



# Rocky Mountain SABR Newsletter

April 2024

## WELCOME BACK, BASEBALL!

### Great Moments in Rockies Opening Day History

Patrick Lyons



No matter the denomination of your parent(s) or the higher-power you may have ultimately found later in life, Opening Day is a religious holiday to most Americans and every single baseball fan.

It all began for the Rocky Mountain region on that very first Opening Day for the Colorado Rockies on April 5, 1993. The result against the Mets was secondary to a slew of firsts at Shea Stadium: David Nied threw the first pitch, Andrés Galarraga recorded the first hit and Eric Young Sr. had the first stolen base.

Mile High Stadium had just one Opening Day: April 4, 1994. A whopping 72,470 fans witnessed Philadelphia take on Colorado. The Rockies received a home run from the newly acquired Ellis Burks, but Curt Schilling and the National League Champions emerged victorious, 12-6.

In 1995, only one word could describe the situation with all-things related to baseball: complicated. Coming off the first year without a World Series, a lockout delayed the start of the '95 season.

Everyone remembers 1995 as the first year the Rockies made the postseason, fastest ever for an expansion club (at least before the Dbacks did it quicker). Many remember game no. 1 that season with an iconic walk-off home run by Dante Bichette in the 14th inning to christen Coors Field. However, that wasn't the first game at 20th and Blake.

The first contest held at Coors Field was actually on March 31 when 47,563 baseball fanatics piled into the new building to watch a bunch of replacement players wear the uniforms of the Rockies and New York Yankees. Three of the more recognizable names in Colorado's lineup that day batted three-through-five: SS Stu Cole, 1B Jay Gainer and RF Alan Cockrell. (They played again the next day, too.)

The game with actual footage that opened Coors Field was April 26, 1995. Here's my description of the game from a previously published piece in 2020:

After a see-saw battle that featured the Mets rallying back from a 5-1 deficit and both clubs scoring a run in the ninth, the contest would need another five innings to reach its climactic finale.

In the 13th, José Vizcaíno singled against Curt Leskanic to bring home Brett Butler and put the Metropolitanians ahead 8-7. Mike Kingery singled in the bottom of the 13th and was driven home by pinch hitter Jim Tatum to extend the game. **(Continued on Page 6)**

---

## HERB SHANKMAN CELEBRATION OF LIFE

On March 24th, a large gathering of friends and family met at Coors Field for a Celebration of Life of our longtime SABR brother, Herb Shankman. There was a wonderful pictorial slideshow and scrapbook illustrating all of the moments in Herb's life including those of when he was a skinny young left-handed pitcher in the Braves organization.

Several touching letters from his family were read and speeches were made by his daughters, grandson, friends and SABR members Dan Evans and Kurt Wells and Paul Parker sharing their memories and feelings about Herb.



---

## COMMITTEE TO SELECT THE ALL-TIME GREATEST PLAYERS FROM THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Rocky Mountain SABR is launching a new committee to subjectively rank the top 20 all-time MLB players that are natives of the Rocky Mountain region.

Kurt Wells is heading the committee and is looking for volunteers to join him in defining criteria for rankings and ultimately in determining the order of the top players. An initial meeting will be held to determine a framework for identifying a scoring system that will provide less subjectivity and more objectivity to the final rankings.

Statistics of the players will be distributed at the meeting for each member to analyze prior to the second meeting. The second meeting will allow the members to discuss and rank the players.

Once the team members are identified, the first meeting will be scheduled.

If anyone is interested in joining the committee or otherwise participating on the project, please contact us via— [info@rmsabr.org](mailto:info@rmsabr.org)





## Register now for the 2024 Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference

Early registration is now open for SABR's annual Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference, which will be held on June 6-9, 2024, at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York. All baseball fans are welcome to attend.

Full and single-day registration is available for a discounted rate before May 24, along with a new virtual registration option. All panels and presentations held at the Hall of Fame's Grandstand Theater on Friday and Saturday will be available on the Zoom livestream.

In-person attendees will also have an opportunity to view the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum's new exhibit, *The Souls of the Game: Voices of Black Baseball*, which will spotlight the decades-long history of Black baseball prior to the formation of the Negro Leagues.

## 2024 SABR CONVENTION—REMINDER

The [SABR's 52nd annual convention](#) taking place August 7-11, 2024 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

This year's conference will highlight four Hall of Famers (the most ever to speak at a SABR convention) - Rod Carew, Tony Oliva, Bert Blyleven and Jim Kaat.

The convention includes game visits to two ballparks, Target Field (Twins) and CHS Field (Saints)

If you've never attended a SABR convention, this is the perfect year to join us and make new baseball friendships. If you're a veteran attendee, we can't wait for you to take part in this invigorated convention experience. It will be an incredible week of baseball fellowship in the Twin Cities and we hope you'll make plans to be part of it!

Conference and hotel registration for SABR 52 will open next Tuesday, February 13 at [SABR.org/convention](#). This year's streamlined registration options will provide for a consistent and accessible experience for all attendees and the lowest registration price



## WRITERS (STILL!) WANTED

Do you have an interesting baseball story, observation, opinion, etc. that you'd like to share with the chapter or a greater audience? If so, please consider writing something to submit to our website blog.

The topic can be anything you feel is of interest or relevant (i.e. baseball history, analytics, player bios, stadiums, the business of baseball, etc.).

Site visitation has grown considerably over the past few months and with plans in place for further promotion of our site, visitation could grow by more than ten-fold before the end of the year - giving your words a broad audience.

If you are interested in contributing a story, please contact us at—[info@rmsabr.org](mailto:info@rmsabr.org)



---

## SABR COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT - GAMES and SIMULATIONS RESEARCH COMMITTEE



Starting with this issue, we are adding a regular feature to the newsletter where we spotlight one of the many interesting research committees that are run and organized by SABR members.

In this issue, we are starting off with the SABR Games and Simulations Research Committee.

The Games and Simulations Research Committee was formed in 2010 to explore how various simulation games work, what statistics are generated, and how organized baseball might benefit from strategies and tactics used in such games.

The Committee focuses on the relationship between these entertainments and the sport they are based on—how they mirror baseball, how they are effectively further our understanding of how the sport actually works, and how they influence our appreciation of its players, teams, and organizations.

The Committee will be generating content documenting baseball gaming in all forms and fashions, including tabletop, fantasy, computer, and video/mobile games.

Committee members all share an interest in games based on baseball and have all played and enjoyed them. Sometimes the games replayed on our table tops or computers become as compelling as the sport they simulate.

For the past two years the committee has had regular (almost monthly) virtual meetings through Zoom. These meetings have included pioneers in computer games, board games as well as rotisserie baseball. They have also welcomed some new games that members are creating. The meetings are open for both SABR and non-SABR members as we believe these topics may help increase the membership in SABR.

The Committee (co-chaired by Derek Bain and Mark Wendling) provides a forum for chronicling, analyzing, and understanding how these games and simulations further our understanding of the sport and why they affect so many fans so profoundly.

Their [recently launched new website](#) allows SABR members to register for online events, view video replays of past events, read or contribute blog posts/game reviews, watch game playthrough videos, read fantasy replay results and more.

A full list of all SABR Research Committees can be found [here](#).



---

## ROCKIES BASEBALL CARD PROJECT

Rockies fans - if you have baseball cards or are willing to look for baseball cards we have a project for you.

The Rockies are currently trying to find a baseball card of every player who has ever played in a game for the franchise. They are missing more than 300 out of 650 who have worn the Rockies uniform and played in at least one game.

[Here is a list of the cards](#) that we are still looking for.

If you happen to have any of these, please let Brian Werner know.

He can be reached at [brianwerner281@gmail.com](mailto:brianwerner281@gmail.com) or at 970-481-2927.



## APRIL ROCKY MOUNTAIN SABR LUNCHEON

On Wednesday, April 17th, we will have an in-person Rocky Mountain SABR gathering at Chopper's Sports Grill.

The luncheon will begin at noon and will go to about 1:30 PM. Chopper's is located at 80 S. Madison St., which is close to S Alameda and Colorado Blvd. There is plenty of free parking, both on the street in front of the restaurant as well as a parking lot behind the building. - [Map](#)

The luncheon is open to both members and non-members and is a great opportunity to discuss baseball with fellow baseball fans. Hope to see you there!

## STAT OF THE MONTH— wOBA

wOBA (pronounced "whoa-buh") stands for Weighted on Base Average.

It is a version of on-base percentage that accounts for how a player reached base -- instead of simply considering whether a player reached base. The value for each method of reaching base is determined by how much that event is worth in relation to projected runs scored (example: a double is worth more than a single).

For instance: In 2014, a home run was worth 2.101 times on base, while a walk was worth 0.69 times on base. So a player who went 1-for-4 with a home run and a walk would have a wOBA of .558 --  $(2.101 + 0.69 / 5 \text{ PAs})$ .

### The formula

Where "factor" indicates the adjusted run expectancy of a batting event in the context of the season as a whole:  $(\text{unintentional BB factor} \times \text{unintentional BB} + \text{HBP factor} \times \text{HBP} + \text{1B factor} \times \text{1B} + \text{2B factor} \times \text{2B} + \text{3B factor} \times \text{3B} + \text{HR factor} \times \text{HR}) / (\text{AB} + \text{unintentional BB} + \text{SF} + \text{HBP})$ .

### Why it's useful

Unlike on-base percentage and OPS (OBP + SLG), wOBA assigns value to each method of reaching base, in terms of its impact on scoring runs. **Calculation:**

### 2023 MLB wOBA Leaders -

Judge .461, Acuna .460, Alvarez .438, Ohtani .427, Seager .412, Freeman .408, Soto .408, Betts .407

MLB wOBA Ranges - Top 20% (>.360), 2nd 20% (.340), 3rd 20% (.330). 4th 20% (.310), Bottom 20% (<.300)



## OPENING DAY (Continued from Page 1)

The top of the 14th brought even more spectacle from New York when rookie Ricky Otero -- making his Major League debut as a defensive substitute -- singled in his first plate appearance. He came around to score on Joe Orsulak's double off Mark Thompson.

For the third time in the game, Colorado was three outs away from deciding the fate of Coors Field's inaugural game.

Joe Girardi, in his seventh plate appearance after catching all 14 innings, singled up the middle to start the rally. Following a strikeout of Larry Walker, Andrés Galarraga reached on an error by third baseman Tim Bogar.

With runners on the corners, the stage was set. On a 2-1 offering from Mike Remlinger, Dante Bichette blasted one deep to left field and emblazoned an image into the minds of every baseball fan through the Rocky Mountain region forever and ever.

The greatest Opening Day performance has to be by rookie Trevor Story in 2016. An afterthought when Troy Tulowitzki was traded to the Toronto Blue Jays in July 2015 for a package of players that included José Reyes, it wasn't until Reyes violated MLB's domestic violence policy that Colorado turned to Plan C.

Story hit two home runs in Phoenix against Arizona's ace Zack Greinke en route to becoming the first player on Opening Day with a pair of dingers in his debut. (A pair of non-rookies also homered twice on the season's lid lifter: Vinny Castilla in the inaugural game at Chase Field in 1998 and C.J. Cron in 2023.)

One of the most recent memorable performances came during the 2017 home opener. Kyle Freeland, the product of Thomas Jefferson High School, made his Major League debut at Coors Field. And he did it with a flourish.

In the lowest scoring home opener in Denver history (also: 2003), Freeland held the Dodgers to one run over six innings in the 2-1 win for the Rockies.

The 23-year-old southpaw accomplished what only one other had in the last 50 years. Chuck Dobson of the Kansas City Athletics made his big league debut in his hometown in the April 19, 1966 home opener at Municipal Stadium. The A's won, but Dobson actually allowed two earned runs in 5.2 innings.



### ROCKIES APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Adael Amador (21) - April 11th  
Peter Lambert (27) - April 18th  
Noah Davis (27) - April 22nd



### TRIVIA

**Q**—This season marked the 32nd Opening Day for the Colorado Rockies. Of the 20 pitchers to make an Opening Day start with the franchise, how many were originally drafted or signed as an international free agent by the Rockies?

**EMAIL your answer to** - [info@rmsabr.org](mailto:info@rmsabr.org)

The first correct response wins a 2023 Coors Field SGA item.

**Last month's trivia question** - Who was the heaviest player ever to hit for the cycle at Coors Field **A**— Pablo Sandoval (2011) - First Correct Answer submitted by Matthew Replinger