm is very strong for being just 19 years old. He can make a strong throw to first from deep in the hole at short. I have seen him do that a few times this year already," Tourists play-by-play man Doug Maurer told SBNation Denver. "His range is pretty good and he is very capable with the glove, especially with the back-hand."

The intangibles part of his game has received high praise as well. "I believe he has the tools to develop into an excellent defensive player if he continues to work hard," Maurer said. "His IQ of the game seems to be very high for his age. He makes the right decisions and is in the right spot a lot."

Much like Arenado, the six inches between the ears appear to be quite the asset with Story, just another aspect that would suggest Story will be a future attendee at "Camp Tulo."

[Story's] IQ of the game seems to be very high for his age. He makes the right decisions and is in the right spot a lot.

–Doug Maurer

"(Spring Training) was very exciting...to be around the big league club and see all of the big leaguers was pretty special," Story told Purple Row, indicating he must have been around Jim Tracy as well. "I got to hang out with Tulo a couple days. He shared some of his drills and baseball knowledge with me that I definitely remember and put to use."

Consider that Trevor Story was sitting in a high school class one year ago. "This past year has flown by. It seems so long ago when I was in high school," said Story. "This past year has also matured me and taught me how to deal with the difficulties of pro ball."

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Growth is inevitable mentally at this stage of his career, but at just nineteen years old, there is certainly potential for physical growth as well before he reaches the big leagues. He might tighten up his defense and arrive as a shortstop, pushing Troy Tulowitzki to third base. He might slide over to second base, bulk up enough to find a home at third base or even fill out enough for right field.

I just try to get in hitters' counts as much as possible and try not to miss my pitch when I get it."

—Trevor Story

That isn't on Story's mind at the moment. As he told Purple Row last August, "I'm not thinking about changing positions. Wherever the Rockies feel that I will contribute the most is where I will play, whether it be shortstop, second base or third."

On the field, the all-around game Story possesses is what has scouts salivating. The 19-year-old has a strong presence of all five tools, though it remains to be seen if any develop into true plus tools. Arguably his weakest of those tools is, ironically, his power. At the end of April, he was the only hitter in the entire Rockies' organization with five home runs, and only two of them came with the short porch at McCormick Field. Before the season, scouts projected him to hit double digits in longballs at the major league level. Again, that's arguably his weakest tool.

The surge in power is not a result of him focusing on that part of his game, however. In fact, the only specific skill Story hopes to improve this season is basestealing.

So while the short walls at McCormick Field would be tempting to any hitter, Story and his teammates use it as motivation of another kind.

"Our left-handed hitters see that short wall in right field. We try to play pepper with that wall, and it helps (us right-handed hitters) with our opposite-field approach." That approach will serve him well, as well as his general idea of hitting: "I just try to get in hitters' counts as much as possible and try not to miss my pitch when I get it."

After just 47 games of his professional career in 2011, Trevor Story was ranked the Rockies' #4 prospect by MinorLeagueBall's John Sickels, #6 by Baseball America and #8 by Baseball Prospectus. His stock has risen since, and the potentially crippling sound of the hype machine could reach deafening levels. How a player handles the whispers, fawning and praise around him can be just as important as his ability to hit a curveball.

"I personally try to avoid it, but it does get brought to my attention sometimes," said Story. "I don't think you can get too caught up in that as a player. Then I think you start to put unwanted pressure on yourself."

There is no guarantee that Trevor Story will follow the path of Nolan Arenado to such prominence, but Story's April compares extremely favorably to the debut season of today's prized gem of the farm.

After Nolan Arenado's 2010 season, he was rated the system's #3 prospect by both Baseball America and Baseball Prospectus, as well as being ranked Baseball America's #80 overall prospect.

Should Story continue his torrid start, he will receive even more accolades than Arenado did two years ago. That would mean two Rockies draft picks outside the first round in the last three years to reach top 100 overall prospect status before his 20th birthday.

	PA	AB	AVG	OBP	SLG	ISO	HR	BB%	K%	BABIP	wRC+
Trevor Story	97	81	0.271	.381	.543	.272	5	13.4%	20.6%	0.304	157
Nolan Arenado 2010	398	372	0.309	0.337	0.552	0.213	12	4.5%	13.1%	0.334	135



Q&A With Doug Maurer, Voice of the Asheville Tourists

Doug Maurer, Director of Broadcasting for the Asheville Tourists, talks about this season's Asheville Tourists.

Vianney Mayo was the Opening Day starter for Asheville. Can you give us a scouting report?

I believe Mayo has two very nice pitches. His fastball and curve-ball. The fastball registers around 91-94 mph and he can keep it low in the zone and also paint the corners pretty well. His breaking ball can also be effective at times. The sweeping curve is really effective against right handed hitters. Comes in around 70-74 mph. His change-up needs a little work. He can have trouble locating the change at times. The more I see Mayo pitch, the more I like him. He is developing with each start and he really attacks hitters. He has a live arm and again he is very dangerous when he throws his breaking ball for strikes.

Rosell Herrera is another highly regarded infield prospect, even with his slow start in Asheville. What are your general impressions of Herrera?

My general impression of Herrera is that he is raw, but he is only 19 years old. He has split time this year between short-stop and third base. I believe he has a better feel defensively for short. I think Herrera is still growing into his 6'3 frame and can look a bit unorthodox at times, both in the field and at the plate. He is not overly fast, but he is quick. I have seen a vast improvement since the start of the season in his ability at the plate. He has a tendency to expand the strike-zone (mainly high pitches) but his eye is getting better. When he connects, he usually hits the ball hard.

I think [Rosell] Herrera is still growing into his 6'3 frame and can look a bit unorthodox at times, both in the field and at the plate.

Dan Winkler has been tabbed as a "potential sleeper" by [John Sickels of Minor League Ball](#). What have been your early impressions of the right hander?

Winkler has good stuff with a fastball in the low 90's. His slider is probably his next best pitch which comes in around 80-82 mph. Winkler's only made 4 starts with the Tourists so I have not been able to see a lot of him yet, [but] he has gone further into the game with each start. When talking to him, he seems to be confident in his abilities but not in a cocky way. He is very personable and a good teammate.

Quick Thoughts On Other Tourists:

OF David Kandilas- David could easily be hitting .400 this year as opposed to the .246 clip through 17 games. He has seen base hits taken away by excellent defensive plays all season. Kandilas has a good eye at the plate and has a fluent swing. His arm in the outfield is excellent and shows good range in his corner outfield position.

IF Sam Mende- Sam has the ability to hit the ball with power to all fields. His defense is solid both at second base and third base. He is a great fastball hitter and plays hard 100% of the time.

SP Ben Alsup- Ben did something I have never seen before just a week ago. He threw a nine pitch, three strikeout inning against Hickory. Of his nine pitches thrown, none of them were even fouled off. It was honestly one of the most amazing things I have ever witnessed at a professional baseball game. Ben is a professional in every sense of the word and I am a big fan of his capabilities on the mound. When he puts on a few more pounds, it should increase his velocity even more.



Doug Maurer graduated from Indiana University in 2008 and has been the Tourists Director of Broadcasting since 2010. He also broadcasts UNC-Asheville basketball and soccer along with ESPN radio's Western North Carolina High School Basketball Game of the Week.

You can hear Doug Maurer broadcast every Tourists game this season via [Gameday Audio](#).



Colorado Springs Sky Sox (AAA)

Record: 14-12

Lead Pacific Coast League Northern Division

Record in April: 14-11

You Need To Know...

Only one Sky Sox team has managed a winning record since the 2004 squad, which included names like Atkins, Hawpe, Barnes, Cook and Francis. That year was 2009, which had the benefit of Carlos Gonzalez on the roster for half the season. With the presence of legitimate starting pitching (3 starters have ERAs below 3.00), 2012 might be the year the Sky Sox return to the correct side of the ledger again. The staff has struck out a PCL-leading 213 batters, walked 67 (2nd fewest), and have allowed the fewest HR in the PCL with 12.

Player To Watch

Rob Scahill (8th rd, 2009) has followed up a decent Arizona Fall League with the best strikeout rates of his career. The righty has a 10.8 K/9 in AAA this season and is looking like a potential quality MLB bullpen arm.

Matt McBride Impresses For Sky Sox

As the “throw-in” to the Ubaldo Jimenez trade last July, **Matt McBride** got little more than a cursory look from Rockies fans. After two brief, uninspiring stops at AAA in 2010 and 2011, McBride has attacked the PCL with a vengeance, leading the Sky Sox in RBIs, doubles, triples, total bases, and hits.

While offense has gone down in Sky Sox games in 2012, the .370/.398/.533 (149 wRC+) line McBride has produced is eye-catching. If he continues his torrid season, the career minor leaguer may actually get a shot at a September callup — or sooner if injury strikes. Not bad for the forgotten man.

Sky Sox...Pitching?

This season figured to be very different for the Sky Sox than in the past. Last year's rotation included journeyman names like Alan Johnson, Billy Buckner, Greg Reynolds, Josh Muecke and Clayton Mortensen. In 2012, thanks to a newly installed humidor and a new wave of young arms, the groundwork has been laid for strong starting pitching.

Christian Friedrich, Rob Scahill, Alex White, and Guillermo Moscoso - all considered to have a good chance to contribute to the big league club in the future - have made the majority of starts for the Sky Sox. The remaining have been filled in by minor league free agent Carlos Torres, who started a combined shutout April 18, the first home shutout for the Sky Sox since 2010.

In what is likely a combination of improved talent and the humidor, the Sky Sox pitching staff is greatly improved upon 2011. Three starting pitchers - Friedrich, White and Torres - have ERA's below 3.00. The staff as a whole checks in at 3.88, good for 6th in the 16-team Pacific Coast League. In the previous 19 seasons as a Rockies' affiliate, the Sky Sox' best staff ERA was 4.47 in 2003, one of just two times Colorado Springs was not among the four worst staffs by ERA in the PCL.

“I didn't notice any difference with the balls with the humidor,” said Christian Friedrich, “but the guys that have been here before said it's making a difference. I like to hear when a guy flies out and someone says 'Last year that ball is gone.' I like to tell them we live in 'the now.'" Still, don't discount the job done by the pitchers, as all five starting pitchers have maintained a ground ball rate over 50%. That will do.



Colorado Springs Sky Sox (AAA)

Record: 14-13

Tied For Lead Pacific Coast League Northern Division
Record in April: 14-11

Blackmon and Pacheco Trying To Return To Denver

Currently hitting 2-3 in the Sky Sox lineup are Jordan Pacheco and **Charlie Blackmon** (2nd rd, 2008), both of whom were expected to break camp with the Rockies' big league club at the onset of spring training. Pacheco did in fact make the team, but after two weeks of offensive and defensive struggles, he was sent back to AAA. Blackmon suffered a foot injury in spring training and joined the Sky Sox midway through April.

Jordan Pacheco (9th rd, 2007) has reasserted himself in AAA, hitting .431/.482/.647 in 13 games. He managed three home runs in those 13 games, which matches his 2011 AAA total in 97 games. With Chris Nelson hurting and Wilin Rosario struggling, Pacheco's torrid tenure in AAA could bring him back up soon.

Blackmon, meanwhile, has not helped himself, hitting just .200/.284/.317 in 16 games.

[Pacheco] managed three home runs in those 13 games, which matches his 2011 AAA total in 97 games.

With Tyler Colvin starting well with the Rockies and Tim Wheeler lurking when he returns from the disabled list in early June, Blackmon needs to turn things around to remain affixed to the Rockies' radar.

More On The Sky Sox Pitching

The humidor has made a noticeable difference in Colorado Springs this year, but the pitching staff deserves plenty of credit. Here are the home groundball-flyball ratios for the entire Sky Sox pitching staff:

Scahill 9-2

Simons 3-2

Ottavino 4-2

White 13-5

Ekstrom 8-1

Escalona 0-1

Friedrich 10-3

Gonzalez 5-2

Dodson 6-3

Molleken 4-3

Putnam 3-0

Moscoso 8-1

Torres 4-1

Total: 77-26

2.96 GO/FO

While it's great to see so many big prospect names with incredible groundball out percentages, the bullpen and fringe arms have also carried their weight. In fact, the entire pitching staff induced nearly three groundballs for every single flyball this April at Security Service Field.

The humidor could be impacting the movement on some of these pitches, but give credit to the coaching staff and the pitchers in Colorado Springs for their great success. The ball is staying in the park this season, and Sky Sox outfielders are getting bored. From a purely statistical standpoint, that's great news. From a development standpoint, however, Colorado Springs appears to be a place to pitch for the first time in franchise history.



You Need To Know...

The Tulsa Drillers have been named one of this season's 10 most fascinating minor league teams in the nation – and for good reason. They have top 3B prospect **Nolan Arenado**, intriguing position prospects **Josh Rutledge** and **Kent Matthes**, and an absolutely stacked pitching staff led by **Edwar Cabrera**. The Drillers had two separate 4-game winning streaks in April, and appear to be rolling towards a division title. Even with Bettis on the disabled list, Tulsa leads the Texas League with a team 3.05 ERA.

Tulsa just enjoyed the best April in franchise history.

Joey Williamson (36th rd, 2007) left baseball in 2010 to pursue a career in the private sector, but returned to the organization in 2011. He holds a minuscule 0.82 ERA through 11.0 IP in his return to professional baseball as the Drillers' setup man.

Chad Bettis Injury Silence

The Drillers have played extremely well this April, and they have done it without the services of their ace pitcher.

Chad Bettis (2nd rd, 2010) has missed the entire season thus far with shoulder inflammation suffered during spring training. There is still no sign of a return for the talented right hander and, despite initial reports that suggested an early May return, there has been a complete blackout following a subsequent MRI. The silence has been deafening.

It may be time to start getting nervous about Bettis' health status.

Tulsa Drillers (AA)

Record: 19-7

Lead Texas League North Division

Record in April: 18-6

What About Schmidt?

This past offseason, the Colorado Rockies traded closer Huston Street to the San Diego Padres for a Player To Be Named Later (an obvious salary dump to clear money for Michael Cuddyer). In return, the Rockies received left-handed starting pitcher **Nick Schmidt**.

Schmidt (1st rd, 2006) has seen injuries derail his career. He missed the entire 2008 season recovering from Tommy John surgery, and has still yet to pitch 100 innings in a single season, despite being a starter the entire time. The 26 year old has a rough minor league career, and that is precisely why the Padres gave him up to a divisional rival.

His future may be in the bullpen, but for now Schmidt is firmly in the Drillers' starting rotation and has been very impressive following a rough debut. In his last four starts, the left hander has thrown 23 IP, allowing 6 ER (all runs scored on HR) and striking out 22 and walking only 2 batters during that span.

Schmidt's curveball is still a major weapon in the arsenal, and his command has been impeccable. He's prone to giving up too many line drives (and has probably been very lucky in that regard), and has been one of the beneficiaries of a sparkling Drillers defense. His numbers are hard to ignore.

This could just be a pleasant four start stretch in an otherwise forgettable career, but Schmidt has been given one last chance to be a starting pitcher and he's running with it so far. He's another cheap lottery ticket with a slim chance at unrealized potential. If he proves that he can finally stay healthy, he may get that shot.

If not? Well, the Rockies can always send him to the bullpen and cross their fingers.



Tulsa Drillers (AA)

Record: 18-7

Lead Texas League North Division

Record in April: 18-6

The Curious Case of Edwar Cabrera

The slight left hander has taken the minor leagues by storm over the past year. After dominating Asheville and Modesto in 2011, claiming the minor league strikeout crown from Rays superprospect Matt Moore, many felt that Cabrera would hit a wall in AA based on his average fastball and lack of another plus pitch aside from his system-best changeup. That hasn't happened, and Cabrera currently holds a minuscule 1.64 ERA after 33.0 IP. *All six earned runs this season have come off solo HR.*

If you look at his 2011 numbers, you'll see a pitcher that dominated A ball across the board. High strikeout rates, low walk rates, and high groundball rates against left handed batters. 2012 tells a very different story. This season, Cabrera has been two completely different -- yet still very successful -- pitchers based on what kind of batter he faces.

Against right handed batters, Cabrera has that impressive 31.7 K%. Yes, Cabrera strikes out almost a third of all right handed batters he faces, and a full 85% of them go down swinging. Yet he only has a 31% GB rate against RHB, giving up quite a few fly balls. 5 of the 6 HR he's allowed this season are against righties.

When facing lefties, Cabrera gets plenty of outs by a very different method. He has only struck out 3 LHB this season, yet has a 45.2% GB rate -- much higher than his righty split, but still a far cry from his 2011 numbers.

What does all this mean? Well, the sample sizes are still far too small to draw any real conclusions. Part of it is certainly luck (an .080 BABIP against RHB!) and part of it can be attributed to the sparkling Tulsa defense playing behind him. We'll have a better idea of what is real and what is statistical noise in another month or so, but for now just sit back and enjoy this season's breakthrough pitcher.

Kent Matthes: One Hit Wonder?

Outfielder Kent Matthes (4th rd, 2009) was often overlooked within the Rockies' system due to his age and inability to stay healthy for an entire season. He changed all of that in 2011 with his videogame numbers in Modesto en route to the California League MVP award.

No, really, look at his 2011 stats:

.334/.378/.642, 23 HR, 95 RBI, 22 BB, 80 K

Now take a look at his April in AA Tulsa:

.203/.267/.464, 4 HR, 8 RBI, 5 BB, 11 K

What is possibly going on? Could last year's wrist injury still be sapping his power? Has he not adjusted to AA pitching? Were his 2011 numbers a product of the extremely hitter-friendly Texas League?

Hidden by last year's impressive numbers was the .288 OBP he put up against left handed pitching. In 2011, Matthes hit 6 HR in 80 PA against left handed pitching. In 2012, *he's already hit 3 in only 18 PA (good for a .500 IsoP!).*

The disturbing numbers come against RHP, a split that Matthes has dominated during his career (1.063 OPS vs RHP in 2011). This season, Matthes is only hitting .196 against righties, meaning there's likely plenty of room for regression.

But there are signs of life. On April 28, Matthes carried the Drillers to victory with a 2 HR game, providing all 3 runs for Tulsa. Has this just a month long slump for the righty slugger, or was his 2011 really just a mirage? That may be one of the big questions this year for the Rockies' farm system.



Modesto Nuts (A - Advanced)

Record: 13-14

3.0 GB California League North Division

Record in April: 11-13

You Need To Know...

Jerry Weinstein managed the Nuts to a winning record in all five seasons at the helm. His replacement, Lenn Sakata, saw his team kill themselves with errors on their way to a 4-12 start. Since that time, a few changes in the lineup and improved pitching and defense had Modesto finish April on a 7-1 run.

Player To Watch

CF Rafael Ortega, 20, is coming into his own after a slow start in Modesto. The past 10 games, the slick defender has posted a .415/.467/.463 line. Though there's a lack of extra base hits so far this season, the plus defense and excellent OBP makes Ortega a player to watch very closely this season.

Modesto's Outfield Full Of Intrigue

Aside from Tyler Matzek, the development of the starting outfield is what should be drawing the most eyes.

Corey Dickerson had an exceptional April, but he is considered by most scouts to be the least likely starting outfielder in Modesto to become an MLB-caliber starting outfielder.

Rafael Ortega missed the first few weeks with a hamstring injury and has only played in ten games.

Kyle Parker was hit by a pitch in Modesto's second game, and the resultant wrist contusion forced him to miss all of April. He is day-to-day in Extended Spring Training in Modesto and is expected to return within a week. With all three in action in May, they will be together for the first time in 2012, each with something to prove.

Modesto's Two Underrated Stars

Until the final week of April, it was a very difficult month for the Modesto Nuts. Two players in particular, however, consistently rose above the inconsistency of their teammates to perform at a high level.

Corey Dickerson took advantage of a short porch in right field in Asheville to put up monster statistics in 2011. Thurman Field is nowhere near as generous, but Dickerson continued to produce. An altered approach helped.

"(Dickerson) really responded well to the adjustments he was encouraged to make in instructs last year and into this spring," Nuts play-by-play man Alex Margulies said. "They asked him to not try and pull the ball as much, and focus on driving the ball to the middle or opposite field. And I'd say of his hits, more than two-thirds have been just that."

The key for **Christian Bergman** has been command of his change-up. "Bergman has a great pace on the mound, goes after hitters, and really has an idea of how to pitch. He said he thinks his best pitch is his fastball, but I think it is the changeup," said Margulies.

"He really sets it up well. He told me the reason why he's having success with it, is that he is throwing it as hard as he can, and really trying to sell the armspeed as if it's a fastball....and it's really working." At least so far, Bergman has more than justified the Rockies' decision to skip him over Asheville. He's more than holding his own at the level—he's become the Nuts' staff ace.

Both players have their doubters in the scouting community, particularly Bergman, but if both continue the success they have shown in Modesto, they will earn more attention as they approach AA.



Asheville Tourists (A)

Record: 17-9

1.0 GB South Atlantic League Northern Division

Record in April: 16-8

You Need To Know...

This Tourists team is stacked with offensive talent. **Trevor Story** was already getting Top 100 Prospect buzz before his hot start. Fellow infielder **Rosell Herrera** set a franchise record for an international free agent signing bonus. Catcher **Will Swanner** has one of the best power bats in the entire system. Currently, the Tourists lead the entire SAL in most offensive categories, including AVG, OBP, and SLG.

Player To Watch

Chris Jensen (6th rd, 2011) had a quality 2011 in Tri-City and his K rate is improved this season in Asheville. With a projectable frame, Jensen could be a breakthrough candidate for the second half of the season in Asheville.

Incoming Reinforcements

The current Tourists' rotation doesn't have much star power right now, but that may be about to change. **Peter Tago** (1st rd, 2010) had a rough 2011 in Asheville, but he will get a chance to improve upon his numbers in 2012.

Tyler Anderson (1st rd, 2011) is currently in extended spring training rehabbing a groin injury, but is likely to make at least a cameo start at Asheville soon.

Too Many Tourists

Top prospects Story and Herrera are likely to stay in North Carolina for the entire season, but that leaves other players like **Taylor Featherston** (5th rd, 2011) and **Samuel Mende** (31st rd, 2011) fighting for regular at-bats.

Once Featherston returns from the Disabled List, there could be a mid-season promotion in the works.

Catcher Will Swanner Opening Eyes

Catcher Will Swanner may be the most curious prospect in the entire Rockies' farm system. Selected in the 15th round of the 2010 Draft, Colorado gave the promising high school player \$490,000 to buy him out of his commitment to Pepperdine.

In his first season at Casper, Swanner struck out 33 times and hit 7 HR in just 18 games. **He did not draw a single walk.** An injury shortened 2011 season in Casper showed some plate discipline improvement, with 20 walks in 43 games to go along with 10 HR and 60 strikeouts.

In 2012, Swanner is finally getting his chance at full-season Asheville. With questions surrounding his lack of plate discipline, the 20 year old catcher has blown away all expectations. While the K rate remains high (14 K in 12 games), Swanner has also drawn 4 free passes. This improved approach has paid immediate dividends. His .352/.417/.630 combined line is very impressive, as is his 1.160 OPS away from the hitter friendly confines of Asheville's McCormick Field.

He's also getting glowing reports about his defense at the plate. Asheville radio announcer Doug Maurer praised the young catcher, "[Swanner] has worked with our pitching staff very well and he called Mayo's complete game three-hit shutout earlier this year. He is very good at blocking pitches in the dirt and does a nice job framing pitches near the strike zone." His arm needs work, however, as Swanner has thrown out only 3 of 30 baserunners.

With an emphasis on plate discipline, Will Swanner may finally begin to reach his hitting potential. Now we'll see if he sticks behind the dish.

APRIL



Colorado Rockies Hottest Prospects

Hitters

	Jordan Pacheco (UT) 3 homeruns, .431 AVG, 1.129 OPS
	Will Swanner (C) 9 doubles, .352 AVG, 1.046 OPS
	Trevor Story (SS) 5 homeruns, .276 AVG, 0.964 OPS
	Harold Riggins (1B) 4 homeruns, .316 AVG, 0.990 OPS
	Corey Dickerson (OF) 11 doubles, .337 AVG, 0.919 OPS

Colorado Rockies Hottest Prospects

Pitchers

	Edwar Cabrera 7.90 K/9, 0.576 WHIP, 1.64 ERA
	Parker Frazier 4.50 K/9, 1.267 WHIP, 2.40 ERA
	Christian Bergman 5.90 K/9, 1.000 WHIP, 2.53 ERA
	Christian Friedrich 7.80 K/9, 0.822 WHIP, 2.59 ERA
	Alex White 7.60 K/9, 1.150 WHIP, 2.70 ERA

Colorado Rockies Coldest Prospects

	Mike Zuanich (1B) 22 strikeouts, .180 AVG, 0.535 OPS	
	Christhian Adames (SS) 18 strikeouts, .191 AVG, 0.570 OPS	
	Rosell Herrera (IF) 17 strikeouts, .232 AVG, 0.577 OPS	
	Charlie Blackmon (OF) 10 strikeouts, .200 AVG, 0.600 OPS	
	Josh Slaats (P) 13 walks, 1.913 WHIP, 7.04 ERA	



Graphic courtesy of Charlie Drysdale