

BASEBALL BETTING GUIDE

VSIN PRO



DYNASTY DODGING

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR BETTING THE MLB

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- DOES MONEY BUY CHAMPIONSHIPS?
- "ANALYST & ATHLETE" 30 TEAM PREVIEWS
- STATS GLOSSARY AND TERMS TO KNOW

VSIN

Greetings, all!

For a lot of you, it has probably been a long, cold, snowy, and dismal winter, but it's time to think spring. We've been thinking about Spring Training and the start of the baseball season for a while and it has all come together in our 2026 VSIN MLB Betting Guide.

This year's Guide is unlike any we have ever done in the past because we have incorporated more insights from Jensen Lewis, who made 161 appearances over four MLB seasons and 362 total appearances in pro ball. His unique perspective having played the game and been in the clubhouses paired with my experience as a self-described nerd and analytics-driven handicapper has produced something special for us.

In this year's MLB Guide, you will find:

- Previews for all 30 MLB Teams from Adam Burke ("The Analyst") and Jensen Lewis ("The Athlete")
- A stats glossary for the 2026 season
- A breakdown of whether or not money buys championships and a World Series futures discussion
- The impacts of park factors from our friends at Ballpark Pal

We're also going to be unveiling our OptaAI MLB Player Prop Projections in the month of March at VSIN.com, as we'll have projected performance numbers for seven offensive categories and five pitching categories on a daily basis. These have been an awesome betting tool for the NFL and NBA and we're thrilled to share MLB with you as well.

Between the World Baseball Classic from March 5-17 and Opening Day on March 25 for the Yankees and Giants and March 26 for everybody else, there is plenty of time to get ready for the MLB season and we strongly believe our coverage will help this be your best season yet.

Along with daily VSIN.com content, you can check out our 24/7 broadcast channel on SiriusXM Ch. 158, YouTube TV (Sports+ Package), [YouTube.com stream](#), the [VSIN Watch App](#), [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), or wherever else you get your podcast content, and on more than 400 radio stations across the United States.

Thank you for your continued support of what we do here at VSIN, THE Sports Betting Network and happy baseball season!

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The logo for VSIN, featuring the letters "VSIN" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, all contained within a red diamond shape.

ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

A NORTH STAR FOR FUTURES

By Adam Burke

We've all heard about how money doesn't buy happiness. I don't know, I'm pretty happy when I can use money to buy a plane ticket and take a vacation or purchase those concert tickets that I want.

We've also heard that money doesn't buy championships. The other three major North American professional sports have salary caps, so it's hard to really apply that notion to those, but we can look at what it means in the context of Major League Baseball. (At least until we get a salary cap and salary floor in the next CBA negotiations!)

Objectively, no, money does not buy championships. Dating back to 2011, the most expensive roster in baseball has lifted the Commissioner's Trophy just three times and two of them have been the Dodgers over the last two seasons. But, one thing that we can state is that spending more money than the majority of teams does increase your chances of playing for a championship.

Jensen Lewis, my co-author on this year's MLB Team Previews and co-host of VSiN By The Books, actually had an interesting page in his Google Doc of writeups highlighting the payroll ranks of teams to make it to the World Series, with a side-by-side comparison of the winner and the loser. It was just in there. I don't think it was meant to be the catalyst for a featured article in this year's publication, but it can be something of a north star for those looking to get involved in the World Series futures market.

WORLD SERIES WINNER & RUNNER-UP PAYROLL RANKS

- This is the Opening Day 40-man, taxable roster payroll
- Total payroll in millions

The average payroll rank of the last 14 WS champs is 6.6 with an average payroll of \$218.4 million.

The average payroll rank of the last 14 WS runners-up is 11.0 with an average payroll of \$184.7 million.

As you can see, we've only had three teams outside the top 10 and only one outside the top half of the league in payroll as the champion of October baseball. We've had more outliers get there and lose, including five teams in the bottom half of the league, but we've only had one World Series out of the last 14 with two teams outside the top 10 in payroll.

None of this data is shocking, though I guess it is somewhat shocking to only see the team with the highest payroll in the World Series four times in this data set and the No. 2 team in payroll nowhere to be found. But, as you think about the futures market for 2026, longer shots that have still been willing to spend some money are probably better investments than young teams on the come-up that look promising and tantalizing.

YEAR	WS WINNER	PAYOUT RANK	TOTAL PAYROLL	WS LOSER	PAYOUT RANK	TOTAL PAYROLL
2012	Giants	5th				
2013	Red Sox	3rd	160.4	Tigers	8th	145.2
2014	Giants	7th	177.8	Cardinals	10th	138.6
2015	Royals	11th	179.8	Royals	19th	111.0
2016	Cubs	4th	152.1	Mets	21st	122.7
2017	Astros	19th	205.9	Indians	21st	117.6
2018	Red Sox	1st	140.5	Dodgers	1st	253.6
2019	Nationals	6th	239.5	Dodgers	4th	195.0
2020	Dodgers	5th	201.2	Astros	5th	203.8
2021	Braves	13th	204.7	Rays	27th	89.9
2022	Astros	9th	172.6	Astros	7th	206.6
2023	Rangers	8th	210.7	Phillies	4th	244.4
2024	Dodgers	1st	242.1	D-Backs	19th	154.6
2025	Dodgers	1st	353.0	Yankees	3rd	316.2
			417.3	Blue Jays	5th	286.1

*Data from Spotrac

DETROIT TIGERS

25-1

The Tigers look to be cracking the top 10 here with Tarik Skubal victorious in arbitration and then more than \$50 million for Framber Valdez and Justin Verlander. That's not what pushes them over the edge for me, though those are some very valuable innings to add to the picture. What is really nice, and what we see with a few of the lower payrolls on there is that they've been teams capable of winning a bad division and then making a run, like the Indians in 2016 and Royals in 2015.

The Tigers have a playoff-worthy pitching staff and any offensive gains will help, plus it appears as though Christopher Ilitch is at the point where he's ready to spend after cutting a lot of pork from the payroll when his father, Mike, went all-in to try and get a title before he passed away. That also means perhaps going out and buying a more expensive Trade Deadline piece as well as they have maybe the easiest path to the postseason in the AL Central.



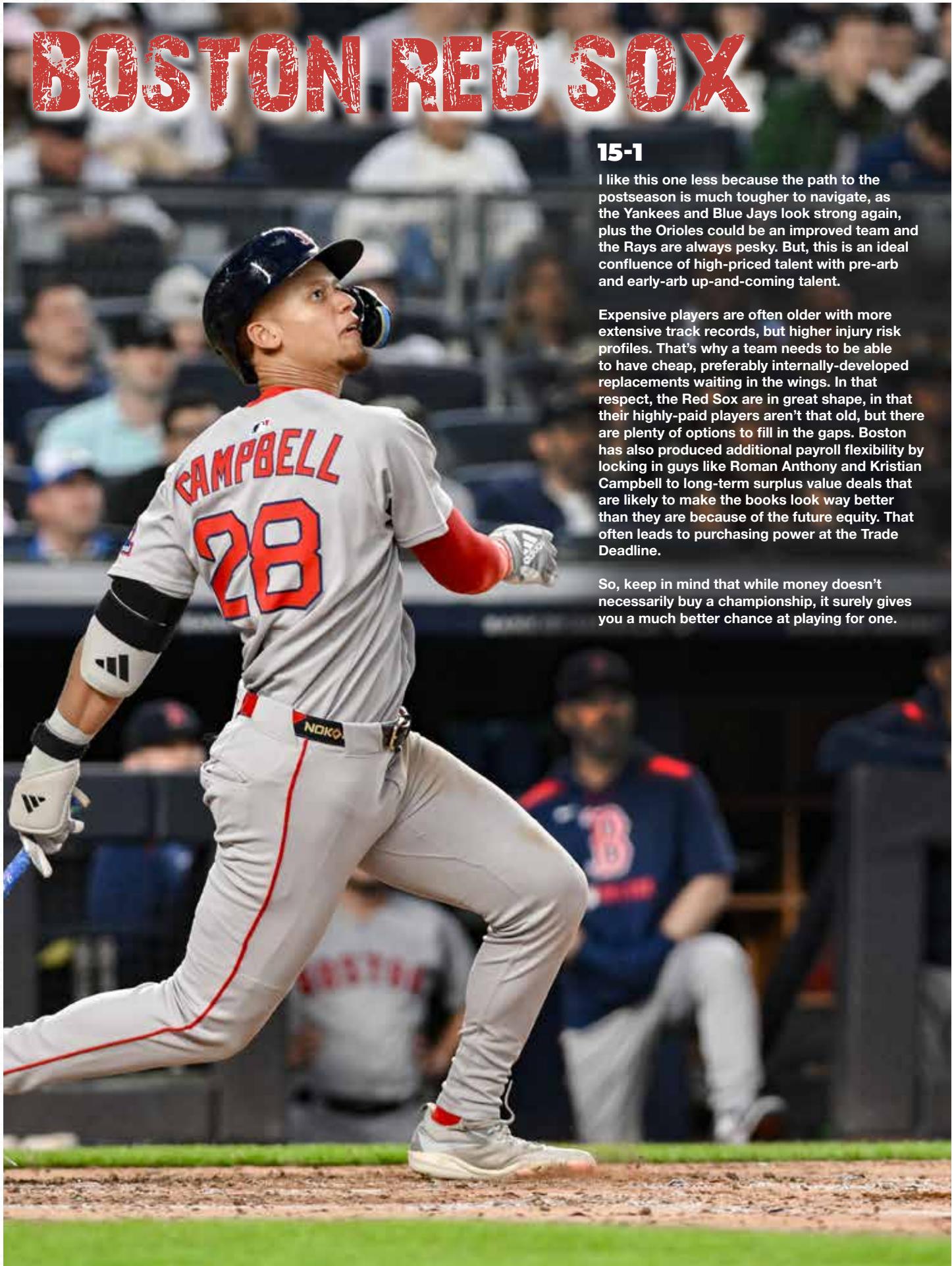
BOSTON RED SOX

15-1

I like this one less because the path to the postseason is much tougher to navigate, as the Yankees and Blue Jays look strong again, plus the Orioles could be an improved team and the Rays are always pesky. But, this is an ideal confluence of high-priced talent with pre-arb and early-arb up-and-coming talent.

Expensive players are often older with more extensive track records, but higher injury risk profiles. That's why a team needs to be able to have cheap, preferably internally-developed replacements waiting in the wings. In that respect, the Red Sox are in great shape, in that their highly-paid players aren't that old, but there are plenty of options to fill in the gaps. Boston has also produced additional payroll flexibility by locking in guys like Roman Anthony and Kristian Campbell to long-term surplus value deals that are likely to make the books look way better than they are because of the future equity. That often leads to purchasing power at the Trade Deadline.

So, keep in mind that while money doesn't necessarily buy a championship, it surely gives you a much better chance at playing for one.



MLB STATS TO KNOW

By Adam Burke

My go-to line when explaining baseball stats and analytics to people is to say that “they quantify what the eyes can see.” Advanced MLB stats simply paint a better picture than the traditional stats and provide more layers of context to help explain how much a player is helping or hurting his team.

You may watch a game and notice that the center fielder isn’t very good defensively. He’s getting a late read on fly balls and doesn’t have the speed to compensate. He’s got a “noodle arm”. Well, the advanced metrics can look at things like “Outs Above Average” or “Defensive Runs Saved” to show how much worse than an “average” fielder that player is.

A lot of traditional metrics fall short. Think about on-base percentage, which is walks plus hits divided by plate appearances $((BB + H) / PA)$. That stat really came to prominence around the time that the Michael Lewis book Moneyball was released in 2003. Batting average had always been the go-to stat, but the whole goal as a hitter is not to make an out. Walks are a big part of that equation, thus OBP became a better indicator of offensive output than BA.

But, let’s think more about OBP. Should a home run count the same as a single? Should a double count the same as a walk? With OBP, there is no distinction between the ways of reaching base. Enter wOBA, or weighted on-base average, which is an OBP variant that assigns run values to the manner in which a hitter reaches base. For example, in 2025, a single was worth .882 runs, while a home run was worth 2.037 runs in the formula for wOBA. A walk was worth .691 runs, but a double was worth 1.252. Why? Because doubles increase the chances of scoring a run or driving in a run more than a walk does.

The way I analyze baseball is to utilize the metrics and the statistics to try and find betting opportunities. I don’t want readers or listeners to be overwhelmed by the numbers. It’s my job to explain what they mean, why they are important and how we can use them in our handicapping to find smart bets to make.

I know these stats and abbreviations can be daunting. My only request is that you keep an open mind throughout the season.

The following are some of the stats that I use in my team previews and will use throughout my daily article and my on-air appearances over the course of the season.

ALTERNATE TEAM STANDINGS METRICS

BASERUNS

In my season previews, I talk about the BaseRuns record. BaseRuns is a “context-neutral environment” that takes all of the individual outcomes, puts them together and spits out expected runs for and against.

Think about these six events in an inning: HR, 1B, 1B, K, K, K. Depending on the order, a team might score three runs (1B, 1B, K, K, HR, K), two runs (1B, HR, K, 1B, K, K), one run (HR, 1B, 1B, K, K, K). The same six outcomes, just in different orders. BaseRuns removes “sequencing”, which is largely random. This also eliminates the randomness of hitting or defending with runners in scoring position. A big disparity between actual record and BaseRuns record might show that a team got lucky or won a lot of close games.

PYTHAGOREAN WIN-LOSS

Pythagorean Win-Loss is a standings metric based on run differential. A team’s runs scored and runs against are put into a formula and an expected record is produced. This concept is used across all sports and is sometimes just labeled “Expected W-L”.

TEAM AND PLAYER MLB STATS

FANGRAPHS WINS ABOVE REPLACEMENT PLAYER (fWAR)

Wins Above Replacement Player (WAR) is one of the most comprehensive individual player statistics available. It shows how much value a player has provided relative to his peers. The “f” stands for [FanGraphs](#), which is where I pull my player WAR data from, since I think they do the best job of calculating it.

A player with a fWAR under 1.0 is a replacement-level player, or not a very good one. A player with a 1-2 fWAR is a decent role player or a platoon type of guy. A player with a 2-3 fWAR is a solid player that any team would be happy to have. The scale goes up from there and separates the bad players from the good players and the good players from the great players.

WEIGHTED ON-BASE AVERAGE (wOBA)

wOBA is one of my favorite stats because it does add more context than on-base percentage (OBP). Much like OBP, a high wOBA is good and a low wOBA is bad for hitters. On the flip side, a low wOBA is good and a high wOBA is bad for pitchers. Once again, it just adds another layer of context where the outcomes of reaching base are weighted differently based on their importance.

WEIGHTED RUNS CREATED PLUS (wRC+)

Using wOBA, we can get to a stat called wRC+. With this stat, a player that has a 100 wRC+ is exactly league average. A player with a 120 wRC+ is 20% more productive than a league average player. A player with an 80 wRC+ is 20% less productive than a league average player. Anything over 100 is good, anything under 100 is bad.

The “Plus” means that the stat is park-adjusted and league-adjusted for the run environment. “Park-adjusted” means that there are factors within the formula that account for the way that Coors Field is a better hitter’s park than American Family Field or that Fenway Park is a better hitter’s park than Tropicana Field.

“League-adjusted” basically means grading on a curve. If a lot of runs are being scored, batters have to be that much productive to be above average. If it is a low run environment, then great hitters will stand out that much more.

K% AND BB%

I don’t like using raw strikeout and walk numbers or strikeouts per nine innings (K/9) or walks per nine innings (BB/9). I prefer to use K% and BB%, which is simply the percentage of plate appearances that end in a strikeout (K%) or a walk (BB%). This can be used for both pitchers and hitters.

Last season, the league average K% was 22.6% and the league average BB% was 8.1%.

FIELDING INDEPENDENT PITCHING (FIP)

ERA is subject to a lot of things that a pitcher can't necessarily control, like batted ball luck and sequencing (the timing of hits, are there runners on base, etc.). FIP takes fielders and balls in play out of the equation by producing a pitcher metric using strikeouts, walks, hit by pitches and home runs, which are believed to be things a pitcher can control.

There is a follow-up metric called xFIP, which stands for "Expected Fielding Independent Pitching", which is calculated by assuming a pitcher has a league average home run rate per fly ball rate (HR/FB%). This is an indicator used by a lot of bettors that move lines. The idea is that a pitcher with a low ERA and a high xFIP is overperforming and is in line for "Negative Regression" and a pitcher with a high ERA and a low xFIP is underperforming and is in line for "Positive Regression".

I do a lot of regression analysis handicapping, looking for stats and metrics that focus on pitchers that are seemingly getting lucky or unlucky.

BATTING AVERAGE ON BALLS IN PLAY (BABIP)

This is a really strong indicator of luck. Think of this as batting average minus strikeouts and home runs. A strikeout is not a ball in play and a home run cannot be fielded, thus it is not a ball in play. The league average BABIP last season was .289. Extremes one way or the other are likely to "regress to the mean".

LEFT ON BASE PERCENTAGE (LOB%)

This is different from LOB in the box score. This is calculated using a pitcher's actual hits, walks and runs allowed and the percentage of runners that they have stranded. Think about ERA and how subjective it can be to something like this. The timing of hits (sequencing) matters a lot. LOB% can be a really good stat to use for positive or negative regression.

League average was 72.3% last season. Like BABIP, extremes one way or the other are likely to regress. High-strikeout pitchers typically carry higher LOB% marks because they are going to strand more runners than guys that allow more balls in play.

GB%/FB%/LD%

These are batted ball types, with ground ball percentage (GB%), fly ball percentage (FB%) and line drive percentage (LD%). These are the percentages of balls in play and the distribution of each type. Guys with a high GB% are likely to give up more hits, but fewer home runs. Guys with a high FB% will give up more home runs, but fewer hits, because more ground balls go for hits than fly balls. Line drives are bad for pitchers to give up because they are harder to field.

The league average GB% last season was 41.8%.

HR/FB%

As mentioned with xFIP, HR/FB% is home run per fly ball percentage - How often does a fly ball become a home run? The league average last season was 11.9%. Anything on the high end is likely to come down and anything on the low end is likely to go up.

There are major exceptions. Pitchers with a high GB% could have a higher HR/FB% because they don't have the sample size of fly balls needed to lower the rate. Similarly, pitchers with a high FB% may give up a lot of homers, but have a lower HR/FB% because they have a larger sample size of fly balls.

You can see most or all of these stats at places like FanGraphs (for a library with more detailed explanations - <https://library.fangraphs.com/>) or Baseball-Reference.

MLB STATS - STATCAST DATA

In recent years, more and more data has been posted for public consumption. Statcast data falls under that category. Housed at BaseballSavant.com, you can see a lot of really detailed statistics for both pitchers and hitters.

I won't hit on them all, but here are several that I use.

AVERAGE EXIT VELOCITY (EV OR EXIT VELO)

This is a measure in miles per hour of how hard the average batted ball is hit. League average last season was 89.4 mph. Pitchers that are 90 mph or higher give up a lot of hard contact, which is harder to field and often much more damaging. Pitchers that are 87 mph or lower tend to give up softer contact, which is easier to field and less damaging.

HARD HIT%

This is one of my favorite indicators for pitchers. Hard Hit% is the percentage of batted balls hit at least 95 mph. With each mile per hour increase in exit velocity, a batted ball has a higher batting average and a higher slugging percentage.

For example, batted balls hit at least 95 mph last season led to a batting average of .481 with a SLG of .942. Batted balls hit at least 94 mph led to a batting average of .467 and a SLG of .904. Batted balls hit at least 93 mph led to a batting average of .453 and a SLG of .869.

As you can see, with each mph you go down, the numbers start to get better for pitchers. On the flip side, the higher you go, the worse the numbers get. This is a good indicator of pitchers that are commanding their pitches well. The less hard contact, the better a pitcher's chances of limiting hits and runs.

Of course, you can also look at this for hitters or teams and see teams that make more hard contact than others. The top teams in Hard Hit% last season? Yankees, Mets, Red Sox, Mariners, and Phillies. Some pretty good offenses there. There is a high correlation between contact quality and success.

The lowest teams in Hard Hit% last season? Guardians, Padres, Reds, Giants, Astros. Something of a surprising list, but teams that finished 28th, 18th, 14th, 17th, and 21st in runs scored.

BARREL (BARREL%)

A "barrel" is a batted ball hit at least 95 mph with an optimized range of launch angle. All you need to know is that a barreled ball has an expected batting average of at least .500 and an expected slugging percentage 1.500, so think doubles and home runs.

There were 10,737 barreled balls last season, leading to a .690 BA and a 2.299 SLG. Pitchers that give up a lot of barrels are not in good shape.

Barrel% is the percentage of batted balls that are "barreled". League average was 8.6%.

SPIN RATE

With starting pitchers, I'm always looking for decreases or increases in spin rate. A decrease in spin rate can be an indicator of injury. When foreign substances were banned, we saw a lot of decreases in spin rate because pitchers didn't have sticky substances to stay on the ball later and create more friction and spin. Pitchers have adapted now.

Spin rate matters because it affects the movement of a pitch. A fastball with a high spin rate will appear to "rise" because it isn't as affected by gravity on the way to the plate. Breaking balls with higher spin rates will move tighter and break later. There is a high correlation between pitcher spin rate and hitter success in terms of things like batting average and slugging percentage.

Decreases in spin rate will also affect control and command because pitchers are used to throwing in a certain spot. The ball won't move as much and won't do what the pitcher wants. It's why Coors Field is such a hard place to pitch. The thin air and elevation don't produce as much friction on the ball, so pitches move less, thus making them easier to hit.

Again, all I ask is that you keep an open mind and take the time to try to incorporate some of these metrics or at least read to understand what they mean and why they are important.

MODELING THE VARIABLES OF BASEBALL

By Aaron from Ballpark Pal

One of the things that makes betting baseball different from every other sport is that the environment changes every single game.

An NBA court never changes. An NFL field is the same shape every Sunday. But in MLB, the offensive baseline can swing dramatically before you even look at the pitchers or lineups. A warm afternoon at Coors Field might play like a run factory, while a cold night in Seattle can suppress scoring across the board. At Wrigley Field, an overnight wind shift can move a total by four runs or more.

Understanding why that happens and how to quantify it is what park factors are all about.

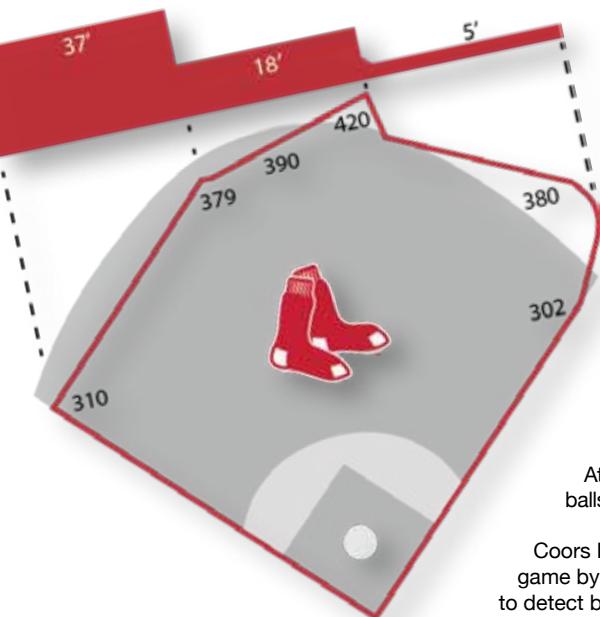
This article breaks down the stadium, weather, and player-level factors that drive run scoring across baseball's 30 unique venues, and explains Ballpark Pal's approach to modeling those variables.

THE STADIUM ITSELF

DIMENSIONS

The most visible component of park effects is field layout. While modern ballparks are more standardized than in past eras, meaningful differences still exist.

Fenway Park is the classic example. The shallow left field wall (the Green Monster) and the deep, low fence in right field create two completely different hitting environments within the same park. Yankee Stadium's short right-field porch boosts left-handed power, while much of the left side plays deeper than average. Features like Houston's Crawford Boxes, Arizona's tall center-field wall, and Pittsburgh's expansive left field all shape outcomes in different ways.



CONTACT QUALITY

Dimensions alone don't tell the full story. The "feel" of a park, including its visuals, batter's eye, and overall environment, also affects how well hitters make contact.

Ballpark Pal tracks long-term effects on contact rate and contact quality by stadium. These aren't things you can easily spot on a broadcast, but they show up consistently in the data.

Seattle's T-Mobile Park has been one of the toughest environments for hitter contact over the years, likely due in part to its quirky batter's eye. On the other end, parks with large outfields like Kansas City, Detroit, and Arizona tend to produce better contact, possibly because hitters focus more on putting the ball in play. Smaller parks such as Cincinnati and Chicago (AL) often show slightly worse contact as hitters sell out for power.

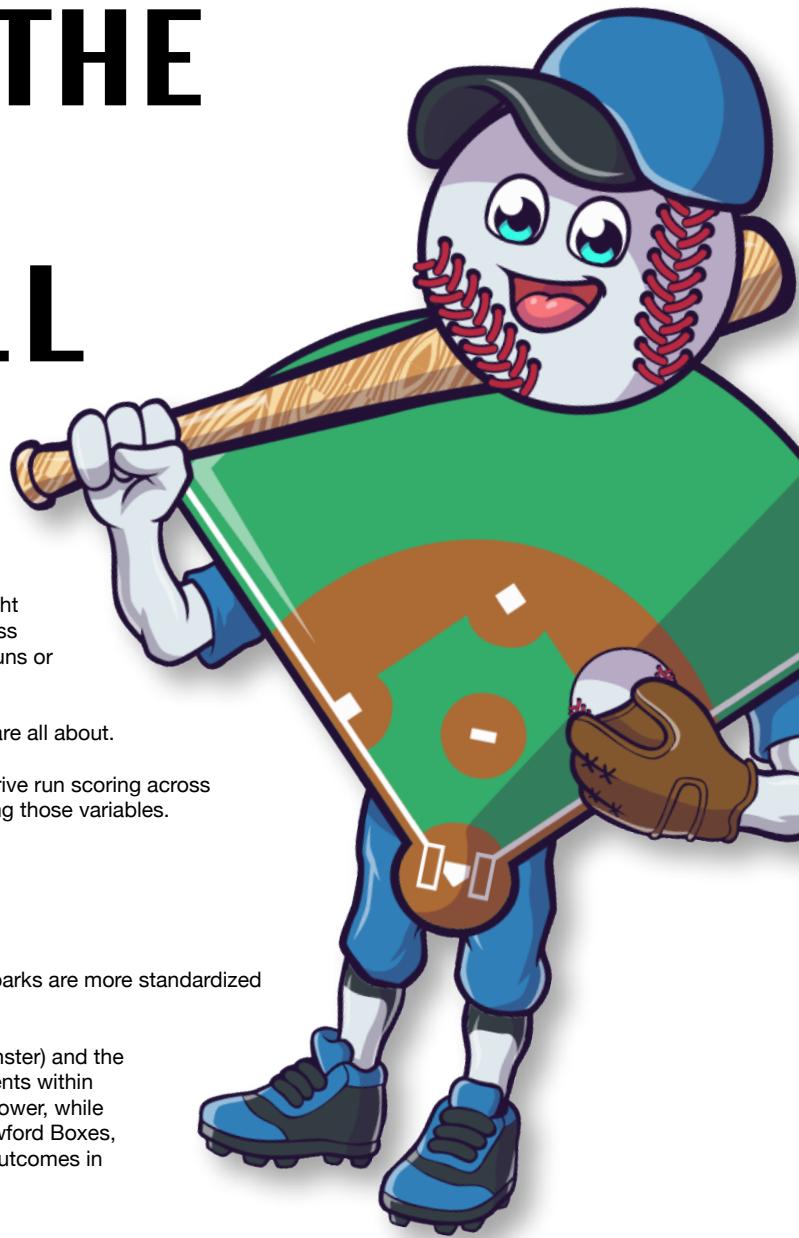
There isn't a perfect explanation for these effects, but they're measurable and show up consistently in the data.

ALTITUDE

Altitude is the final stadium-level piece before weather comes into play.

At higher elevations, the air is thinner. That means fly balls travel farther and pitches move less. Breaking balls don't break as sharply, fastballs don't ride as much, and hitters see straighter pitch paths.

Coors Field is the extreme example at over 5,000 feet above sea level, where these effects show up game by game. Smaller differences, such as Atlanta at around 1,000 feet vs Tampa at 44 feet, take longer to detect but are still real.



WEATHER

TEMPERATURE

Temperature is the most reliable day-to-day weather variable for park factors.

Warm air helps the ball carry. Cold air suppresses distance. Unlike wind, temperature affects every fly ball and doesn't fluctuate during the game. That's the main reason home run rates climb in the summer and dip again in early spring and late fall.

WIND

Wind gets the headlines for good reason, but it's tricky.

At places like Wrigley Field, Fenway Park, and Citizens Bank Park, wind direction and speed can dramatically change run scoring. A strong wind blowing out at Wrigley can turn routine fly balls into home runs. Flip that wind around, and the same park can become one of the toughest scoring environments in baseball.

Other stadiums are nearly wind-proof. Citi Field, Milwaukee, and Toronto block gusts effectively. San Francisco is especially misleading: the forecast almost always shows wind blowing out, but inside the park it swirls unpredictably and often has little net effect.

This is why it's imperative to account for how wind actually behaves inside each stadium, not just what the weather app shows.

AIR PRESSURE AND HUMIDITY

Two quieter factors also matter: barometric pressure and humidity.

Lower air pressure means less dense air, which reduces drag on the baseball. Humid air is also less dense than dry air, helping the ball retain exit velocity. Both contribute to better carry and higher scoring, and both are part of the overall run-scoring equation on a given day.

PARK FACTORS ARE PLAYER-SPECIFIC

Not all hitters benefit equally from the same conditions.

A 450-foot blast is a home run anywhere, but warning-track fly balls are far more sensitive to stadium dimensions and weather. That's why park factors matter more for some hitter profiles than others.

A pull-heavy right-handed hitter like Isaac Paredes gains more from Houston's short left-field wall than someone like Yordan Alvarez, who sends a higher share of his fly balls to center field. Similarly, park effects tend to matter less for pure power hitters like Kyle Schwarber and more for contact-oriented hitters such as Alejandro Kirk, whose fly balls often land near the edge of the warning track.

Ballpark Pal assigns park factors at the player level first, then rolls them up to team and game projections. Two hitters in the same lineup can receive very different boosts, or penalties, under identical conditions.

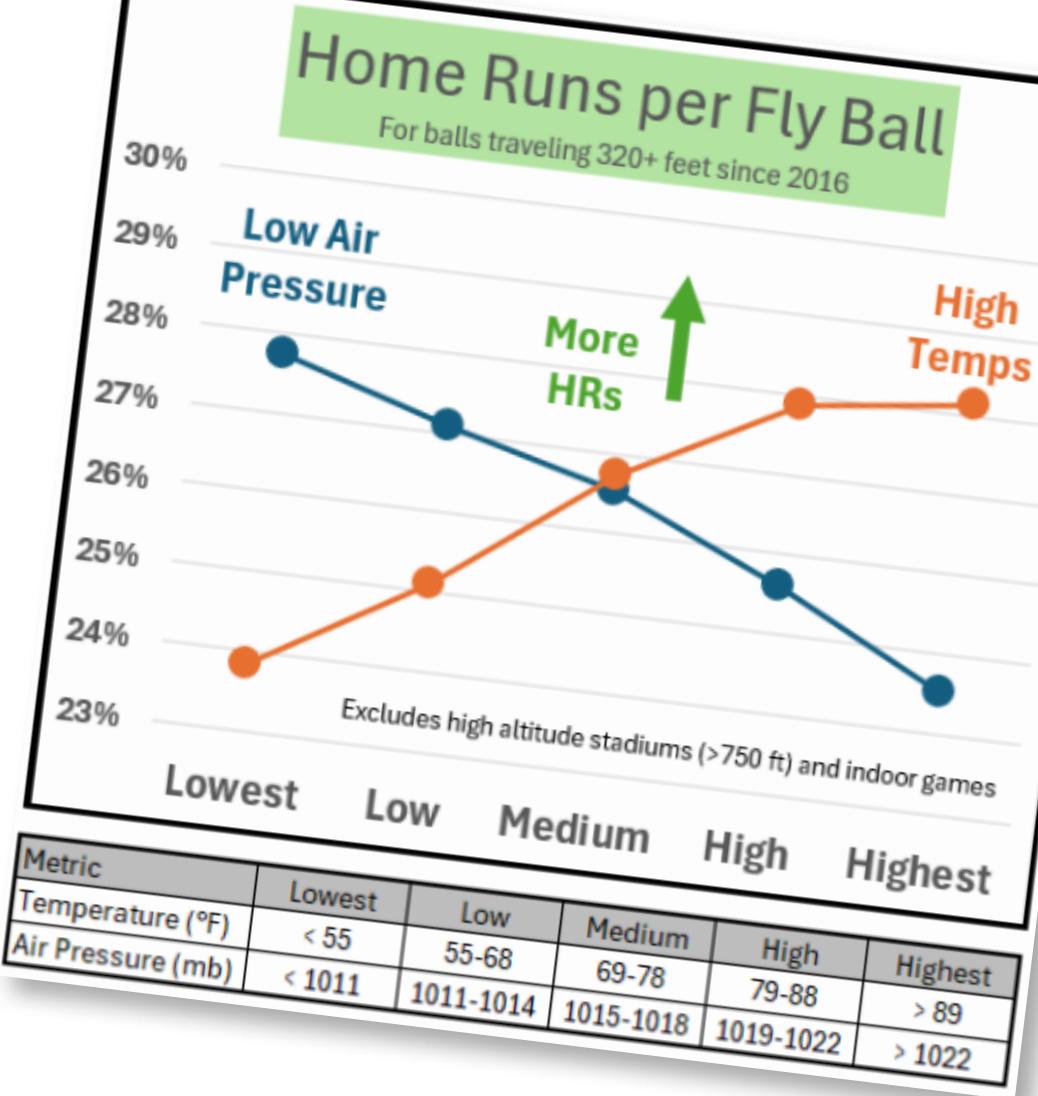
CALCULATING PARK FACTORS

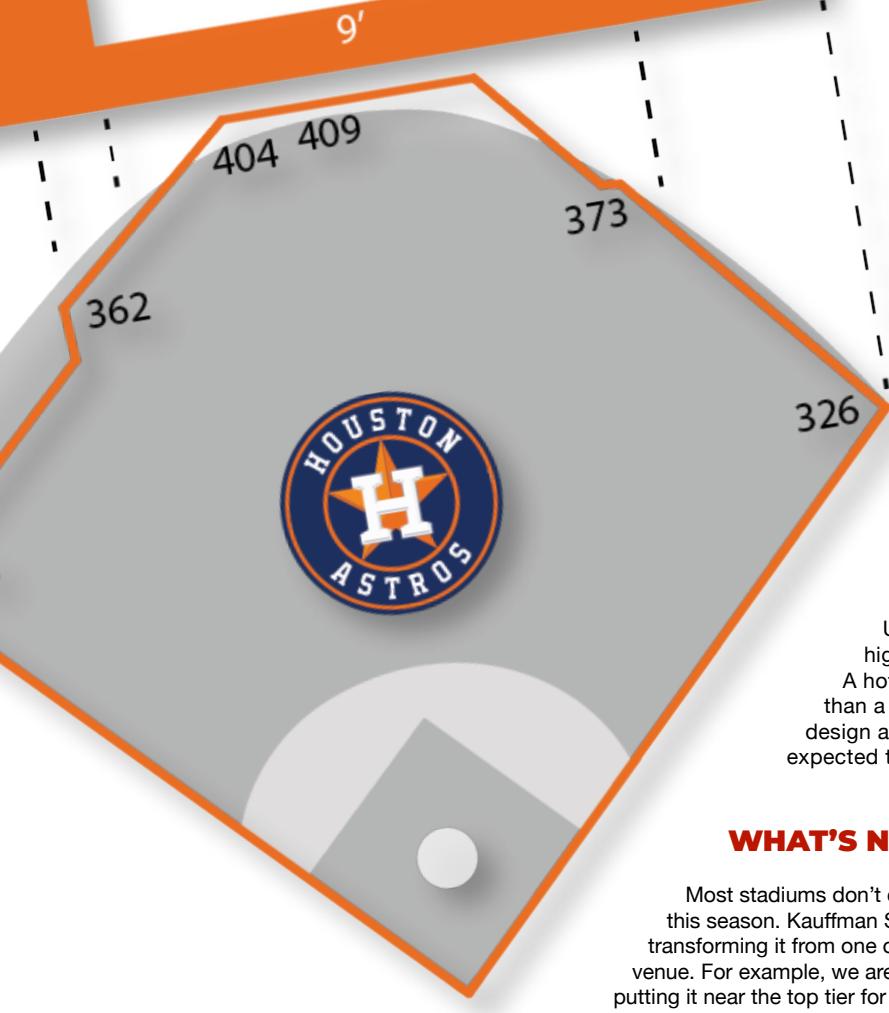
Traditional park factors rely on home/away splits that compare performance in a park to performance everywhere else. That approach works directionally, but it's noisy. Team quality, divisional opponents, weather distribution, and randomness all get mixed into the results.

Ballpark Pal takes a different approach. Instead of comparing outcomes, it models batted balls directly. For each fly ball, the system estimates the probability of a home run with and without environmental effects. The difference between those two probabilities represents the park's impact.

When you aggregate those differences across more than a million batted balls, you get a cleaner, more precise view of how each stadium-weather combo truly affects scoring.

Home/away splits are still useful for things like strikeouts and walks, but batted-ball modeling does a better job isolating the environment itself.





APPLYING PARK FACTORS

Season-long park factors are usually expressed relative to league average. A value of 100 is neutral, 107 is 7% above average, and 93 is 7% below over the course of the year. Those numbers describe how a park tends to play in general, across a wide mix of weather conditions and matchups.

The larger edge comes from moving beyond season averages. Ballpark Pal's approach centers on combining each stadium's structural and local tendencies with the specific weather forecast for that game, rather than relying solely on historical splits. Temperature, wind, air density, and altitude are layered onto the park's baseline characteristics and then applied at the player level based on each hitter's batted-ball profile. Those individual adjustments are rolled up into team and game projections.

Under that framework, Coors Field is not automatically the highest-scoring environment every time it appears on the schedule. A hot, windy night at Fenway can sometimes project for more offense than a cool, still evening in Denver. The interaction between stadium design and real-time weather ultimately determines how a game is expected to play.

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2026

Most stadiums don't change much year to year, but Kansas City is the big exception this season. Kauffman Stadium is bringing in its outfield fences by 9-10 feet in most spots, transforming it from one of the toughest home run parks in baseball into a power-friendly venue. For example, we are increasing Kauffman's home run factor from 81 to 110 in 2026, putting it near the top tier for long balls.

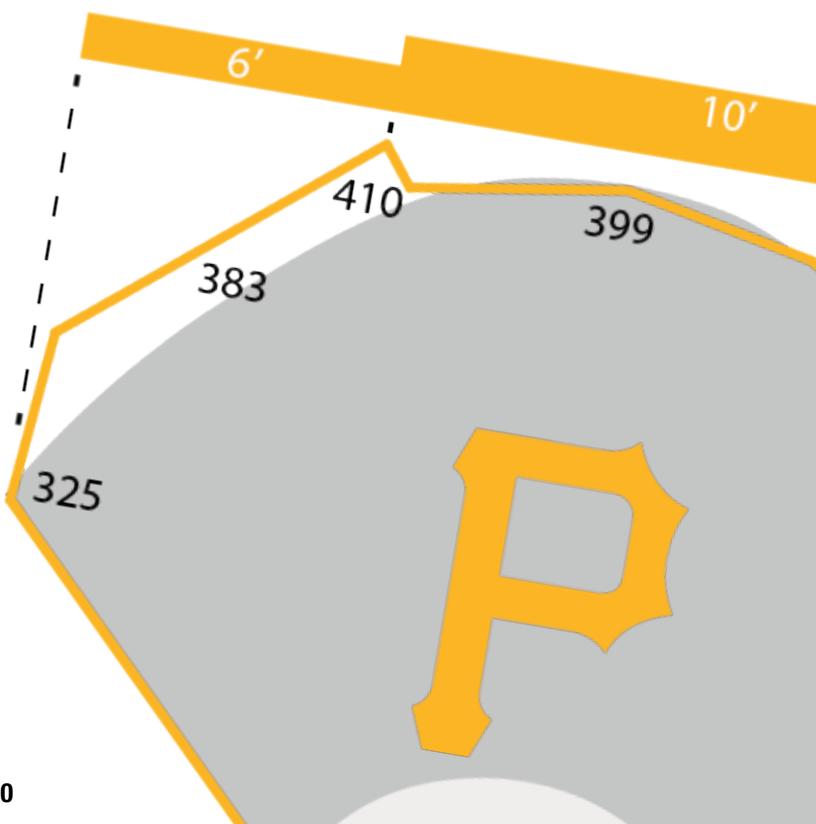
Cincinnati and Arlington (Texas) are also worth monitoring. Neither park underwent structural changes, but both produced fewer home runs than expected in 2025 after accounting for lineup strength and contact quality. In Cincinnati, a park that typically ranks among the league's most homer-friendly, balls simply didn't clear the fence as often as the quality of contact would suggest. A similar pattern showed up in Arlington. Whether those trends persist in 2026 remains an open question, but both parks will be watched closely.

Two minor league venues entered the mix in 2025. Sutter Health Park became the Athletics' temporary home as they transitioned to Sacramento, while Steinbrenner Field hosted the Rays during repairs to Tropicana Field. Both parks played very friendly to home runs, with Sutter Health Park standing out in particular due to a consistently strong out-blowing wind. Tampa Bay returns to Tropicana Field in 2026, but the Athletics remain in Sacramento, where Sutter Health Park is once again expected to rank among the league's top venues for dingers.

BOTTOM LINE

Park factors aren't just trivia, they're a foundational driver of scoring in Major League Baseball. But they're also layered and often misunderstood. A park's reputation doesn't tell you how it will play on a specific night, and the weather forecast alone rarely gives the full picture. Stadium design, altitude, temperature, wind patterns, and hitter tendencies all interact in ways that aren't always intuitive.

When those variables are accounted for properly, totals and player props start to look less random and more logical. The challenge isn't knowing that park factors matter. It's measuring them accurately on the day the game is played.



AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST

VSIN

2026 SEASON

The AL East enters the 2026 season as the unquestioned best division in baseball. The last-place Orioles won 75 games in 2025, more than any other last-place team in the league, and the Blue Jays and Yankees tied for the best record in the Junior Circuit. It was the only division to feature three teams with at least 89 wins and one of two divisions with three playoff qualifiers, though the NL Central had the Reds at 83-79, as the Wild Card bubble in the Senior Circuit was rather soft.

The Blue Jays had a busy offseason doubling, and maybe

even tripling, down on their success, while the Red Sox and Orioles did what they could to improve at the margins and replace some lost production. The Rays are always dangerous as one of the league's sharpest organizations and the Yankees, who seemed to have their offseason derailed by Trent Grisham accepting the \$22.025 million qualifying offer, had a very quiet offseason, with the exception of a reunion with Cody Bellinger.

Interestingly, the Rays were arguably the unluckiest team in baseball last season,

finishing 77-85 with an 84-78 record by Pythagorean Win-Loss and the same by BaseRuns, a context-neutral standings metric created by FanGraphs. Furthermore, the Rays had the worst record within the division at 20-32, while Baltimore checked in at 22-30. Boston was tops at 32-20.

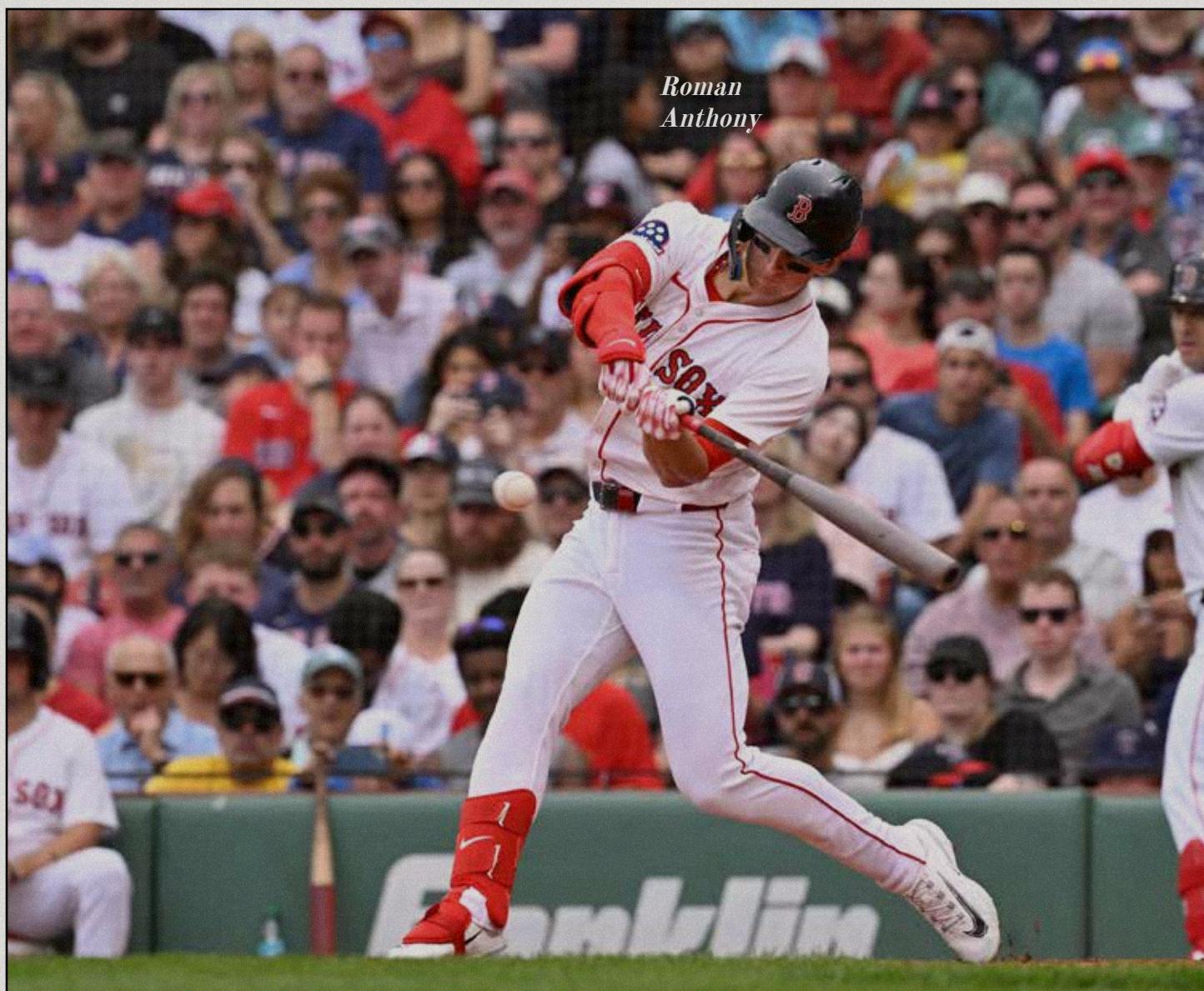
Can Tampa Bay close the gap against their AL East brethren to make a big push? Will Toronto's big spending allow them to run it back as division champs for the first time since 1992-93? Can the Yankees

hit their stride before or after Gerrit Cole and Carlos Rodon return in May or June? Just how good are the Red Sox? Have the Orioles found enough pitching to get back over the hump?

Plenty of questions remain for each of the five teams in the AL East, but a lot of wins are coming for a division that collectively went 299-251 (.544) against the other five divisions in 2025.

- Adam Burke

*Roman
Anthony*



BALTIMORE ORIOLES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Following back-to-back playoff appearances with 192 combined regular season victories, the Orioles were one of baseball's most disappointing teams in 2025. It was a season, ahem, for the birds, as Baltimore went just 75-87 and got outscored by more than 100 runs. A total of 70 players and 41 pitchers appeared on the roster, as the Orioles dropped off in the batter's box and on the pitcher's mound.

Only two players - Gunnar Henderson and Jackson Holliday - had more than 365 plate appearances. Five pitchers threw over 100 innings and four of them had an ERA of 4.19 or higher and two of them

had ERAs of 5.21 and 5.42. In total, 16 different pitchers made a start. Maybe it was unfair of the organization to make manager Brandon Hyde a casualty for a situation that was about way more than him, but the reset button has been pushed with highly-respected Craig Albernaz, who had been AL Manager of the Year Stephen Vogt's bench coach the last two seasons in Cleveland.

Where the reset button was not pushed was with the roster. Baltimore locked in free agent slugger Pete Alonso and high-leverage reliever Ryan Helsley, but was unable to get the front-of-the-rotation starter that they desperately needed.

the last four seasons. In today's high-strikeout, fielding-optimized environment, home runs matter a lot and this offense should perk up.

PITCHING

While the O's didn't get Ranger Suarez, Dylan Cease, or Framber Valdez, count me in on this rotation. Getting a ground ball merchant like Valdez in the rough-and-tumble AL East would have been spectacular, but a healthy rotation could be really special for Baltimore. Unfortunately, health is a skill and one that is hard to maintain. Kyle Bradish has been outstanding when healthy, but he's made 14 starts over 71.1 innings in the last two seasons. Trevor Rogers had his second career breakout season with 3.3 fWAR and a 1.81/3.39/2.82 pitcher slash (ERA/xERA/FIP). The last time he did something like that was 2021 when he had 4.3 fWAR in 133 innings. In between, he had 2.1 fWAR over three seasons and made just 52 starts. Interdivision trades are rare and any trade with the Rays carries inherent pessimism, but Shane Baz, one of four projected rotation



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 84.5

DIVISION: +475

PENNANT: 10-1

WORLD SERIES: 22-1

members who have had Tommy John surgery, has high upside with a 24.5% K% over 1,196 batters faced and is coming off of his best season by GB% at 46.7%. Add in Zach Eflin back from a lumbar discectomy that cut short a wasted 2025 season and innings muncher Dean Kremer and I like the core group, but they'll need to stay healthy since depth from below is limited, even with the Bassitt addition, and the retooled bullpen is limited on leverage arms beyond over-30 relievers in Helsley and Andrew Kittredge.

PROSPECT WATCH

While many will focus on C/DH Samuel Basallo, and deservedly so, my focus is on SP Trey Gibson. The undrafted free agent already touched Triple-A by essentially his second season in pro ball at the end of last year and probably just ran out of gas coupled with the increase in the degree of difficulty. I mentioned a ground ball merchant like Valdez? Well, Gibson isn't quite that, but with well over a punchy per inning and a high rate of ground balls is an enticing arm. He also has

roughly 90th percentile Extension to help his stuff play up. If injuries hit - and they will - expect him to debut.

OUTLOOK

Albernaz got a managerial interview in Cleveland before agreeing to come on and work alongside Vogt, so I have no doubt that the Orioles got a good one, even if the heavy Boston accent turns off the fans a bit. I would like to think that the Orioles stay healthier, at least in the lineup, where a budding star like Colton Cowser battled busted ribs and saw drops in contact and power. Basallo should also hit regardless of position on the field or in the batting order. And the rotation has upside. Outlooks are predicated on health and good fortune for all teams, but even more so for the O's in this division and with the thick medical files on these guys.

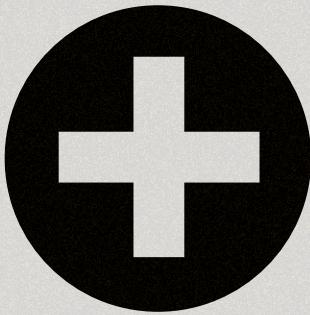
BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 84.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Gunnar Henderson returns to his 2024 form (dealt with a shoulder impingement in 2025) and wins the AL MVP (22/1)



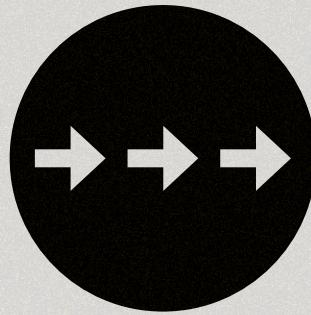
BALTIMORE ORIOLES

2025 RECORD: 75-87, LAST IN AL EAST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: OVER 84.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Pete Alonso
OF Taylor Ward
SP Shane Baz
RP Ryan Helsley
RP Andrew Kittredge
OF Leody Taveras
SP Chris Bassitt



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP Tomoyuki Sugano
C Gary Sanchez
OF Dylan Carlson
INF Jorge Mateo
SP Grayson Rodriguez

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
75-87

-15.6 UNITS

•

TOTAL
80-82

•

RUN LINE
80-82

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
65-71-26
-9.2 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5
81-81 (50%)

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
80-82

•

YES RUN
FIRST INNING
82-80

HITTING

For a lineup with so much momentum and promise at the end of the 2024 season, the 2025 campaign sputtered and stalled out by about mid-May, falling 10+ games out of first place in the AL East for the rest of the year. Can the “future-is-now” foundation of SS Gunnar Henderson, 2B Jackson Holliday, 3B Jordan Westburg, and C/DH Samuel Basallo revitalize their attack in 2026? Survey says: Yes, especially bolstered by the big bat of Alonso in a splash signing by the Orioles front office. Add in the shocking trade of Rodriguez that brought in Ward from the Angels and you’ve got a legit chance at Westburg, Henderson, Alonso, and Ward combining for over 110 HR. That’s an offensive surge you can buy. Adley Rutschman needs a major bounce-back campaign to help lengthen a lineup that will also feature young phenoms Holliday and Basallo, as well as 2024 AL Rookie of the Year runner-up OF Colton Cowser. The sky is the limit in Baltimore’s offense and they show every indication of rebounding in the runs scored department.

PITCHING

Orioles fans have been screaming for president of baseball operations Mike Elias to go get a top-line starter. Did he do that by acquiring Baz from the Rays? It’s definitely a good start, adding the power right-hander into the fold alongside holdovers Trevor Rogers and Dean Kremer. Staff ace Zach Eflin re-upped for one more year and a healthy Kyle Bradish could be the elixir the top of the rotation so desperately needs. A couple seasons ago, the Orioles bullpen was the envy of the baseball world, featuring arguably the most dominant closer at that time in Felix Bautista. Shoulder surgery in August last year will sideline him, forcing the O’s to go after veteran leverage relievers. Kittredge comes over from the Cubs to join Keegan Akin, who assumed the 9th inning duties at the end of 2025. Baltimore took a gamble signing Helsley, hoping that a change of scenery for the stopper is exactly what the doctor ordered.

PROSPECT WATCH

Most of the top players are in the big leagues, with Basallo

and OF Dylan Beavers the latest graduates in 2025. OF Enrique Bradfield Jr. and P Trey Gibson are the next in line, should reinforcements be needed. Top 2025 draft pick and Golden Spikes Award winner, as well as SEC Player of the Year, SS Wehiwa Aloy, can probably speed through the system with his advanced skill set and notable power for a middle infielder.

OUTLOOK

Craig Albernaz comes over from being bench coach with the Guardians to take over as skipper for the Orioles. There’s a lot of buzz already about his personality, impact, and attention to detail, after being highly sought after just a year ago for managerial openings. Don’t be shocked if he is a finalist for AL Manager of the Year. The acquisition of Alonso can’t be understated and cements the “aircraft carrier” this lineup needs. There’s balance, depth, and explosiveness up and down the order. A top-five offense after what we just witnessed a year ago would be as big a story there is this season.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE:
ALONSO HITS 40+ HR AND THE ORIOLES WIN THE AL EAST



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 87.5

DIVISION: +310

PENNANT: +700

WORLD SERIES: 15-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: The Red Sox are actually the main threat to the Blue Jays and the best World Series value bet from the division at 15/1

HITTING

We'll have to wait and see what Jose Bello and James Tibbs ultimately become for the Red Sox, but to lose a career 127 wRC+ player in Devers in mid-June and still make the playoffs is an impressive accomplishment. (Kyle Harrison from that trade was part of the package to acquire 3B Caleb Durbin from the Brewers in February.) The curve placed on playing in a hitter's haven like Fenway Park did lower Boston's wRC+ to 103 since park factor is a major part of the equation, but they were top 10 in BA, OBP, SLG, SB, and runs scored. And, incredibly, the pitching staff allowed fewer runs per game in that environment than on the road, so the offense benefitted in a much bigger way.

The Red Sox posted a 86 wRC+ from the first base position, which was the fifth-lowest in the league. Enter Contreras, who owns a career 122 wRC+ and should see his BB% spike back towards his 9.8% career mark after a down year at 7.8% last season that cut into his on-base percentage and other metrics. If Carlos Narvaez, who was an elite defensive catcher, hits too poorly, Triston Casas should return

in the first quarter of the season and Contreras can catch. Roman Anthony had a 140 wRC+ in his first 71 MLB games and looks like a bona fide star. With a lineup that was in the top five in Hard Hit%, top 10 in Barrel%, and terrific defensive numbers from guys who might not hit, this is one of the best position player groups in baseball.

PITCHING

It is rare when a pitcher who had a 3.12 ERA goes on to have a better career as a coach than he did as a player, but Andrew Bailey is on that path. The third-year pitching coach inherited a Red Sox staff that had just posted a 4.52 ERA with a 4.18 xERA and a 4.37 FIP in 2023, along with the ninth-highest Hard Hit% at 40%. Bailey came to the team with some shocking suggestions, such as "Throw your best pitch more often" and "Let's throw fewer fastballs". Early-season reporting highlighted how Bailey wanted to relax the staff's usage of fastballs because they are often hit harder than offspeed pitches. It should also be noted that the Red Sox defense was -50 in Outs Above Average in 2023, worst in the league by far.

BOSTON RED SOX

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The standards remain high for the Fenway Faithful, but many are wondering why the front office doesn't feel the same way. The dominoes started to fall with the Mookie Betts and David Price trade to the Dodgers back in 2020 and it seems like it has just been bad news since. Alex Verdugo has been a decent big-leaguer, but he never had a 2-WAR season for the Red Sox. It's six years later and Jeter Downs has 50 career MLB plate appearances and spent last season playing in Japan. Connor Wong is a .245/.303/.377 player in 1,148 career plate appearances.

Failing to maximize an asset like Betts could be a kiss of death for other organizations, but not the Red Sox, right? Despite the Betts

deal fallout, the Red Sox got Alex Cora back from his yearlong suspension and went to the ALCS in 2021. Then the bottom fell out. Back-to-back last-place finishes, an ill-fated decision to prioritize keeping Rafael Devers over Xander Bogaerts, only to ultimately lose both of them, a front office fiasco, and a fair amount of bad luck have led to a total of three playoff games in the last four seasons.

While the headlines painted a dark and murky picture, the Red Sox were busy developing some legitimate talent from within and are hoping that the major acquisitions of Willson Contreras and Sonny Gray via trade and the signing of Ranger Suarez fill last season's holes.

middle infield hotshot in Franklin Arias as an elite contact bat and plus defender. The 20-year-old finished the season at Double-A in his second full year of pro ball and has just 132 K in 1,057 career PA. There may be a logjam eventually, and the Red Sox have an embarrassment of riches they can use as currency to make a World Series push.

OUTLOOK

When we get "super teams" in the NBA, the common sentiment is, "There's only one ball". Well, we'll have to see how Cora distributes playing time here, as the young guns are beating on the door and some have already broken through it. Strikeouts could be a problem, especially with some impatient hitters towards the bottom of the order, but this should be a high-SLG lineup with plenty of plus defenders, and a much improved, more durable pitching staff. The Red Sox are also making a substantial push again with analytics and they're likely to find surplus value on players as a result.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: OVER 87.5**



BOSTON RED SOX

2025 RECORD: 89-73, 3RD IN AL EAST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL PLAY: OVER 87.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

90-75
+.3 UNITS

•

TOTAL

76-85-4
•

RUN LINE

88-77

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

88-77

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

72-69-24
-.7.6 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

86-79
•

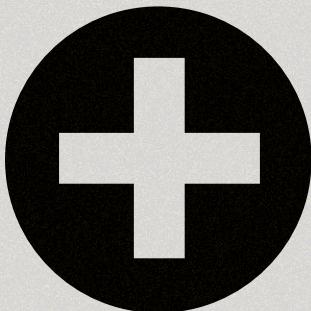
RUN LINE 1ST 5

83-82

•

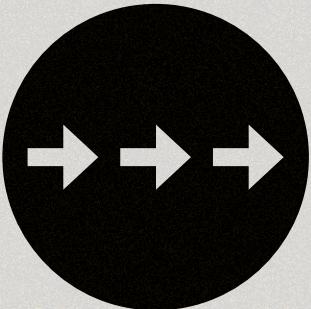
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Willson Contreras
SP Ranger Suárez
SP Sonny Gray
SP Johan Oviedo
RP Ryan Watson
INF Caleb Durbin
INF Andruw Monasterio



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

INF Alex Bregman
SP Lucas Giolito
SP Steven Matz
RP Justin Wilson
OF Rob Refsnyder
SP Dustin May
RP Josh Winckowski
RP Liam Hendriks
INF Nathaniel Lowe
RP Jordan Hicks
SP Kyle Harrison



JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Welp, it's not the offseason offensively that this Red Sox fan base had in mind. Alex Bregman is gone to Chicago, leaving a gaping hole of leadership in the Boston clubhouse and on the field. Enter 1B Willson Contreras, coming over with former Cardinals teammate Sonny Gray, to fill a much needed void at first base. He'll position squarely in the middle of a lineup alongside Red Sox regulars DH Jarren Duran and SS Trevor Story. One of the brightest young stars in the game, LF Roman Anthony, returns after a terribly timed injury, ending his second half of 2025. RF Wilyer Abreu, the speculation of much trade talk along with Duran, remains in Beantown and lengthens a lineup that features C Carlos Narváez, newly-acquired 3B Caleb Durbin, 2B Romy Gonzalez and speedy CF Ceddanne Rafaela. Veteran OF Masataka Yoshida provides depth off the bench and 1B Triston Casas is hopeful to return from knee surgery he underwent last May. What will the drop-off (if any) be without Bregman? He seemed to be such a keystone in the Red Sox lineup and those responsibilities will fall on a handful of Boston thumpers to pick up the slack. It's still a lineup with plenty of speed and versatility, but the expectations are far higher now with the momentum of 2025.

PITCHING

Is this the best rotation in baseball? On paper, it just might be. Ace and 2025 AL Cy-Young runner-up LHP Garrett Crochet will be right back in the running for the award in 2026. He'll be flanked by standout LHP Ranger Suárez, who signed a 5-year/\$175M deal in January, as well as veteran standout Sonny Gray, acquired in a November 2025 trade with St. Louis. It makes for a top three starting trio that'll stack up against any in the

Junior Circuit. Rounding out the rotation will be Brayan Bello and RHP Johan Oviedo, brought over in a deal with Pittsburgh. Closer Aroldis Chapman statistically stacked up as the best overall reliever in the game last year. His primary setup man, Garrett Whitlock, returns with Justin Slaten and Greg Weissert to boot. Quite the arsenal of arms that pitched Boston to the second lowest bullpen ERA in 2025.

PROSPECT WATCH

Plenty of top tier talent abounds in the Boston farm system, highlighted by top organizational prospects LHP Payton Tolle and SS Franklin Arias. Tolle, the Red Sox 2024 second round pick, will be a factor at some point this year, as will Connelly Early, who burst on the scene in the second half of 2025. Arias is almost a carbon copy of Marcelo Mayer, as far as the offensive tools are concerned and he'll begin the year at Double-A. The real excitement beckons in a couple years when 2025 No.15 overall selection, RHP Kyson Witherspoon, potentially rockets through the minor league system. He's got frontline starter stuff and a little seasoning with his slider and curveball will do him wonders when he reaches the big leagues.

OUTLOOK

Manager Alex Cora returns to head a Red Sox team that's come under fire for a lack of top target offensive additions this offseason. Can he lean on a starting rotation that should have its way with most opposing lineups, while getting a quick offensive start from Anthony, Story and Duran? Will Chapman keep defying Father Time and continue at his dominant pace? If that all materializes, Boston will put immense pressure on the rest of the AL East right out of the gates, firmly entrenched in a battle for the division title.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: ROMAN ANTHONY RECEIVES MVP VOTES AND BOSTON MAKES A DEEP OCTOBER RUN

NEW YORK YANKEES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The quest for No. 28 continues, as the Yankees have made the playoffs in 11 of the last 15 seasons, but don't have a World Series trophy to show for it. In fact, the Bronx residents have made the playoffs in all but five seasons in years starting with a 20 and have two World Series victories (2000, 2009) to show for it. Failing to really build on the momentum of the Fall Classic loss to the Dodgers two seasons ago didn't sit well with the fans and the Yanks bowed out in the ALDS.

Truth be told, I'm not sure things could have gone better for the Yankees last season. Aaron Judge won another AL MVP and played 152 games. Cody Bellinger (4.9) and Jazz Chisholm Jr. (4.4) led a group of

five players with at least 3.0 fWAR. Max Fried and Carlos Rodon each threw 195.1 very valuable innings and Will Warren made 33 starts to offset the in-season loss of Clarke Schmidt and the preseason loss of Gerrit Cole. Outside of the bullpen being an adventure, Cam Schmittler debuted and was excellent, Trent Grisham had a breakout season, Ben Rice would have gotten Rookie of the Year votes if eligible, and Aaron Boone was only ejected seven times.

With Ryan Weathers as the only newcomer, and an eye on Cole and Rodon's returns in May or June, do the Yankees have enough to emerge victorious in a clearly improved division?

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 91.5

DIVISION: +160

PENNANT: +400

WORLD SERIES: 10-1



HITTING

So, there's a glass half-full and glass half-empty approach to the Yankees offense. The half-full part is that Judge remains an elite hitter who was two times better than league average with an MLB-best 204 wRC+. Rice, Grisham, Chisholm, and Bellinger, who are all locked in for this season, combined for 120 home runs. Giancarlo Stanton only played 77 games, but hit 24 dingers with a 158 wRC+. Last season's power production remains intact and those guys collectively draw walks at a well above average rate.

I'm not going to pretend like Judge is going to experience a huge drop in numbers, but he'll turn 34 in April and his SwStr% was his highest since 2019 and his Z-Contact% has been down the last three years relative to the two years prior. Teams that have lofty expectations like the Yankees have to be viewed in the aggregate. Any decline from Judge paired with declines from Grisham, whose 21.5% HR/FB% was easily a career-high, Chisholm, who set a career-best mark in BB% and saw a huge spike in fly balls, Rice, who swung and missed less at the MLB level than he had in the minors, or Bellinger, who had a SLG of .480 with an expected SLG of .317, negatively impacts the team in a good division with a high win total and short futures odds.

PITCHING

The Yankees do find themselves in an advantageous situation here. Schmittler's emergence as a burgeoning star and Fried's strong, healthy season give New York a lot to build around. Also, like we've seen with the Dodgers, there is probably a pretty big push among organizations with a lot of money or a lot of arms to not overextend guys. Fried is a workhorse, but Schmittler worked over 160 innings and he's an arm worth protecting. That's why the May return of Rodon and the probable June return of Cole are so important.

With competent starters like Warren and Luis Gil, plus an arm I've loved forever in Weathers, the Yankees should run deep here by the summer. Weathers added

three ticks to his fastball over the last few seasons, but has never thrown more than 86.2 MLB innings in a campaign, so the jury is way out on him. Nevertheless, between the rotation and a bullpen in line for positive regression, this is a good group. Bullpens are super volatile year-over-year. The 2024 Yankees pen posted a 3.62 ERA with a 3.91 xERA and a 3.96 FIP. The 2025 Yankees pen had a 4.37 ERA with a 3.77 xERA and a 4.11 FIP. The biggest difference? The 2025 version had a 69.8% LOB% that ranked 26th. The 2024 version had a 72.6% LOB% that ranked 12th.

PROSPECT WATCH

We're finally at the point where Jasson Dominguez can't really be considered a prospect, so we go to the next outfielder in the pipeline with Spencer Jones. Jones is often dangled by Bronx Bombers fans in hypothetical trade proposals as a guy with prolific power and a ton of holes in his swing. He bashed 35 HR in 506 PA across AA and AAA last season, but also struck out over 35% of the time with a 19.2% SwStr%. I think strikeouts are overblown, especially if you can offset them with power and free passes, and Jones did post an 11.5% BB%. A boom-or-bust left-handed bat on a per-PA basis with this home ballpark intrigues me greatly.

OUTLOOK

Returning from Tommy John surgery is not linear, so there's no guarantee that Cole comes back looking like himself, nor is there with Rodon and his bone spur surgery. But, the Yankees have positioned themselves well to go seven-ish deep by late spring and shouldn't have to overextend guys. Similarly, there are a lot of above average bats to go with an elite one in the lineup. The relief corps will rely on situational regression with no major adds. This is basically the same team, but a year older. To me, this group stayed pretty much the same, while the other four in the division got better.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 91.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Multi-player regression hits and the Yankees are fighting for the final AL Wild Card spot several games back in the division

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Hard to argue with the offensive output from this 2025 Yankees lineup. The league leader in runs scored, OPS and HR basically runs it back in 2026 with most of the regulars that finished in pinstripes last season. RF Aaron Judge won his third AL MVP award in the last four years and has his battering mates LF Cody Bellinger and DH Giancarlo Stanton back for lineup protection. Fresh off of a career year, CF Trent Grisham accepted the Yankees qualifying offer, returning to hit leadoff, while 1B Ben Rice and re-signed 1B Paul Goldschmidt share duties anchoring the infield of 2B Jazz Chisholm Jr., SS José Caballero and 3B Ryan McMahon. C Austin Wells rounds out the lineup. Bench options abound with INF/OF Oswaldo Cabrera and Amed Rosario, along with "the Martian" OF Jasson Domínguez. On paper, can the Bronx Bombers recreate 849 runs scored and 274 team HR? Projections indicate yes, with the favorable short porches in Yankee Stadium. This lineup surprisingly

finished top eight in stolen bases and with Caballero getting the Opening Day spot for the injured SS Anthony Volpe, he's got a shot at 50+ in that category. Speaking of 50 or more, what's to stop Judge from eclipsing the 50+ HR plateau and three-peating in the MVP race? There still seems to be no answer (outside of the playoffs) to solve getting him out in clutch situations. Expect the usual thunder and lightning from the Yankee starting nine again in 2026.

PITCHING

Hold the line. That's the refrain for the early portion of the 2026 schedule in the Yankee rotation. Max Fried is slated for the top starting spot out of the chute, alongside rookie sensations Cam Schlittler and Will Warren. A sneaky good deal with the Marlins brings in a high-upside starter in Ryan Weathers, with Luis Gil rounding out the first five. The rehab timelines for staff ace Gerrit Cole and stalwart Carlos Rodón are something to monitor, with Cole potentially joining the big

league staff in early June. Neither will be rushed, considering the depth of the current starting options; nevertheless, when both return to full health, New York will have a viable argument for the deepest rotation in the AL. Bullpen issues plagued this team a year ago, but with offseason defections by Williams and Weaver to the crosstown rival Mets, some roles become pretty clear heading into 2026. Closer David Bednar flourished down the stretch and will be the stopper. Setup men Camilo Doval, Fernando Cruz and Tim Hill all provide excellent leverage options. The real question in camp will be how to fill out the remaining reliever options, deciding between veterans Paul Blackburn, Ryan Yarbrough and Rule 5 selection Cade Winquest. New York can't afford this unit being the early Achilles' heel it became in 2025.

PROSPECT WATCH

Four Yankees farmhands find their spots in MiLB's Top 100 list entering 2026, highlighted by INF George Lombard Jr. (No.32),

RHP Carlos Lagrange (No.79) and RHP Elmer Rodriguez (No.82). Lombard possesses excellent base-stealing abilities and scouts believe he'll develop into a five-tool player. Rodríguez is ticketed for the Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre rotation as a potential early call-up candidate. Notably absent from the Top 100 list is ballyhooed power prospect OF Spencer Jones. His struggles with swing-and-miss continue to keep him from the Bronx, but his power is absolutely undeniable.

OUTLOOK

The goal never changes: World Series or bust. Manager Aaron Boone will rely on the early offensive firepower to win games before Cole and Rodón can return to the rotation. The bullpen needs a quick start as well. With the AL East getting even better this offseason, the Yankees will be plenty battle-tested. Will those battles result in too much injury attrition or can they overwhelm their division rivals, en route to a deep October run?

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: THE YANKEE ROTATION REINFORCEMENTS PROVE VITAL AS THEY FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO THE ALCS

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
97-72
-13.1 UNITS

TOTAL
77-85-6
•
RUN LINE
79-89
•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
95-53-21
+16.8 UNITS

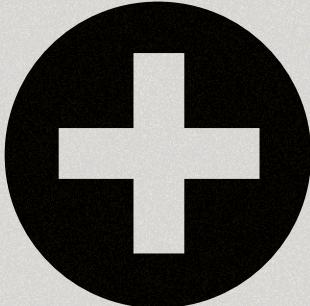
TOTAL 1ST 5
89-80
•
RUN LINE 1ST 5
95-74
•
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
94-75



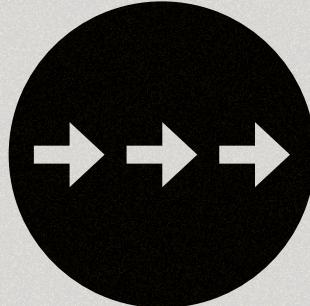
NEW YORK
YANKEES

2025 RECORD: 94-68
T-1ST IN AL EAST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
PLAY: UNDER 91.5



NOTABLE
ADDITIONS
SP Ryan Weathers
RP Cade Winquest



NOTABLE
DEPARTURES
RP Devin Williams
INF Paul Goldschmidt
RP Mark Leiter Jr.
RP Luke Weaver
INF DJ LeMahieu
SP Marcus Stroman
RP Ian Hamilton
RP Scott Effross
OF Austin Slater
RP Jonathan Loáisiga
RP Jake Cousins

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: The Rays are pretty far out of it in July and one of their AL East rivals pays a rich sum for Drew Rasmussen at the Trade Deadline

HITTING

The move outside is complicated to process. The 2025 Rays hit .261/.330/.418 with a .326 wOBA and a 107 wRC+ at Steinbrenner Field. The 2024 Trop-dwellers hit .229/.303/.466 with a .295 wOBA and a 99 wRC+. Their .295 wOBA ranked 29th in the league, so moving outside helped. The Rays scored 67 more runs over their 81 home games. Of course, they also went 41-40 with the offensive boost and 42-39 in 2024 when they got outscored at home because baseball is funny like that.

The incredible thing to me is that the Rays only had a FB% of 33% in a ballpark that does help the ball carry, though the park does play very differently during the day versus the night because of the humidity and the winds. I can't say I expected the Rays to lead the league in home GB% with what seemed to be a lot of reasons to elevate the baseball because nothing carries at Tropicana Field. And, yet, they still scored a lot more runs.

Oddly, the Rays were third with a 120 wRC+ in 2023 at home, slushing .255/.322/.439, which was an even higher SLG than last season. Obviously some personnel has changed and the team is always seeking an edge. I'll be honest, though, this lineup is unimpressive, even with the acquisition of Gavin Lux and the signing of Cedric Mullins.

PITCHING

Time will tell if going from Baz to Steven Matz is a downgrade - and to what degree, if so - but the Rays do field a very interesting staff this season. Drew Rasmussen made 31 starts and threw 150 innings in his first full season since 2022 and was extremely good, but also treated with kid gloves, as 15 of those starts featured between 62-80 pitches. Of course, he was also very efficient in most outings. Unfortunately, they were unable to provide the same to Shane McClanahan, who didn't pitch in a big league game for the second year in a row.

McClanahan is said to be healthy entering Spring Training, but

what can the Rays realistically expect? As a high-velo strike-thrower, his Stuff+ figures were elite pre-injury, but what now? Former Athletic Joe Boyle has punched a lot of tickets as a big leaguer with a 25.2% K%, but also sports a 14.3% BB%. With another five-and-dive guy in Ryan Pepiot, an oft-injured starter in Matz, and a cast of journeymen in the MLB bullpen and AAA rotation, the improved park factor of the The Trop will have to boost this staff.

PROSPECT WATCH

Sometimes a cup of coffee can be really bitter and that's how to describe Carson Williams' 32-game sample at the MLB level, as he struck out 41.5% of the time, but did flash his power and speed tools with five homers and two steals. While the future at SS is the focus of the Rays organization

SP Brody Hopkins is where I'm looking. The collegiate two-way player only threw 54 innings at Winthrop before making his pro ball debut with 66 strikeouts and 44 walks in 15 appearances. He was a centerpiece in the Randy Arozarena deal with the Mariners and has posted terrific run prevention numbers while still throwing a ton of pitches between strikeouts and walks. But, he's a highly athletic arm and the Rays don't mind pushing guys. With a delicate starting staff, I won't be surprised if Hopkins debuts this season.

OUTLOOK

Overperforming is what the Rays usually do, as they had a better record than their Pythagorean Win-Loss record four straight seasons from 2017-20 and then again in 2024. Last season, despite a +31 run differential, they were 77-85. Run prevention remains a strength, but run generation remains a moving target. If the Rays are going to lead baseball in ground ball rate and have a bottom-10 K%, they're not going to generate enough offense to be a factor in this division or the AL playoff picture.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: UNDER 77.5**



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 77.5

DIVISION: 30-1

PENNANT: 35-1

WORLD SERIES: 90-1

TAMPA BAY RAYS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The Rays return home to Tropicana Field with earlier game times during the week and a new ownership group. Former owner Stuart Sternberg sold the team to a group led by Patrick Zalupski, Bill Cosgrove, and Ken Babby, who was the owner of the Akron RubberDucks, Cleveland's AA affiliate, and Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp, Miami's AAA affiliate. Most of the talk regarding the new owners this winter centered on upgrades to The Trop while waiting for a new ballpark in 2029.

We have no indication thus far as to whether or not this new group will be willing to spend more money on the roster or prevent guys from being traded prior to free agency, as they've spent under \$25 million on FA during their first offseason and jettisoned Shane

Baz before he got more expensive with upcoming arbitration years. When teams were still operating like it was the Dark Ages, the Rays were able to capitalize on data and smart minds, including Andrew Friedman, who leveled up from penny-pinching charter boat captain to drunken sailor with a trillion-dollar yacht moving from Tampa Bay to Los Angeles to lead the Dodgers front office.

These days, the Rays are still really smart and getting back to The Trop should help, as their roster is constructed for that, not a free-for-all, outdoor Spring Training park with Yankee Stadium dimensions. But, they aren't ahead of other organizations analytically like they once were and the first back-to-back losing seasons since 2016-17 do seem pretty telling.

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
77-85
-20.0 UNITS

TOTAL 71-81-10	TOTAL 1ST 5 74-87
•	•
RUN LINE 73-89	RUN LINE 1ST 5 78-84
•	•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5 71-71-20 -12.5 UNITS	YES RUN FIRST INNING 88-74



TAMPA BAY
RAYS

2025 RECORD: 77-85
4TH IN AL EAST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 77.5

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

What a dichotomy the Rays offense is entering 2026. The good: 3B Junior Caminero is a budding superstar, All-Star DH Yandy Diaz continues to mash and slug with the best in baseball and youngster 1B Jonathan Aranda looks like a middle order bat that brings additional run scoring ability. Rookie speedster LF Chandler Simpson made his big league debut in 2025, 2B Gavin Lux came over in a trade with Cincinnati to replace the departed Brandon Lowe and veteran outfielders Cedric Mullins and Jake Fraley can take over in CF and RF, respectively. The bad? Who's filling out the bottom of a lineup that, as a whole, couldn't get above league average in most of the critical offensive departments last year? This team thrived on speed and pressure, leading MLB in stolen bases, while finishing ninth in team batting average. The Rays also depart their temporary 2025 "home" at George Steinbrenner

Field, Spring Training home of the New York Yankees, back to Tropicana Field, after \$55M in renovations from the devastation during Hurricane Ian. A new turf playing surface was installed in mid-January and may provide a new data point to consider for run totals in Rays home games. Will the power numbers from the left-handed bats, who benefitted from the short porch in a Spring Training ballpark last year, be able to recreate that firepower back indoors?

PITCHING

The pitching factory that's resided in Tampa Bay took a dip last year, suffering a rash of injuries throughout the staff. Health is always top of mind in all organizations, but the hope is former staff ace Shane McClanahan can reprise his role atop the rotation. If so, Ryan Pepiot and Drew Rasmussen can team with him to form quite the trio. Add in veteran Steven Matz, as well as freshly

signed swingman Nick Martinez and youngster Joe Boyle. That group produces another familiar refrain in this organization, creating depth for a competent starting five. The closing duties in the bullpen will pass to Edwin Uceta, after the departure of Pete Fairbanks down the state to be the Marlins stopper. Setup men Griffin Jax and Garrett Cleavinger provide the bridge to Uceta and Bryan Baker is a name to keep your eye on for leverage spots in key situations. Finding early-season length out of the rotation will be an early litmus test of the success these Rays hurlers can expect in 2026. A plethora of swing-and-miss capability, teamed with high-octane velocity, puts this staff in their customary sleeper spot to surprise in the AL.

PROSPECT WATCH

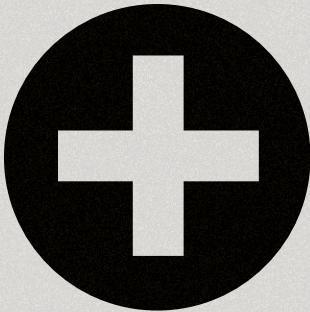
The highly touted SS Carson Williams got his feet wet in 2025 at the big league level and quickly found out how difficult life is at

the top. He's as big a foundational piece for the organization moving forward and can develop into an All-Star. A big addition is OF Jacob Melton, coming over from the Astros in the three-team deal involving Houston, Tampa Bay and Pittsburgh. His bat needs work, but his defensive prowess may give him a shot at beating out Cedric Mullins for the starting CF job this year.

OUTLOOK

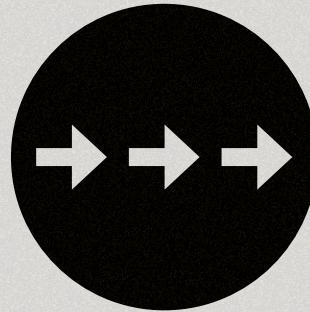
Manager Kevin Cash always seems to extract 110% ability out of his teams and this year's challenge will be no different. The AL East is arguably the toughest division in baseball going into 2026, but that's never daunted one of the best skippers in the game. The offense will need to limit strikeouts and their arms must remain healthy for the majority of the season. They go as far as Caminero's bat takes them and if McClanahan gets 25+ starts, they'll push for a postseason berth.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: JUNIOR CAMINERO FINISHES TOP 5 IN AL MVP VOTING AND THE RAYS WIN 85+ GAMES



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Gavin Lux
OF Cedric Mullins
OF Jake Fraley
OF Justyn-Henry Malloy
SP Steven Matz
RP Steven Wilson
RP Yoendrys Gómez
INF Ben Williamson
SP Nick Martinez



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP Adrian Houser
RP Pete Fairbanks
INF/OF Christopher Morel



TORONTO BLUE JAYS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

There are 107 players with at least 4,000 plate appearances from 2014-25. Miguel Rojas ranks 107th on that list in SLG, 13 points behind the next closest player. Only Jose Iglesias (50) has fewer homers than Rojas (57) on that list. In thinking about all of the wild moments from the 2025 World Series, including the Andy Pages catch, I have sympathy pains for Blue Jays fans that it was Rojas who hit the game-tying home run in the top of the ninth, just two outs away from a championship.

It usually takes a perfect storm of clutch performance and good fortune to make a run that deep and those things are rarely repeatable the next season, but the Blue Jays opened the wallet

and spent the offseason doing everything that they could to improve their chances. Too many teams rest on their laurels, clinging to the notion that they were good enough to get there with what they had and they can do it again. Not Toronto.

Even though Bo Bichette left and the team's pursuit of Kyle Tucker failed because he preferred getting paid until 2085 by the Dodgers, the Blue Jays were involved in seemingly every big FA discussion, ultimately adding Dylan Cease, Tyler Rogers, and Japanese import Kazuma Okamoto. Armed with key pieces from deadline deals in Shane Bieber and Louis Varland, Canada's Team is ready to make another run.

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: The offense regresses back towards league average (101 wRC+ in 2024) and Toronto finishes a little above .500

HITTING

We can all universally agree that striking out is bad, but it's tolerable for guys that hit a lot of home runs or draw a lot of walks. Well, the Blue Jays decided that striking out was really bad, so they composed a roster of guys who rarely do it. Toronto's 17.8% K% was the lowest in baseball. And unlike the other four teams in the top five, who hit 159, 152, 154, and 166 home runs, the Blue Jays hit 191. Only the Brewers scored more runs of that group with 806 compared to Toronto's 798, but they also had 87 more stolen bases and ran a more fortunate .305 BABIP.

In that respect, Bichette may be a loss, as he only had a 14.5% K% and we'll have to see how Okamoto adjusts to the Majors. Projection systems are high on the 29-year-old, who slashed .327/.416/.598 in Nippon Professional Baseball last season, though he was limited to 293 plate appearances due to injury. Still, he should fit right into the contact-oriented offense. Even the guys who may or may not hit are plus defenders and the bench is full of capable hitters. My biggest worry by far is George Springer, who showed very obvious signs of decline from age and wear and tear in 2023 and 2024 to post wRC+ marks of 103 and 94 before exploding for a 166 wRC+ in his age-35 season last year. That is absolutely the exception and not the norm. In 2024, Springer hit leadoff in 101 games and the Blue Jays were 28th in OPS from the leadoff spot. Springer did it 38 times in 2025 and the Jays ranked third, with Springer posting a 1.117 OPS.

PITCHING

Throwing from mid-February to effectively November is not easy on the arm. At the outset, it looks like the Blue Jays will mitigate risk and monitor innings and pitch counts with a six-man rotation, so long as everybody makes it through the Grapefruit League unscathed. Cody Ponce from the KBO and Cease from free agency are the rotation additions, along with wunderkind Trey Yesavage, who will be bubble-wrapped as often as possible after throwing 112 regular season innings and 27.2 more in his first season of pro ball. Bieber is unlikely to be ready for Opening Day with forearm soreness and that's a big red flag already.

I'm always a little leery of a rotation with five 30-somethings,

including Kevin Gausman in his age-35 season, but veterans know how to handle their bodies these days, as binge drinking on the plane and cigars at glutinous dinners are no longer the norm on road trips. As great of a season as the Blue Jays had, I think people forget that this was a marginal starting staff for a while. Collectively, this group was 23rd in fWAR, 20th in ERA, and 24th in FIP during the regular season, plus a merely league average bullpen in support. I don't know how long Berrios is for the rotation, but replacing 31 bad starts from Max Scherzer and Bowden Francis is a big deal and if Ponce can stick over Berrios, who eats innings, but has a limited ceiling, this is an upgraded group.

PROSPECT WATCH

This is a pretty light system, with players that have graduated to The Show and others used to make the World Series push. A non-roster invite to camp that intrigues me is Charles McAdoo, acquired from the Pirates in the Isiah Kiner-Falefa deal in July 2024. The San Jose State product has a lot of swing-and-miss in his game (25.5% K%), but he's also hit 38 homers and stolen 60 bases in three MiLB seasons. He primarily played 3B last season, but has played 1B, 2B, and corner OF. With the success that the Jays have had in cutting down strikeouts, McAdoo's swing plane, raw power, and speed could find a home on this roster in the future.

OUTLOOK

Top to bottom, this is a strong roster. They'll hit for contact and enough power. They've got starters capable of swallowing innings with above average numbers. The bullpen has a couple of high-leverage questions, but a variety of arm angles and matchup guys. Health is a worry for every team, but a bigger worry for me after a very long season and a lot of fortune on the health front the previous year (see Springer, George). The Jays had six players with at least 500 plate appearances, three starters with 30+ starts, and the top relievers were healthy. With a light minor league system and a platoon kind of bench, lofty goals are hard to reach without the key guys on the field.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 88.5

DIVISION: +250

PENNANT: +600

WORLD SERIES: 14-1

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 88.5**

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

104-76

+20.2 UNITS

•

TOTAL

96-75-8

•

RUN LINE

98-81

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

78-72-30

-7.5 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

74-87

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

89-73

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

91-89

HITTING

It didn't start great in 2025, but boy did the Blue Jays finish with a flourish, en route to their first World Series appearance since back-to-back titles in 1992 and 1993. Following up a historic offensive campaign will be quite the challenge, losing SS Bo Bichette in free agency to the Mets. The face of the franchise, 1B Vladimir Guerrero Jr., is back to anchor a lineup that saw a renaissance campaign from veteran DH George Springer, breakout years with RF Addison Barger and OF Nathan Lukes, plus some surprising production from 2B Ernie Clement and SS Andrés Giménez. C Alejandro Kirk reprised his role as one of the best dual-threat catchers in the big leagues and CF Daulton Varsho battled through injuries to find his way back to the starting lineup. LF Anthony Santander, after losing most of the season on the IL in 2025, got dealt another horrendous blow needing left labral surgery, sidelining him for 5-6 months. New 3B Kazuma Okamoto fills out the starting nine. A bench of C Tyler Heineman, INF/OF Davis Schneider and OF Myles Straw gives Toronto plenty of late-inning options as well. There's now a sudden shortage of firepower in this lineup - how will these Blue Jays handle the pressure of being the hunted, not the hunters?

PITCHING

Plenty of optimism surrounds this Blue Jays staff, boosted by a

monster signing of Dylan Cease as arguably the most prized free agent starting pitcher on the market. Teamed with staff ace Kevin Gausman and rookie playoff sensation Trey Yesavage, Toronto is literally armed with as much top-end talent as any starting rotation in the big leagues. Questions surround some of the rotation assets, including Shane Bieber, who won't be ready for Opening Day, dealing with forearm fatigue. That means veteran José Berrios and newly signed Cody Ponce out of the KBO will make up the bottom of the rotation to start the season. The bullpen had its roller coaster rides early last season and much of that centered around closer Jeff Hoffman. He came within two outs of securing a championship in Game 7 of the World Series, but will be tasked with providing much more continuity throughout 2026. Free agent submariner Tyler Rogers comes over from the Mets to team with mainstays Yimi García and Louis Varland as the primary setup men in front of Hoffman. Brendon Little appears to be the lone lefty with an Opening Day roster spot secured, so only a few choices remain to round out the Jays relief corps. There's plenty of swing-and-miss in the back end of the pen - if they limit walks, they've got a chance to be an elite unit.

PROSPECT WATCH

Hard to beat the meteoric rise of Yesavage in 2025. He started the

year in Single-A and found himself starting Game 1 of the World Series. Who can top that in 2026? As far as Blue Jays farmhands in the latest Top 100 MiLB prospect list, two shortstops make the cut in JoJo Parker (No.45) and Arjun Nimmala (No.77). Both are well equipped with solid offensive foundations and are a handful of years away from knocking on the big league door. Notable arms are LHP Johnny King, RHP Gage Stanifer and LHP Ricky Tiedemann. Stanifer, by many reports, became one of the Jays minor league breakout stars last year and Tiedemann, a former top organizational prospect, will hope for a healthy 2026 in a potential make-or-break season.

OUTLOOK

Manager John Schneider, once on the hot seat in mid-June of last year, had his team option exercised for 2026. There's optimism a contract extension happens, potentially even before Opening Day. That will set the stage for the most important follow-up campaign for a Blue Jays team since the early 90s. How does life without Bichette work? Will the offense face the same uphill climb they did in the first half of 2025? Can the back end of the bullpen keep things calm for the majority of the regular season? Confidence should abound with the dominant rotation arms and the pieces are certainly there for another magical run north of the border.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: TORONTO EARNS A WILD CARD BERTH AND DYLAN CEASE RECORDS 200+ STRIKEOUTS

NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Kazuma Okamoto
SP Dylan Cease
SP Cody Ponce
RP Tyler Rogers
OF Jesus Sanchez

NOTABLE DEPARTURES

INF Bo Bichette
SP Chris Bassitt
INF Ty France
RP Seranthony Domínguez
INF Isiah Kimer-Falefa
SP Max Scherzer
RP Nick Sandlin
RP Ryan Borucki
SP Spencer Turnbull
RP Chad Green
SP Alek Manoah

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

2025 RECORD: 94-68, T-1ST IN AL EAST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL PLAY: OVER 88.5



AMERICAN LEAGUE CENTRAL

VSIN

2026 SEASON

One of the most improbable outcomes in baseball history happened in the AL Central last season. The Guardians, sitting 150/1 to win the division at the All-Star Break with a 12-game deficit and a record of 46-49, ran down the Tigers and wrapped up their second straight ALC title. Incredibly, the Guardians were 12.5 games back on August 25 in their sixth defeat in a row. To say that Stephen Vogt earned his second straight AL Manager of the Year Award is an understatement.

What did Cleveland do to build upon their good fortunes

and back-to-back postseason appearances? Pretty much nothing. To be honest, it was a quiet offseason in the AL Central as a whole for a while. The Tigers retained Kyle Finnegan and Gleyber Torres while adding Kenley Jansen and eventually Justin Verlander to the mix. However, they also made easily the largest splash by signing Framber Valdez around the same time they were losing an arbitration case to Tarik Skubal. The Royals signed platoon bat Lane Thomas and mid-leverage arm Eli Morgan. The Twins spent about \$15 million, adding Josh Bell,

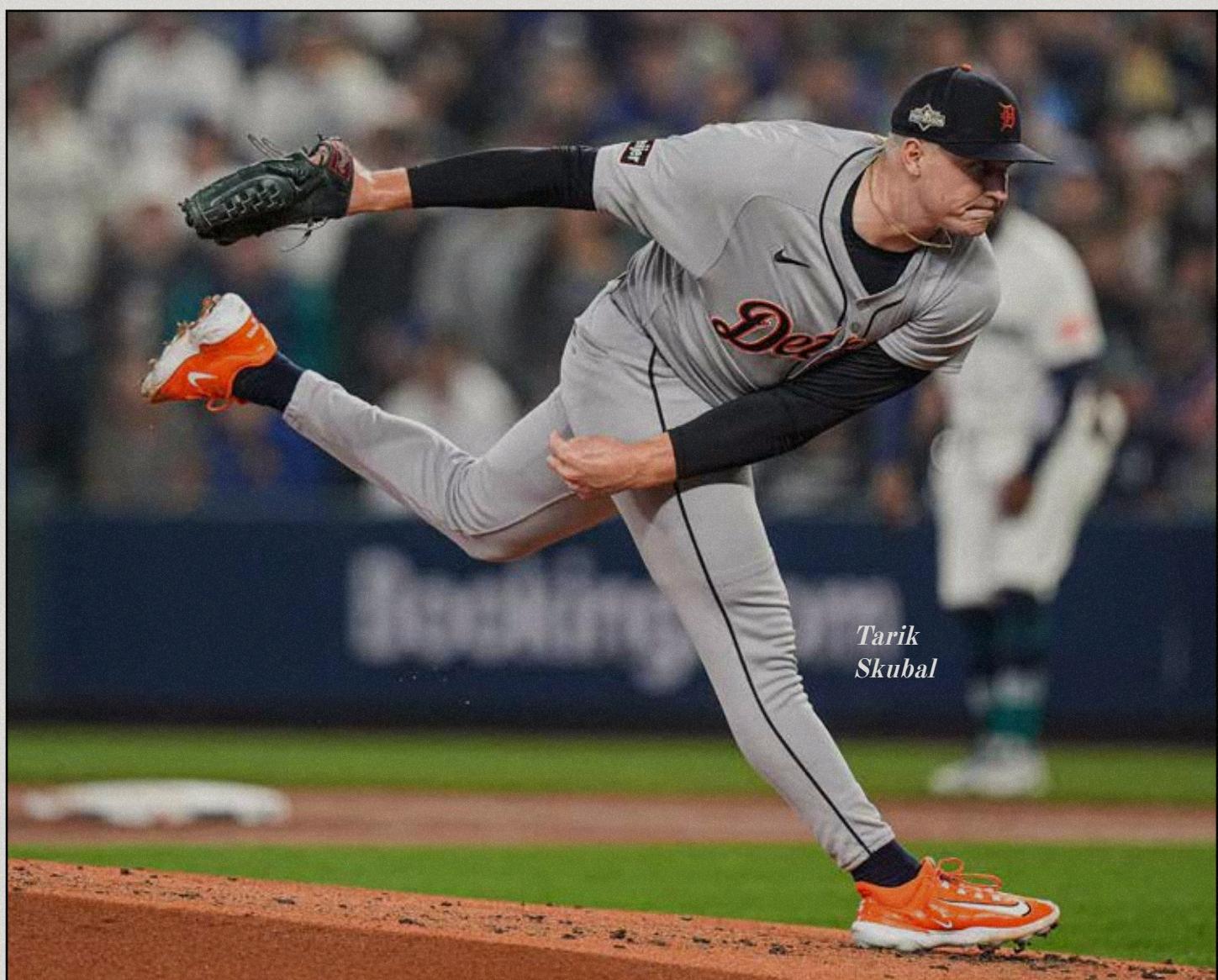
Taylor Rogers, and Vic Caratini. Ironically, it was the White Sox who were the most active outside of the Tigers. Along with a prospect haul for Luis Robert, they signed Seranthony Dominguez, Austin Hays, Erick Fedde, and Munetaka Murakami out of Japan.

The reigning division champ re-signed head cheerleader and .161 hitter Austin Hedges and grabbed some bullpen depth, which should make this a very wide-open competition once again. Cleveland also lost Vogt's right-hand man, bench coach Craig Albernaz, who

got his own dugout to run in Baltimore.

Given that Cleveland was an 80-82 team by Pythagorean Win-Loss, eight games behind the Tigers and three games behind the Royals, and 77-85 by BaseRuns, 10 games behind Detroit and seven behind Kansas City, nobody should be remotely surprised to see a new winner in this division. Also of note, the AL Central had a 257-293 (.467) record against everybody but each other.

- Adam Burke



CHICAGO WHITE SOX

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The White Sox were one of the charter members of the American League back in 1901. As they - and the other OGs - celebrate 125 seasons worth of play, action is being taken to try and avoid a fourth straight 100-loss season. The Pale Hose had never even had back-to-back seasons with 100+ losses, let alone three, with 101, 121, and 102 over the last three campaigns. To say that times are tough on the South Side is an understatement. Since winning the World Series in 2005, Chicago only has three postseason appearances, finishing fourth or fifth in the division 10 times.

The uncertainty of the 2027 season and little clarity about

TV broadcasting deals were contributing factors as to why most of the AL Central teams didn't spend money. But, Chicago did, and they deserve a ton of credit for trying. The lineup and the pitching staff are hardly impressive, but second-year skipper Will Venable has more to work with this season and a decent prospect pool will collectively get one year closer to making an impact. Venable has work to do as well, as the White Sox were a league-worst 15-36 in one-run games.

Every season is technically measured by wins and losses, but this season for the White Sox is about figuring out who can stick and who can't.

HITTING

One silver lining to being bad is that flawed prospects can get a chance to work things out at the highest level and that was the case for Colson Montgomery. Chicago's first-round pick in 2021 tore through the lower minors before driving off the road and getting stuck in mud at AAA. Montgomery's extreme whiff rates and questionable defensive projection raised a lot of questions, but he slugged 21 homers at the MLB level in just 71 games and actually graded very well at shortstop.

Montgomery debuted on July 4. From the start of the season through July 3, the White Sox batted .220/.292/.342 and their 78 wRC+ was better than only the Rockies. From July 4 to the end of the season, the White Sox slashed .246/.312/.409 with a 101 wRC+. That wasn't all Montgomery, but Kyle Teel settled in, Brooks Baldwin and Lenyn Sosa flashed good power, and Luis Robert Jr. rebuilt some of his trade value with a 124 wRC+.

Despite the second half surge, the White Sox let hitting coach Marcus Thames walk, but did keep director of hitting Ryan Fuller and hired Chicago-area native Derek Shomon, formerly with the Marlins, as the new hitting coach.

PITCHING

Along those same lines, the White Sox let pitching coach Ethan Katz go and replaced him with Zach Bove, an assistant pitching coach for the Royals last season. Hiring from the pitching braintrust in Kansas City is a pretty strong move. Bove was in KC as Cole Ragans, Kris Bubic, and Noah Cameron started their ascensions and was also part of the process with veterans Michael Wacha and Seth Lugo. He has less to work with here, but the White Sox did improve from 4.67 to 4.28 in ERA from 2024 to 2025 and also cut down their team BB%.

That's the thing about Bove and his Royals ties. KC only walked 8.0% of batters faced, while the White Sox walked 9.7%, which



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 66.5

DIVISION: 40-1

PENNANT: 200-1

WORLD SERIES: 500-1

ranked 29th overall. Even with all that contact, the Royals had the fourth-lowest Hard Hit% against and seventh-lowest Barrel%. The White Sox were 21st and 25th, respectively, in those areas. Davis Martin, who had one of the best changeups on the roster, could be a breakout arm this season, plus the Royals tapped into Bove's southpaw expertise by signing Anthony Kay from the NPB and Sean Newcomb. Expect more changeups and more pitching to contact from the staff.

PROSPECT WATCH

By definition, Chase Meidroth is no longer a prospect, as he played 122 games with 505 PA last season, slushing .253/.329/.320. The jump from AAA to MLB is the biggest in sport and Meidroth, who batted .285/.425/.414 in 264 minor league games and .291/.438/.413 in 598 AAA plate appearances, found out the hard way. He made a lot of weak ground ball contact. Even with just a 4.3% SwStr%, which ranked fourth overall, it was not a good offensive

season. Pitchers at this level can locate and his paltry power paired with low bat speed means they're going to challenge him. As a guy who hit first or second in 89 games, I think he's Shomon's most important pupil.

OUTLOOK

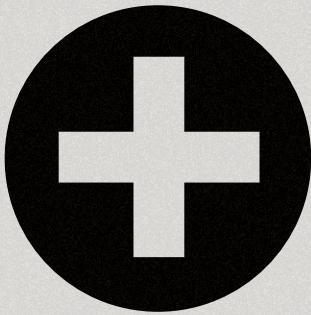
The talent level of the White Sox has risen and the uptick in power production with Murakami, who once hit 56 HR in a season in the NPB and hit 22 HR in 56 games last season, Teel, Montgomery, Sosa, and Baldwin, among others, will help the team field a far more competitive offense. This is still an objectively bad starting rotation and an average at best bullpen, even with the signing of Seranthony Dominguez. They'll probably be a good team to beat Overs with once the weather warms up a bit in Chicago and the rest of the Great Lakes/Midwest region.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 66.5



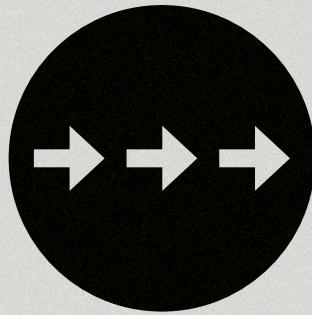
CHICAGO WHITE SOX

2025 RECORD: 60-102, LAST IN AL CENTRAL
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL PLAY: OVER 66.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

OF Austin Hays
INF Luisangel Acuña
INF Munetaka Murakami
RP Seranthony Domínguez
OF Everson Pereira
SP Anthony Kay
SP Sean Newcomb
RP Alexander Alberto
RP Jélixson Paez
RP Jordan Hicks
SP Erick Fedde



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

OF Luis Robert Jr.
OF Mike Tauchman
SP Tyler Alexander
SP Martin Perez
SP Mike Clevinger
RP Miguel Castro
RP Dan Altavilla
INF Josh Rojas

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
60-102

-17.6 UNITS

•

TOTAL
74-76-9

•

RUN LINE
92-67

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
59-71-32
+6.5 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5
79-83

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
90-72

•

YES RUN
FIRST INNING
91-71

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

What do the kids say these days? How it started - How it's going. That sentiment certainly embodies where the youth movement is on the South Side entering 2026. Top emerging talents in C Kyle Teel, SS Colson Montgomery, DH/C Edgar Quero and 2B Chase Meidroth will team with veterans in 3B Miguel Vargas and LF Andrew Benintendi. A surprise trade that sent OF Luis Robert Jr. to the Mets for bright young prospect INF/OF Luisangel Acuña effectively closes the book on the previous era of White Sox baseball. Is it better than last year? Yes, but how much better will it really be? If you're glass half-full, their post-All Star break offensive surge, powered by a .727 team OPS and averaging 4.85 runs/game, is definitely worth consideration. Add in the surprise signing of 25-year old Japanese 1B Munetaka Murakami and on the surface, the lineup looks far more potent. There's an outside chance that nearly each everyday position player can hit double-digit HR by season's end. Look for Montgomery and Teel to take major steps forward too.

PITCHING

Outside of the greater Chicagoland area, little to no chance the common fan can name the five starters in the White Sox rotation. Maybe that's even a stretch within the Windy City, but get to know this group quickly. Top starter Shane Smith is a foundational piece moving forward with Davis Martin and Sean Burke following as homegrown talents. Anthony Kay came over from the NPB and the Sox went back to get old friend Erick Fedde signed to a one-year deal in February. Veteran Sean Newcomb will be insurance as starting pitching depth after coming over from the A's. Free agent Seranthony Domínguez signed a two-year pact to take over closing duties, with Jordan Leasure, Grant Taylor and Mike Vasil, anchoring a backend of the bullpen that started generating much more swing and miss in the second half. Add in freshly-acquired flamethrower Jordan Hicks from the Red Sox in a February trade and the South Siders might just pose a much tougher late-inning challenge for opposing offenses.

PROSPECT WATCH

The cavalry isn't necessarily coming this year, but a stable of top arms in Noah Schultz, Hagen Smith and Tanner McDougal are among the future additions to the Sox staff. The offensive infusion centers around the prospects acquired from trading Garrett Crochet (Teel, Meidroth) and strong drafting. OF Braden Montgomery is my pick to rocket through the minor league system in 2026, with top minor league prospect INF Caleb Bonemer also a couple years away.

OUTLOOK

First-year manager Will Venable weathered a rough early start in his inaugural campaign and closed with a team that finally became exciting to at least watch again. We are in no danger of the Sox making inroads in the division this season, but they proved to be a thorn in the side of contending teams down the stretch in 2025. This season will center on patience, talent evaluation and hoping for breakout campaigns from several young players.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE:
MUNETAKA MURAKAMI FINISHES TOP-3 IN AL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR VOTING



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 80.5

DIVISION: +330

PENNANT: 20-1

WORLD SERIES: 50-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Hunter Gaddis (151) and Cade Smith (150) are second and third in pitcher appearances over the last two regular seasons. Both get hurt, among others, and the Guardians finish below .500

HITTING

The hopes and dreams of the Guardians rest on the shoulders of unproven hitters with iffy health records. For Cleveland to improve on offense, it will be on Chase DeLauter, George Valera, Travis Bazzana (at some point), C.J. Kayfus, and maybe Cooper Ingle. Valera posted a 113 wRC+ over a minuscule sample size of 48 plate appearances. That was the same mark as Kyle Manzardo, who hit 27 homers to derive most of his offensive value since he only batted .234 and struck out over a quarter of the time. The league average Hard Hit% was 40.9%. Five Guardians with at least 100 PA were above that number - Nolan Jones, Manzardo, Gabriel Arias, Daniel Schneemann, and Jhonkensy Noel. They batted .211, .234, .220, .206, and .162, respectively.

How this team made history overcoming a 12.5-game deficit in late August is still a mystery, though Naylor did slash .290/.324/.548 in September after making some swing adjustments. Bat speed is the new

holy grail for hitters, much like spin rate has been with pitchers. The Guardians ranked 27th in that department. Based on batted ball direction, launch angle, exit velocity, and other factors, the Guardians had a xSLG of .367, lowest in the league. If the kids hit, the Guardians can make strides here. If the kids don't hit, this will be one of the worst units in the league.

PITCHING

Fortunately, the Cleveland Pitching Factory is still alive and well. The staff was fourth in ERA at 3.70 and eighth in FIP at 3.95. Given that the starting staff was a bit discombobulated throughout the season, it was quite an accomplishment. Also, Tanner Bibee had a 4.24 ERA with a 3.62 xERA, so one of the staff aces fell on the wrong side of luck. On the other hand, Gavin Williams had a 3.06 ERA with a 4.29 xERA, so it more than evened out it would appear. Seven huge starts from Parker Messick and 10 strong outings from Joey Cantillo proved to be incredibly valuable, plus the bullpen found a way to rally and get

CLEVELAND GUARDIANS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

We need to retire the phrase "hometown discount" because nothing will ever come close to what Jose Ramirez has provided the Guardians. The surefire Hall of Famer who might go down as the best third baseman ever, and will probably become the ninth player in history with 300 HR and 300 SB this season, gave Cleveland yet another gift this offseason by signing an extension that keeps him in The Land through his age-40 season.

Ramirez scored or drove in 188 of Cleveland's 643 runs and was one of two position players (Steven Kwan) to post a fWAR higher than 1.5. The 1.5 was Bo Naylor, who batted .195/.282/.379, but was an excellent defensive catcher. I know that you need really gaudy numbers, typically in the HR department to

win MVP, but find me a player more valuable to his team than Ramirez.

The thanks that ownership gave him, aside from the below-market contract he agreed to, was not improving an offense that ranked 28th in runs, 29th in batting average, OBP, and OPS, 20th in HR, and 30th in Hard Hit% and Barrel%. As a native Clevelander, the love-hate relationship I have with this team and the fact that Ramirez has given them an astounding amount of flexibility is hard to put into words.

Amazingly, while threading the needle with limited funds in an imbalanced financial system, the Guardians have won back-to-back AL Central titles and have made the playoffs seven times in the last 10 seasons. It'll be a grind to make it three and a row and eight of 11.

a lot of outs despite the suspension of Emmanuel Clase.

Assuming that the rotation doesn't run into health problems in Goodyear, the average age of the five starters likely to break camp is 26.7, so we're talking about guys that still have room for growth, especially a guy like Slade Cecconi, who is starting his second season in the system. The loose change that Paul Dolan found in the couch cushions went to bullpen reinforcements for a group that is third in appearances (Nationals, Dodgers) over the last two seasons, but Shawn Armstrong is the only sort-of high-leverage addition.

PROSPECT WATCH

There are a lot of interesting prospects in this system, and I encourage you to look up Ralph Velazquez, but DeLauter has to go here. All he's done since going pro is hit and get hurt. He was 1-for-6 with a walk and a single in the AL Wild Card Series, which was his MLB debut. Those two games added to the 138 he's played in the minors, plus some fall ball, are all we've seen since he was drafted in

2022 because of a litany of injuries. But, he can undoubtedly hit, slinging .302/.384/.504 in 583 minor league PA with only 80 K. The Guardians are really gambling that he'll stay healthy (and be able to handle CF) based on their inaction to add to the lineup.

OUTLOOK

As depressing as the offense projects to be, this organization just finds ways to win games. They've had two losing seasons since 2013 and one was 80-82 back in 2021. The 2023 season is the only objectively poor showing in over a decade and that was with Terry Francona halfway out the door. One thing Cleveland has been able to do well is take advantage of the division. Unfortunately, Detroit and Kansas City have both been better recently and even the doormat White Sox improved this winter. All the dice rolls with lineup and even a little gamble in the rotation are major concerns.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL LEAN: UNDER 80.5



CLEVELAND GUARDIANS

2025 RECORD: 88-74, 1ST IN AL CENTRAL

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: UNDER 80.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

89-76

+12.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL

70-87-8

•

RUN LINE

90-75

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

74-91

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

62-71-32

+17.9 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

73-91

•

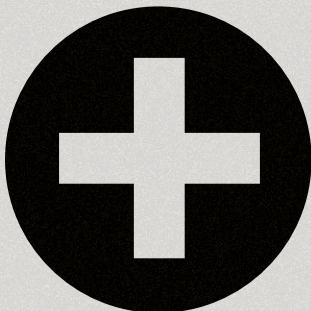
RUN LINE 1ST 5

81-84

•

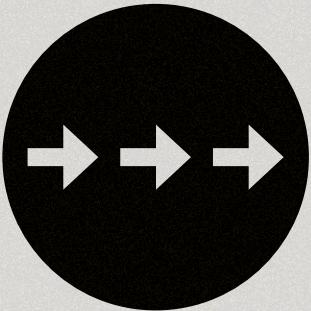
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

RP Shawn Armstrong
RP Connor Brogdon
RP Peyton Pallette



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

RP Jakob Junis
OF Lane Thomas
RP Sam Hentges
SP John Means



JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

When you look up surreal in the dictionary, you'll find a picture of the 2025 Cleveland Guardians offense next to it. How did a team ranked 28th in runs scored, 29th in average, OBP, OPS and 20th in HR rattle off one of the most improbable come-from-behind division winning performances in MLB history? Unexplainable in so many ways, but Guards Ball provided the theatrics, winning the AL Central on a walk-off home run in their final regular season game, after trailing the Detroit Tigers by as many as 15.5 games. Future Hall of Fame 3B Jose Ramirez is the heart and soul of the team, flanked by All-Star LF Steven Kwan and cleanup hitter 1B Kyle Manzardo. A host of young, unproven position players will find every-day roles this season, including RF George Valera, highly touted CF Chase DeLauter and DH CJ Kayfus. Young regulars C Bo Naylor and SS Brayan Rocchio, along with 2B Gabriel Arias fill out the remaining order. The single biggest question of the Guardians offseason: how do you not go out and get at least a proven veteran bat or two in helping Ramirez in the lineup? President of baseball operations Chris Antonetti is gambling that his young corps of position player prospects will produce and it's a massive bet on the unknown.

PITCHING

“Pitching U.” is the longstanding nickname for the pipeline that is the Guardians minor league developmental system on the mound. Homegrown aces Gavin Williams and Tanner Bibee are set to lead the rotation, with Slade Cecconi taking a massive step forward in 2025. Joey Cantillo is a name to watch and may be worth a sprinkle in the AL Cy Young race. Parker Messick came up to the big leagues in the second half and absolutely wowed, en route to becoming as reliable a starter

down the stretch as Cleveland had. The bullpen, once anchored by the best closer of the last couple years in Emmanuel Clase, dealt with the gambling-related off-field issues in stride. Closer Cade Smith stepped in seamlessly and will once again have the ninth inning duties in 2026. Hunter Gaddis is as good a setup man there is in the league and he'll get help from freshly-signed Armstrong, as well as returning Erik Sabrowski, Matt Festa, Tim Herrin and Connor Brogdon round out a very deep Guardian pen, which posted the third-lowest ERA in all of MLB.

PROSPECT WATCH

All eyes focused on CF Chase DeLauter throughout last year and when he made his MLB debut during the playoffs, the fans in Cleveland loved it. He graduates from a Guardians farm system still with 2024 No.1 overall selection INF Travis Bazzana. There's speculation that Bazzana will get a chance to win the second base job in camp against Arias. Other notable position player prospects include SS Angel Genao and 1B/OF Ralphy Velazquez. High-octane arms in RHP Daniel Espino and RHP Khal Stephan are the next wave of power rotation hurlers.

OUTLOOK

Second-year skipper Stephen Vogt won back-to-back AL Manager of the Year Awards for the historic divisional comeback, overtaking the Tigers on the final day of the season. To say last year's job took years off his life is an understatement. Fast forward to the challenge ahead in 2026 and he's faced with the same predicament: outside of Jose Ramirez and Steven Kwan, who can you rely upon to produce offensively? The pitching staff will once again be tasked with keeping the offense close enough to win lots of low-scoring affairs. Strap in for another nail-biting year from the corner of Carnegie & Ontario.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: CHASE DELAUTER & TRAVIS BAZZANA COMBINE FOR 50+ HR

DETROIT TIGERS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Tarik Skubals don't grow on trees. In the past, the Tigers would pony up, much like they did with Justin Verlander and Max Scherzer, with no regard for payroll. Things have been different since Mike Ilitch died, leaving the team in the hands of his son. Christopher Ilitch has not been as willing to spend the family fortune, letting an aging roster full of players expire and fall off the payroll while not being a huge participant in free agency.

Per Cot's Contracts, the Tigers ran a top-five Opening Day payroll every year from 2012-17. Mike died in 2017 and the cost cutting began, as Detroit hasn't been higher than

17th in Opening Day payroll since (they will be this season). Through savvy trades, player development, and a good managerial hire in AJ Hinch, the Tigers had back-to-back playoff appearances in 2024-25 for the first time since 2013-14. But, this could be their last hurrah with Skubal since a massive contract awaits and both sides were reported to be extremely far apart on value.

Even with the Skubal-sized elephant in the clubhouse, this team should be the AL Central favorite and has the best chance to win the division, especially with the somewhat-shocking addition of Framber Valdez in early February.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 85.5

DIVISION: +120

PENNANT: 11-1

WORLD SERIES: 25-1



HITTING

Want a powerful example of how things are different with the Tigers? Their projected starting lineup features six homegrown draftees and an international free agent who grew up in the system. Gleyber Torres is the only big-ticket free agent slated to be in the everyday 9 and only two seasons are left on the disastrous Javier Baez contract. The Tigers have also held on to two top-10 prospects in Kevin McGonigle and Max Clark because their trades have been more about acquiring supplemental pieces as opposed to looking for a blockbuster deal.

The Tigers scored 76 more runs in 2025 compared to 2024 and have improved in the win column in each of the last four seasons while also scoring more runs year over year. The 2024 lineup was 25th in wOBA, while the 2025 group made a huge jump to 12th. There aren't any stars, but there are a bunch of very solid players, as the top seven guys in plate appearances ranged from a 109 wRC+ (9% above league average) to 121. Most importantly, the Tigers stayed healthy, with 10 players going over 300 plate appearances. Nobody dramatically overperformed relative to their expected metrics and a few guys actually underperformed, including Torres. Running it back with this same group means Detroit should be above average offensively.

PITCHING

The offensive uptick couldn't have come at a better time because even a Cy Young season from Skubal wasn't enough to help the Tigers repeat their 2024 pitching numbers. The Tigers were fourth in ERA (3.63) and second in FIP (3.70) two seasons ago. They were 17th in ERA (3.97) and 15th in FIP (4.05) this past season. The Core Four of Skubal, Jack Flaherty, Casey Mize, and Reese Olson were all back until Olson had season-ending surgery in early February. Flaherty was unlucky with a 4.64 ERA to go with a 3.97 xERA and a 3.85 FIP, so he's a positive regression candidate.

The unknown in the rotation was the fifth spot, but the signing of Valdez and post-Super Bowl reunion with Justin Verlander cleared that up. What was kind of a lack of starting pitching depth is no longer a concern, as the Tigers previously cobbled together Johnny Wholestaff games with Brant Hurter, Troy Melton, and Tyler Holton in high-leverage spots. Now those guys can be used almost exclusively in relief with new closer Kenley Jansen and everybody falling into line behind him.

PROSPECT WATCH

We should find out quickly whether or not Zach McKinstry's first MLB season with a wRC+ over 89 (114) was a mirage or not. He's still a good baserunner and decent defender, but McKinstry has the aforementioned McGonigle lurking over his shoulder. The 2023 competitive balance pick has raked at every level and owns a .308/.410/.512 slash over 818 minor league plate appearances. He also thoroughly impressed in the Arizona Fall League with a .362/.500/.719 slash and a 12/19 K/BB ratio over 19 games. It's a rapid ascent for a cold-weather prep player from the Philly area, but this kid is a hitter and he's probably not going to be blocked for long.

OUTLOOK

The Tigers were the only AL Central team to have a winning record against teams .500 or better and it took a 7-17 September for the Guardians to run them down. Before that disastrous month, and the Tigers did get revenge when it mattered more, Detroit was on a 94-win pace. Nothing about last season's performance felt fluky or unsustainable and the Tigers did what Cleveland did not. They struck the hot iron and struck it hard. The addition of Valdez, what it means for the bullpen, and the likelihood of the offense improving from within has positioned this team as a legitimate AL Pennant candidate.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PLAY: OVER 85.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:

Riley Greene finishes in the top 10 in MVP voting
(17th last year)

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Finally! The offense returned to Motown in a big way to start the 2025 campaign. Averaging nearly 4.97 runs per game in the first half, the Tigers bludgeoned their way to a 15.5-game lead in the AL Central. After the All-Star Break, the runs evaporated, the power disappeared and so did Detroit's lead in the division. A monumental second-half collapse is what the 2026 Motor City Kitties are looking to put behind them. All-Star LF Riley Greene headlines a lineup returning many young, homegrown Tigers in 3B Colt Keith, DH Kerry Carpenter and 1B Spencer Torkelson. C Dillon Dingler broke out in a big way, both offensively and defensively - look for him to be among the best catchers in the AL this season. 2B Gleyber Torres re-signed for one more year, atop the Tiger order. Role players RF Wenceel Pérez, SS Zach McKinstry and CF Parker Meadows round out the lineup. One of the great stories in 2025 came in OF Javier Báez making

the All-Star team and providing as good a season as he's had in his career. He'll find a home again somewhere in the outfield. Will it be another scintillating start for Detroit's offense this year? Carpenter, Greene, and Torkelson will need to provide the power, along with Keith and Torres setting the table.

PITCHING

Same time. Same station. Same Tarik Skubal. Back-to-back AL Cy Young awards for arguably the best pitcher in the game and a third one squarely in his sights to start 2026. It took until February, but the surprise of the offseason might be Detroit landing free agent Framber Valdez. With Skubal and Valdez, at least initially, there's no better 1-2 punch in an American League rotation. Jack Flaherty and Casey Mize provide much needed support while future Hall of Famer Justin Verlander signs back with the organization that drafted him second overall in 2004. The Tigers hope young

phenom Jackson Jobe can recover quickly from Tommy John surgery he underwent last June, potentially providing a major boost to the staff. Grizzled veteran closer Kenley Jansen joins the Detroit bullpen as their new stopper, with setup men Will Vest, Kyle Finnegan and Tyler Holton all providing quality leverage innings. The Tigers need a boatload more swing-and-miss this season, finishing dead-last in that category amongst MLB bullpens. Nothing super flashy about this group, but they're battle-tested and reliable.

PROSPECT WATCH

It's a wealth of top talent, with two players occupying Top 10 spots overall in MiLB. Organizational top prospect and No. 2 overall in MiLB is Tigers stud SS Kevin McGonigle. While not physically imposing, the kid just flat out rakes. Above-average power and speed, his swing decisions are truly elite for a player not even 22 years of age. Not a matter of if, but when he

makes his way to Comerica Park this season. Right behind him is OF Max Clark, also No. 10 overall in MiLB. Easy speed in center field, he's projected as a leadoff hitter and can be the Tigers table-setter for years to come. Keep your eyes on SS Bryce Rainer, C/1B Josue Briceño, C Thayron Liranzo and LHP Andrew Sears in the coming years as well.

OUTLOOK

Manager A.J. Hinch nearly fell victim to a firing after the historic second half collapse that saw his Tigers lose the AL Central on the final day of the regular season. He saved face with a Wild Card series win over Cleveland. The worries are the offensive hangover from 2025 and the inevitable trade of Skubal coming. The Tigers are still contenders, but how long can they realistically compete without arguably the best pitcher in the game? It's no juggernaut of a division, but the AL Central margin for error gets narrower each year.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: TARIK SKUBAL'S WORKLOAD CATCHES UP WITH HIM & HE SUSTAINS A MIDSEASON ARM INJURY

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
91-79
-14.1 UNITS

TOTAL
86-76-8

•

RUN LINE
76-94

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
79-61-30
+5.2 UNITS

TOTAL 1ST 5
82-84

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
86-83

•

YES RUN
FIRST INNING
76-94

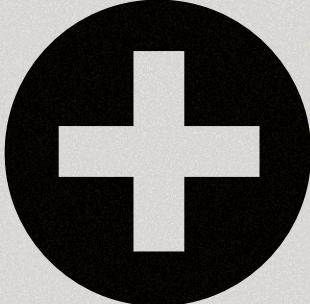


DETROIT
TIGERS

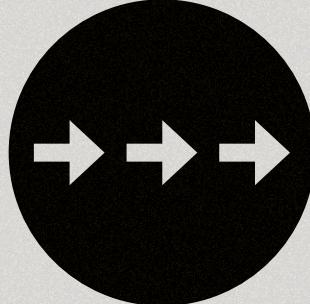
2025 RECORD: 87-75
2ND IN AL CENTRAL

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
PLAY: UNDER 85 .5

NOTABLE
ADDITIONS
SP Framber Valdez
SP Drew Anderson
RP Kenley Jansen
SP Justin Verlander
OF Austin Slater



NOTABLE
DEPARTURES
SP Chris Paddack
INF Andy Ibáñez
RP Rafael Montero
RP Paul Sewald
RP Alex Lange
SP José Urquidy
OF Manuel Margot
RP Tommy Kahnle
SP Alex Cobb
RP Jason Foley



BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
Bobby Witt Jr. has the first 40/40 season in the AL
since Alex Rodriguez in 1998

HITTING

The new dimensions should help those two youngsters, but also Bobby Witt Jr., whose Barrel% and launch angle numbers suggest he should have more home runs than he does. Witt has hit 105 career homers and Stateast xHR numbers give him more homers than that in 22 of the 30 parks. Interestingly, three of the parks where he'd have fewer xHR are in the AL Central. The Royals had a .307 wOBA, but a .318 xwOBA based on their batted ball data. They also had a .397 SLG with a .416 xSLG. Not all of that can be attributed to Kauffman Stadium, but the changes could be substantive for this offense.

This is a contact-oriented lineup. It makes sense. The batter's eye at Kauffman Stadium must be one of the best in baseball because it is the venue with the lowest Strikeout Park Factor over the last three years. Some of that has to do with the composition of the offense, but the Royals had an 18.2% K% last season, second only to the Blue Jays. But, they also only walked 7.2% of the time, 29th in the league ahead of the Rockies. Full seasons of Caglianone, Jensen, and a valuable hitter in Isaac Collins from the Brewers will improve this offense and the park changes will help. With 81+ games at Kauffman Stadium, the changes are going to mentally help the hitters and there's no way to quantify that impact, but it will have one.

PITCHING

Hitters are happy about the changes, but pitchers probably aren't too excited. Because of the hitter-friendly backdrop, the Royals pitching staff has some depressed K% numbers, meaning that they, too, could be negatively impacted with how much they pitch to contact. KC did have a K% drop year over year, but Cole Ragans only made 13 starts this past season over 61.2 innings compared to 32 starts and 186.1 innings the season prior. I'd expect more punchies from Noah Cameron going forward,

a southpaw who only had a 20.5% K% at the MLB level, but a 29.8% K% in the minors over 334.1 innings.

This is a really, really good rotation. I correctly predicted a season of regression for Seth Lugo, who had a career year in 2024, and I'm still concerned about him this season, but Ragans, Cameron, Kris Bubic, and one of my favorite arms in the system, Ryan Bergert, make for a deep group. The Royals also bolstered the bullpen with Matt Strahm and Nick Mears via trade in December. As a top-10 staff in ERA and HR prevention last season, I think they're better this season.

PROSPECT WATCH

The aforementioned Caglianone had a miserable pot of coffee as a rookie with a .239 wOBA and a 46 wRC+ in his 232 plate appearances. He chased over 40% of the time, had a SwStr% of nearly 13%, and hit way too many ground balls. He was also just drafted in 2024 and only played 29 games of pro ball before decimating AA and AAA pitching prior to his call-up in 2025. He was as pure of a hitter as you can get in college with a .355/.447/.760 slash and 75 HR in just 165 games. Growing pains were inevitable, but I'd hardly consider them a red flag.

OUTLOOK

This is a high-floor team. It's cliche, but they just have a lot of ballplayers. Bat-to-ball guys. Some guys with thump. Three guys with 20+ steals. Three elite defenders in Witt, Maikel Garcia and Kyle Isbel, who combined for 53 Outs Above Average last season. A legitimate ace and a bunch of league average or better starters. A plus bullpen. The ceiling will come from Caglianone and Jensen. If those guys are 110+ wRC+ bats, then we're probably talking about a playoff team.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: OVER 81.5



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 81.5

DIVISION: +225

PENNANT: 17-1

WORLD SERIES: 40-1

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Last offseason, Kansas City's biggest moves were off the field. This offseason, their biggest moves have literally been on the field. Prior to the 2025 season, the Royals extended Michael Wacha, signed Carlos Estevez and Mark Canha, and also reunited with Trade Deadline acquisition Michael Lorenzen. Prior to the 2026 season, the Royals are reimagining the Kauffman Stadium outfield.

The Big K is a great venue for singles, doubles, and triples, but not for hitting home runs. It is a very spacious outfield with a lot of ground to cover, with Baseball Savant data showing that it is the second-largest playing field area in the Majors (Coors Field is No.

1). Kauffman Stadium also had the second-deepest average fence distance at 384 feet, two feet shorter than Coors Field, where OF course, the ball carries better because of the elevation and other atmospheric factors. So, the Royals bankrolled a big study and decided to move the fences in nine feet down the lines and 10 feet in the gaps, with a seven-foot adjustment in between to straightaway left and right field.

Purely a coincidence after drafting Jac Caglianone and Carter Jensen, right? Dayton Moore and the predecessors of the current regime weren't as analytically-driven as this crew is and it is going to keep yielding positive results.

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
82-80
-1.6 UNITS

TOTAL 70-90-2	TOTAL 1ST 5 64-97
•	•
RUN LINE 82-80	RUN LINE 1ST 5 81-81

MONEYLINE 1ST 5 69-68-25 -9.7 UNITS	YES RUN FIRST INNING 74-88
---	----------------------------------



KANSAS CITY
ROYALS

2025 RECORD: 82-80
3RD IN AL CENTRAL

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 81.5

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

The finish to 2025 is what most thought the Royals might do at the beginning of the season: more power, more speed and more runs. They couldn't score to save their lives in the first two months of the season and it snuffed out any hope of challenging for the AL Central title. This year, you'd expect the urgency from Day 1 is there and no better place to start than a lineup anchored by MVP candidate SS Bobby Witt Jr. Breakthrough performances from 3B Maikel Garcia and 1B Vinnie Pasquantino make the top three in this order as good as it gets in the American League. The "Caymus of Catchers" in Salvador Perez returns for what feels like his 20th season (it's his 15th) and young phenom RF Jac Caglianone is primed for a 30+ HR season. Rookie DH Carter Jensen also deserves a serious look in fantasy baseball lineups, but will provide much needed production from the bottom third. The Royals

will need to get consistency out of second base and both left and center field, with Jonathan India, newly-acquired Isaac Collins and returnee Kyle Isbel slotted for those starting spots. This order doesn't have far to go and a drastic improvement from their 2025 overall performance is almost a certainty.

PITCHING

Quietly, this Kansas City rotation is one of the deepest in the American League. Staff ace Cole Ragans suffered an early season injury that kept him from continuing a dominant finish to the 2024 campaign, but he returns and will be a fixture in the AL Cy Young race. Veteran stalwarts Michael Wacha and Seth Lugo follow Ragans, but the big shot in the proverbial arm came from Kris Bubic last year. He'll team with second-year southpaw Noah Cameron to round out the Royals starting five. It's a very confident and consistent group, one capable

of big things at every turn. The bullpen is vastly improved in front of All-Star closer Carlos Estévez, setup men Lucas Erceg and John Schreiber with the additions of former Phillies Matt Strahm, Brewers Nick Mears and Tigers Alex Lange. They easily go six leverage relievers deep and many have late-inning experience to even the workload. Can they generate a lot more swing and miss in 2026? If they do, watch out - the sky is the limit.

PROSPECT WATCH

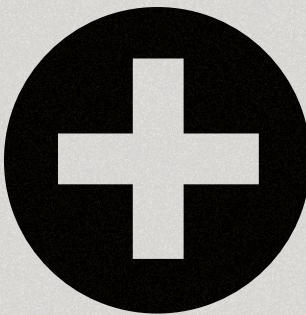
Caglianone, Jensen and Cameron graduate from a Royals farm system that's now devoid of most of its upper minor league talent. RHP Luinder Avila made his big league debut in 2025 as a reliever, but will likely be stretched out for rotation depth, at minimum to start 2026. The next wave is a few years away from impacting the big league level, but keep your eyes squarely on C Blake Mitchell,

RHP Kendry Chourio and SS Josh Hammond.

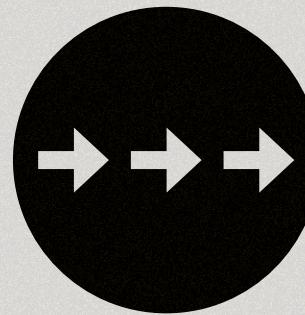
OUTLOOK

Manager Matt Quatraro signed a three-year contract extension, running through 2029 with a club option for 2030. He's completely turned the big league team into a viable, division-winning capable team in short order. The Yankees three-time MVP Aaron Judge is realistically the only man standing in the way of Bobby Witt Jr. finally ascending to win one of his own. Is 2026 the year he breaks through? I'm definitely bullish on that potential, especially with the adjusted Kauffman Stadium dimensions this season, bringing left and right field in approximately 9 to 10 feet. Health and depth of the starting rotation will be something to monitor all season, but if the offense gets off to even a league-average start compared to last season, this Royals team will be making noise into October.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: THE ROYALS WIN 90+ GAMES AND CAPTURE THE AL CENTRAL DIVISION TITLE



NOTABLE ADDITIONS
OF Isaac Collins
OF Lane Thomas
RP Matt Strahm
RP Nick Mears
RP Alex Lang



NOTABLE DEPARTURES
OF Mike Yastrzemski
SP Michael Lorenzen
INF Adam Frazier
RP Hunter Harvey
RP Taylor Clarke
C Luke Maile
OF Randal Grichuk
OF MJ Melendez
INF/OF Mark Canha



MINNESOTA TWINS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The White Sox had the lowest win percentage in one-run games, but the Twins were second. That wasn't the only reason that Rocco Baldelli was fired, but it was certainly a contributing factor. Derek Shelton was fired in May by the Pirates and is now the manager of the Twins, a team he spent two seasons with in 2018-19 as the bench coach, first for Paul Molitor and then for Baldelli. Shelton goes from one of the cheapest owners in baseball in Bob Nutting to whatever the situation is for the Twins.

The Pohlad family was looking to sell in 2024 and early 2025, but then opted to keep the team and just get

some minority investors. Not before the Trade Deadline fire sale, though, as the team traded Jhoan Duran, Willi Castro, Carlos Correa, Griffin Jax, Brock Stewart, Ty France, Louis Varland, Harrison Bader, Chris Paddack, and Danny Coulombe. Many felt, if not universally agreed, that the team needed a refresh, but trading most of the bullpen, including an elite, flame-throwing closer, was a bit shocking.

If the team is on a similar trend line this season after going 70-92 last season, we'll be talking about Pablo Lopez, Joe Ryan, and Ryan Jeffers being available at the Trade Deadline, if not more.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 73.5

DIVISION: +900

PENNANT: 40-1

WORLD SERIES: 100-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: The Twins do finish behind the White Sox and finish last for the first time since 2021 and second time since 2016

HITTING

In the aggregate, the Twins were a below average offense, but they did get a lot of above average contributions. It's just that they also had the playing time spread out quite a bit. Fourteen different players had at least 200 plate appearances, some post-fire sale, some due to injury. The team actually wasted one of the healthier and more productive Byron Buxton seasons, as he played 126 games with 542 plate appearances and a 136 wRC+ with a .264/.327/.551 slash and 35 homers to lead the team. The only others with over 500 PA were Trevor Larnach, who was a tad above league average, and Brooks Lee, who was terrible at the plate.

One of the players who produced at a high rate was Luke Keaschall. Don't be surprised if regression hits the 2023 second-round pick, as he had a .363 wOBA with a .324 xwOBA and a .340 BABIP, but the Twins should be excited about him as one of their few building blocks. Royce Lewis failed to stay healthy again and also took a nosedive with the stick. This lineup, including free agent signings Josh Bell and Vic Caratini, will probably look very different by August again.

PITCHING

The rotation might, too, but it's an okay group for now. The Twins were 23rd in starter ERA last season, but top 10 in walks and strikeouts, so there was a good bit of bad luck, though that'll happen with a poor defensive team. Of the seven guys with at least 10 starts, Ryan and Lopez were the only two to post an ERA below their xERA and Ryan did so by one point. Also, not one of the top eight in games started posted a GB% above 38.5%. This was a rotation that gave up a lot of long balls. That'll need to change because, much like we saw last season, this offense isn't good enough to outhit that.

Lopez only made 14 starts and the other highest-upside starter, Zebby Matthews, only made 16. Minnesota may explore a six-man

rotation at the outset and I think that makes sense to protect the young arms, including Taj Bradley from the Rays, and to keep Lopez and Ryan fresh for trade purposes. I don't think there's enough differentiation in this rotation, though. Bradley provides some with a 56 degree arm angle, but this is an all right-handed rotation with arm angles of 25, 32, 35, 40, 46, and 56 degrees and a lot of fastball usage. I'm honestly surprised that both pitching coach Pete Maki and bullpen coach LaTroy Hawkins were retained by Shelton.

PROSPECT WATCH

At least when Buxton and/or Lewis get hurt, the Twins might get some help from below. I'm not sure it will be top prospect Walker Jenkins, who was drafted fifth overall in 2023 out of high school, but it could be amateur free agent signing Emmanuel Rodriguez. The Dominican-born 22-year-old struck out or walked in over 52% of his plate appearances last season. He's struck out 389 times (30.3%) and walked 278 times (21.7%) over 1,283 PA in the minors. He did swing and miss over 12% of the time, but rarely chased. When he does make contact, he hits the ball hard, as his small sample size in AAA yielded a 46.9% Hard Hit%. He's a fascinating player.

OUTLOOK

The Twins are probably ticketed for fourth place in the AL Central again. I think it's a lot more likely that the White Sox close the gap than it is that they close the gap with the other three teams in the division. There are financial reasons to trade Lopez and Ryan, but there are baseball reasons as well. Namely, the Twins aren't winning anything this year or next year with them and 1.5 years of control is way more attractive to a buyer, even with the uncertainty of the 2027 labor agreement.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 73.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

70-92

-36.1 UNITS

•

TOTAL

72-80-8

•

RUN LINE

79-81

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

64-70-28

-20.5 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

82-20

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

81-81

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

86-76

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Unpredictability. One word to sum up the 2026 Minnesota Twins offensive outlook. Seven of the nine projected position player regulars are all homegrown Twins, led by franchise stalwart CF Byron Buxton and former No. 1 overall pick 3B Royce Lewis. Returning veterans RF Matt Wallner, C Ryan Jeffers and DH Trevor Larnach fill out an order that gets a boost from offseason acquisition 1B Josh Bell. Power wasn't the problem for the 2025 Twins - they ranked 11th in all of baseball in home runs. Consistency in reaching base and hitting with runners in scoring position short-circuited their attack. They get into lots of strikeout streaks, so limiting the swing and miss up and down the lineup is a huge priority.

PITCHING

The top end of the Twins rotation rightly deserves the hype and praise it received as the team's best asset. Pablo Lopez, Joe Ryan and Bailey Ober return to lead the starting five. If Lopez and Ryan stay healthy, pencil them in for 30+ starts and 170+ strikeouts each. Simeon Woods

Richardson and Zebby Matthews likely fill out spots 4 and 5, with Taj Bradley as next man up in AAA. Your guess is as good as mine for who gets the lion's share of closing opportunities to start 2026. Justin Topa, Kody Funderburk and Cole Sands will be in contention in camp, but closer-by-committee is the likely avenue to begin the season.

PROSPECT WATCH

No. 1 Twins prospect (No. 14 overall in MLB) OF Walker Jenkins will be in big league camp and is poised to turn heads. He's got all the tools, both offensively and defensively, to be a major leaguer this season. If he adds consistent power early in the year, don't be shocked if he's in Target Field at some point in 2026. No. 2 prospect Emmanuel Rodriguez nursed a late season oblique injury, but hopefully a winter ball stint has him ready to rock. The excitement about 2024 1st round SS Kaelen Culpepper is also worth noting. Versatile with power and speed, he can also be a call-up candidate if he continues momentum from a fabulous finish to 2025. On the bump, LHP Connor Prielipp is primed for

potential big league innings as either a starter or reliever, if his workload progresses.

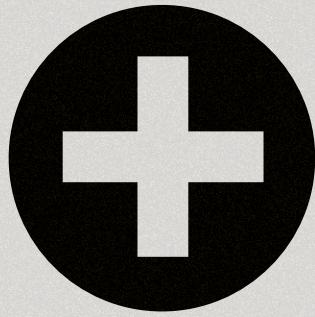
OUTLOOK

Derek Shelton takes over as skipper, beginning another tour-of-duty in the Twin Cities, after previously being Roco Baldelli's bench coach. Shelton's managing tenure ended in Pittsburgh after a 306-440 record, but he replaces Baldelli and is excited for his second chance. The lack of impactful offseason additions can largely be attributed to the uncertainty hanging over the organization after a potential sale of the team (which did not come to pass), as well as a drastically reduced intake of rights fees from the regional sports network situation. Of the players that will take the field in 2026, health always seems to be top of mind with injury histories surrounding Buxton, Lewis and Lopez. The young infielders must take big steps forward for the offense to contend, too. A boatload of turnover in the bullpen, coupled with a bottom-third defense, will be tough to overcome. The silver lining? They play in the AL Central, where as we saw just a year ago - ANYTHING can happen.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: BYRON BUXTON PLAYS 140+ GAMES, WALKER JENKINS AND EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ BOTH DEBUT BEFORE THE ALL-STAR BREAK, HELPING LEAD THE TWINS TO A PLAYOFF BERTH

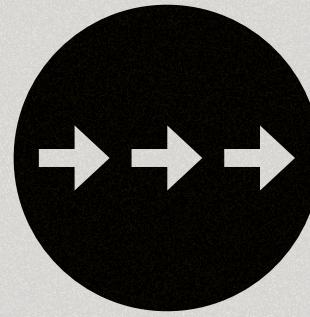
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Josh Bell
C/DHF Victor Caratini
C Alex Jackson
RP Eric Orze
INF/OF Eric Wagaman



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

C Christian Vazquez
RP Michael Tonkin
RP Genesis Cabrera



MINNESOTA TWINS

2025 RECORD : 70-92, 4TH IN AL CENTRAL
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN : OVER 73.5



AMERICAN LEAGUE WEST

VSIN

2026 SEASON

As my dad, and probably everybody else's dad, used to say, "close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades". Close is how we could have described the 2023 and 2024 seasons for the Mariners, who finished 3.5 games back in the AL West in 2024 and just two games out in 2023, missing out on the playoffs both times. Ironically, when they finished 16 games back in 2022, they were actually a Wild Card team with a 90-72 record.

Well, a 90-72 record was good enough to win the division this past season and Seattle

advanced past the ALDS for the first time since 2001. In fact, it was just the second postseason appearance for the ballclub since then, with 2022 being the other. The Mariners are deservedly favorites to run it back, which would mean winning the division in consecutive seasons for the first time in franchise history dating back to 1977.

The Astros, Rangers, Athletics, and Angels are all in chase mode, which is actually a rare spot for Houston to be in, given that they've won the division in seven of the last nine seasons

and just missed the playoffs for the first time since 2016. Texas has a new skipper as they strive for some consistency, posting losing records in seven of the last nine seasons with two losses to end the season 81-81 last year. Of course, the one year with a winning record was a pretty good one, culminating in a World Series title.

The Athletics and Angels have been consistent...ly bad. Now residing in Sacramento, the Athletics' 76 wins last season were the most since 2021. The Angels haven't had a winning season since dropping the "of

Anaheim" from their name following the 2015 season. This past season was the first with 90+ losses in consecutive campaigns since 1968-69. That's anything but nice, though they also start with a renewed sense of purpose thanks to a new manager.

This shouldn't be a walk in the park for Seattle, but the Mariners certainly have to feel pretty good about how things look coming into 2026.

- Adam Burke



*Josh
Naylor*

ATHLETICS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Quantifying how the move to Sacramento would affect the A's was pretty tricky. The average temperature is much warmer than Oakland, plus there's not really a marine layer and the ballpark dimensions are a lot different. Oakland Coliseum stole a lot of at bats in foul territory because it was just massive. The A's scored 733 runs, a leap of 90 from the previous season and the most that they scored since 2021. They also gave up 817 runs, the second-most they've allowed since 2017.

At home, specifically, the A's scored 368 and allowed 445, while they scored 365 and allowed 372 on the road. So, the pitchers definitely did not enjoy pitching at home and many lamented the quality of the moundwork in the AAA ballpark. That being said, this was a team that went 35-29

HITTING

Comparing offensive numbers year over year for the A's is like comparing apples to watermelons. The cavernous Coliseum actively suppressed offense due to a variety of factors, and that was plenty evident as the A's slashed .233/.301/.393 with a .303 wOBA in 2024 and then pumped those numbers up to .253/.318/.431 with a .324 wOBA this past season. It wasn't all because of the change of scenery, though. It helped that 2024 fourth overall pick Nick Kurtz had an absurd rookie season with 36 homers and a .619 SLG in 489 plate appearances. What's wild is that he hit one home run in his first 85 plate appearances and 35 in his final 404.

The median number of plate appearances for a hitter with enough PA to qualify for the batting title was roughly 590 out of the 145 players that hit that threshold. Extrapolate Kurtz out to that number with what he did over his final 404 PA and that's a 51-homer pace. But, he wasn't the only one to aid in the power surge.

in the second half of the season with a +50 run differential, so they did improve as the season went along and maybe created something to build upon in Year 2 as Sacramento residents, though the schedule this season does include a six-game June homestand at Las Vegas Ballpark in Summerlin, a launching pad for fly balls.

Running it back with virtually the same roster is definitely a choice, but the A's have a very good core to build around and this will be a huge season for several of the pitchers.

Shea Langeliers crossed 30 for the first time while also cutting his K% down 7.5% from the previous season. Tyler Soderstrom hit 25 as a full-time player. Even with drops in production from Brent Rooker and Lawrence Butler, who could absolutely bounce back, this was a strong offense and looks to be again.

PITCHING

While the offense is in good hands, the pitching staff is not really in anybody's hands. However, there were some noteworthy developments in 2025. Yes, the team's ERA jumped from 4.37 to 4.71, along with a FIP bump from 4.24 to 4.66. Giving up more home runs was inevitable. The A's staff was second in HR/FB% in 2024 and easily first in HR/FB% at home, 1.2% better than any other staff. This past season, the HR/FB% jumped to 12.4% overall and 13.5% at home.

The starting staff did have a modest 1.6% bump in K%, even with below average numbers from Jeffrey Springs, Luis Severino,



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 75.5

DIVISION: 16-1

PENNANT: 40-1

WORLD SERIES: 100-1

and JP Sears, who had the most starts and innings pitched in that order. Springs had also made 10 starts the previous two seasons and made 30 last year. Severino was awful at home in general, but saw a 5.9% K% increase from the first half to second half. Luis Morales and Jacob Young were bat-missers in the minors. The A's have some arms down below that are intriguing, whether they are rotation depth pieces or maybe leverage relievers. If this staff is league average, it's a win, but there is room for improvement with some higher-upside arms.

PROSPECT WATCH

Expect SP Gage Jump to make the jump to the Majors this season. The college arm out of LSU was taken 73rd overall in 2024 after missing the 2023 season. He didn't even throw 100 innings in college and still has a lot to learn, but he pitched very well in the brutal Texas League for Midland last season with a 3.64 ERA and a 3.48 FIP over 81.2 innings. The average pitcher ERA in the Texas League last season was 4.21 and teams

scored 4.62 runs per game. There are a lot of games in hot weather and only 10 teams, so hitters see you a lot. Jump only allowed a 37.2% Pull% and a 7.4% HR/FB% last season in A+ and AA. That kind of batted ball data would be welcomed pitching in Sacramento.

OUTLOOK

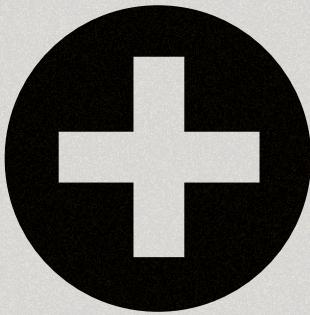
I am rather optimistic on the A's this season. A full season's worth of data in Sacramento should help the team better optimize pitch selection at home to mitigate some of the park factor hardships. As it is, the A's allowed a .341 wOBA overall at home for the season, but they improved from .353 in the first half to .321 in the second half, so they adjusted well on the fly. Similarly, the team's wOBA improved 16 points over that same period. Maintaining for 162 is very hard, but the A's played like an 88.6-win team in the second half of last season.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: OVER 75.5



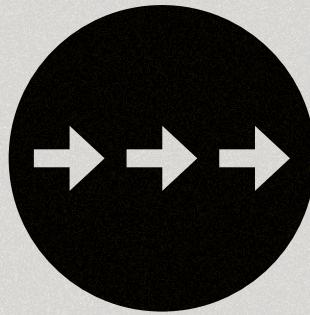
ATHLETICS

2025 RECORD : 76-86, 4TH IN AL WEST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN : OVER 75.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Jeff McNeil
RP Mark Leiter Jr.
SP Aaron Civale



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

RP Sean Newcomb
INF Luis Urias
RP T.J. McFarland
RP Scott McGough
OF JJ Bleday
RP Jose Leclerc
INF Gio Urshela

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

76-86

-3.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL

77-76-9

•

RUN LINE

86-76

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

65-69-28

-2.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

82-79

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

85-77

•

YES RUN

FIRST INNING

82-80

HITTING

My goodness. What a resurgence this lineup and organization saw offensively in 2025. The foundation of DH Brent Rooker and RF Lawrence Butler received reinforcements in a big way. Breakthrough performances of 2025 AL Rookie of the Year 1B Nick Kurtz C Shea Langeliers, SS Jacob Wilson and newly extended LF Tyler Soderstrom helped pace the A's attack. Wilson, ironically, led the ROY odds for most of the season until the power barrage from Kurtz, catapulting him to not only a vaunted leadoff hitter, but perhaps the new face of the franchise. 2B Jeff McNeil adds veteran leadership in 2026, coming over in a trade with the Mets. Playing their home games in Sacramento during the "purgatory" between Oakland and Las Vegas provided a host of high-scoring games early in the season. Expect that trend to continue and the sportsbooks to take heed of that experience. A top-12 scoring offense from a year ago has all the pieces to not only crack the top 10, but potentially become one of the most dangerous lineups in the American League.

PITCHING

The offense took major strides forward in 2025. The pitching staff must continue that

momentum and make leaps and bounds of their own. Luis Severino and Jeffrey Springs lead the rotation, with fresh, hard-throwing Luis Morales ticketed for rotation slots. Veteran Aaron Civale inked a free agent deal in February after a stint with the Cubs. Meanwhile, the biggest hype is fixated on lefty Jacob Lopez, who turned heads last season with a phenomenal rookie campaign. He's a darkhorse candidate for double-digit wins in 2026. However, the Achilles heel of this team is inconsistency in the entire pitching staff and the bullpen left several potential wins on the table last year. Plenty of swing-and-miss capability resides in leverage arms Hogan Harris, Justin Sterner and newly-acquired Mark Leiter Jr. No clear cut closer exists at the moment, so auditions will definitely take place during camp. Outside of that trio, several candidates will need to emerge for chances to bridge between the rotation and the back end of the pen. Be bullish that stalwarts Severino and Springs will provide innings, along with Lopez taking the biggest step forward.

PROSPECT WATCH

There's a young core of Athletics players that will find their home in Las Vegas, perhaps even before that inaugural season in

2028. RHP Gunnar Hoglund made his MLB debut in 2025 to much fanfare and will definitely be a rotation fixture for years to come. Future studs in SS Leo De Vries (No. 3 overall prospect in MiLB) and 2025 11th overall selection LHP Jamie Arnold are the next wave of talent that can impact the roster in a year or two. With Luis Morales graduating to the bigs, LHP Gage Jump is also an arm to watch. A decision to be made on whether he'll continue as a starter or transition to reliever will need to be made, sooner than later.

OUTLOOK

Manager Mark Kotsay agreed to a three-year contract extension, with a club option for 2029. He's been everything the A's could want and more, developing the expectation to win and getting those results far earlier than most outside the organization anticipated. Now that the secret is out offensively, how will the lineup adjust to the league's tweaked approach? Will the pitching staff be able to lockdown opposing attacks and the bullpen convert the leads into wins? The A's are no longer a series where opponents take three to four days off. They better be ready for a motivated group, looking to back up their 2025 campaign with an even better season in 2026.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: NICK KURTZ FINISHES TOP 3 FOR THE AL MOST VALUABLE PLAYER AWARD



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 86.5

DIVISION: +200

PENNANT: +900

WORLD SERIES: 22-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: The Astros may very well have their first losing 162-game season in more than a decade

HITTING

This offense has been going in the wrong direction for a while now, going from a .332 wOBA in 2023 to a .321 wOBA in 2024 to a .312 wOBA this past season. Injuries have played a role, obviously, as Kyle Tucker missed a big chunk of 2024 and Yordan Alvarez was limited to 48 games in 2025. Carlos Correa's resurgence after returning to Houston helped a lot in the second half, along with a breakout season with the stick for both Jeremy Pena and Isaac Paredes.

When all was said and done, seven of the top 11 in plate appearances had a wRC+ of 104 or higher, with another player at 99 in Christian Walker, who still hit 27 home runs. As a unit, the Astros were 27th in BB% and put a lot of balls in play, but not authoritatively. Houston finished 26th in Hard Hit% and 18th in Barrel%. To finish third in Pull% and not really do much with it is concerning, but that's what can happen with 3,833 R v. R plate appearances, easily the most in

the league. Without Alvarez, the Astros didn't have much lineup balance and something that they got away with in the past is not something they can get away with to the same degree now.

PITCHING

The decline in offensive production has been pretty clear, but the Astros continue to do well getting outs. A year over year increase of 0.11 runs in ERA was mostly offset by having a lower xERA and an almost identical FIP. ERA is a byproduct of sequencing and luck, whereas other run estimators are going to strip those components out. Injuries didn't help last season, as Framber Valdez and Hunter Brown made 31 starts apiece and nobody else made more than 14. Hayden Wesneski, a main piece in the Tucker trade with the Cubs, needed Tommy John in May. Ronel Blanco needed it in June.

It is going to be fascinating to see how the Astros make up 192 really good innings from Valdez, who had a 3.66 ERA with a 3.77 xERA and a 3.37 FIP. Hunter

HOUSTON ASTROS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

There are a lot of fanbases out there that would kill for an 87-75 season. Over a full 162-game campaign, it is the worst record that the Astros have finished with since 2016. On the heels of getting bounced in a two-game sweep in the 2024 Wild Card Round, it is fair to wonder if we're finally starting to see the downfall of the Astros. With a front office brain drain, the core group hitting the aging curve or getting too expensive to keep, and other organizations getting smarter, the Astros don't seem to have the same edges.

Not only did last season's team miss the playoffs, but they also only had a +21 run differential, the lowest

for the team since 2014 outside of the 2020 COVID year. Their .514 Pythagorean Win-Loss percentage with a .537 actual win percentage means that they were more like an 83-79 team. BaseRuns, Fangraphs' context-neutral standings metric, had them 82-80. Clay Davenport's 3rd Order Win% had them 81.3-80.7. With a 27-17 record in one-run games, the Astros were able to overperform a bit. Oh, and they had a losing record within the division for the first time since 2014 (excluding 2020).

For the most part, the Astros kept the status quo on the roster front. Will they be able to slow the downward trajectory?

Brown was aces with a 2.43 ERA, 3.15 xERA, and a 3.14 FIP, but then what? Ryan Gusto was tied for third in starts with 14 and got traded to Miami for Jesus Sanchez. Colton Gordon also had 14 starts and ran a 5.34 ERA and 5.37 FIP. Lance McCullers also had lackluster numbers, while Spencer Arrighetti did not take the leap many had hoped for. The floor for this staff is high because of how good Brown and the high-leverage relievers are, but the ceiling isn't in my mind.

PROSPECT WATCH

He's not truly a prospect at 27, but he's a rookie by MLB standards and he's going to have to carry a big load for this Astros team. Tatsuya Imai was outstanding with Seibu in Japan. The slender right-hander posted a 3.15 ERA in 963.2 innings in the NPB, but he only had a 22.3% K% and an 11.5% BB%, which he has cut down in recent seasons. The cadence of starting at the MLB level is a lot different, so we'll see how he adjusts, plus MLB hitters are objectively better than NPB

hitters. Imai was tremendous at preventing home runs in Japan with an assortment of breaking balls that he's brought stateside, but there is a learning curve to the culture, the experience, and, obviously, the competition.

OUTLOOK

Counting the Astros out seems foolish, but this team does not impress me much. The Mariners, Rangers, and Athletics are all better this season than they were last season in my opinion and Houston seems the same, if not worse without the innings-munching power of Valdez. For a team that graded like an 81-83 win team by the advanced standings metrics, that may simply be what we are looking at. With Jose Altuve aging, Alvarez's contract up after 2028, and Jeremy Pena looking to get paid very soon, the Astros are in a precarious spot moving forward.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: UNDER 86.5**



HOUSTON ASTROS

2025 RECORD: 87-75, 2ND IN AL WEST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: UNDER 86.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

87-75

-7.0 UNITS

•

TOTAL

71-82-8

•

RUN LINE

79-82

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

73-89

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

67-75-20

-25.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

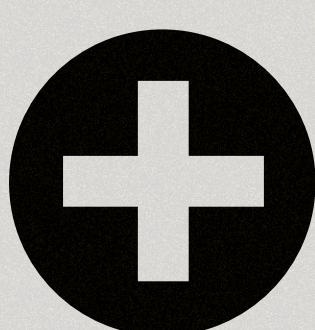
75-87

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RUN LINE 1ST 5

82-78

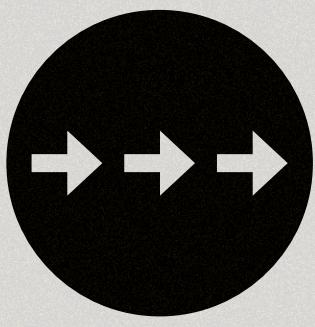
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NOTABLE

ADDITIONS

SP Tatsuya Imai
SP Mike Burrows
SP Ryan Weiss
INF Nick Allen
RP Nate Pearson
RP Roddery Muñoz
OF Joey Loperfido



NOTABLE

DEPARTURES

SP Framber Valdez
INF Ramón Urías
C/1B Victor Caratini
SP Luis García
RP Craig Kimbrel
OF Chas McCormick
RP Héctor Neris
INF Brendan Rodgers
OF Jesús Sánchez

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

The envy of the American League a few years ago, this Houston offense is a much different animal heading into 2026. What a difference a handful of injuries to DH Yordan Alvarez and SS Jeremy Peña make to a lineup that also sorely missed 3B Alex Bregman and RF Kyle Tucker. Both Peña and Alvarez are healthy headed into this season and will lead an order with franchise cornerstone 2B Jose Altuve, 3B Carlos Correa and 1B Christian Walker. C Yainer Diaz is one of the better all-around backstops in the league and lengthens the order in front of LF Zach Cole and CF Jake Meyers. It still may be the worst offensive outfield in the league and that's a problem in the very competitive AL West. One pressing question: where will INF Isaac Paredes play? With Alvarez returning as DH and Correa manning the hot corner, Paredes is "without" a position currently. Can the bottom of the order do anything to improve a run-scoring group that finished in the bottom third of MLB in 2025? The heavy lifting all centers on the top three in the order and that's a heavy burden to bear.

PITCHING

The heir apparent to departed rotation ace Framber Valdez is Hunter Brown. He put together as dominant a season as any American League starter and looks to do even better, leading a much different looking Astros rotation in 2026. Holdovers Cristian Javier and Lance McCullers Jr. are back from injuries and will need to post at least 25+ starts each. Good luck with that happening. Newly-acquired Tatsuya Imai became a shocking signing in January, but a necessary one for the time being. Mike Burrows, traded over from the Pirates, is an under-

the-radar name to watch. The Houston bullpen still features arguably the best 1-2 punch to close out games in Josh Hader and Bryan Abreu. In front of them, young Bryan King burst onto the scene in 2025 as a dependable leverage reliever. Enyel De Los Santos, Steven Okert, free agent signee Nate Pearson and Rule 5 selection Roddery Muñoz fill out the rest of the relievers. It's still a dominant pen - the question will be how hard do they get worked early on if rotation injuries hit again?

PROSPECT WATCH

Hard to find a lot in the Astros farm system to get excited about, but a few bright spots are 2B Brice Matthews and SS Xavier Neyens. Matthews is probably starting the year in Triple-A Sugar Land, but the upside is definitely there, only a couple years removed from being drafted No. 28 overall in 2023. Neyens has sick raw power for a 19-year-old and he might benefit from a position change to 3B with his physical frame. RHP Miguel Ullola is likely next man up for the rotation and a potential breakout candidate is RHP Bryce Mayer. It's a system devoid of depth and that might get exposed in the next year or two.

OUTLOOK

Manager Joe Espada needs credit for doing so much with so little last year. Through all the injuries, the offensive inconsistencies and everything in-between, this Astros team STILL had a shot at the division title into the final two weeks of the regular season. The worry is the rotation, plain and simple. How long will the arms behind Brown stay healthy? Will age finally catch up to Altuve and Correa? Can Alvarez play in 120+ games? So many questions for a team that will have its hands full in a highly competitive AL West.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: HOUSTON BARELY FINISHES ABOVE .500 AND MISSES THE PLAYOFFS

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Mike Trout was 23 years old the last time the Angels made the playoffs. He'll turn 35 this August. It seems extremely unlikely that he'll get a chance to play postseason baseball this year, either on his own accord or on the team's. He did manage to play 130 games last season and cracked 500 plate appearances for the first time since 2019, but he's clearly not the player he once was. Unfortunately, the organization is still the one it has been for a while now.

The Angels hired Kurt Suzuki as the manager and he's on a one-year deal that coincides with the one guaranteed year left on GM Perry Minasian's pact. Suzuki, who has been a special assistant to Minasian

the last two seasons, just retired in 2022. Perhaps the hope is that the Angels can find the same magic that the Guardians have had with Stephen Vogt, who also retired that year. Regardless, it is another catcher finding a managerial position, but one who has zero job security and a pretty poor roster to work with. While the Angels were aggressive in their pursuits for bullpen arms, that's the only part of the team that looked markedly different and possibly better.

For a team that got outscored by 163 runs last season and 162 runs the season before while narrowly avoiding 100 losses, it's a bold strategy.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 70.5

DIVISION: 40-1

PENNANT: 100-1

WORLD SERIES: 250-1



HITTING

The Angels finished fourth in home runs last season, which was a pretty good accomplishment all things considered. Just imagine what they could have done if they didn't also lead the league in strikeouts by a significant margin. With 226 homers, the Halos still finished 25th in runs scored. As it turns out, hitting home runs is valuable, but hitting them with people on base is more valuable. LA was third in solo homers and 14th in homers with men on base, a byproduct of their 27.1% K%, and scored the third-fewest runs on multi-run HR. The Rockies were the only other team over 25% and they have a pretty good built-in excuse with the Coors Field Effect. The Angels have no such excuse.

How did the Angels try to use their home run prowess to their advantage this offseason? Well, they didn't. They traded Taylor Ward and his 36 homers, one behind team leader Jo Adell, whose name was also bandied about in trade talks. Ward was second to Zach Neto in fWAR and one of the few regulars who actually drew some walks. He also had wildly bad luck on batted balls with just a .257 BABIP. They'll look to replace Ward with Josh Lowe, who was 21% below league average offensively and was acquired in a three-team trade. Maybe Minasian wants to get fired.

PITCHING

The most talented player on the roster is a reliever. That's just such a depressing statement, but it's true, as the aging curve and health problems have derailed Trout. I guess Neto has a case, but the most exciting player is Ben Joyce, who unfortunately blew his shoulder out last season and only made five appearances. Joyce threw the hardest fastball in the league last season with an average of 102.1 mph. We'll see how Joyce comes back from injury, but the Angels stocked up on tradeable relievers in Drew Pomeranz, Kirby Yates, and Jordan Romano for when they're inevitably out of it by June. I actually like the bullpen a lot, but they won't have leads to protect.

I am very curious to see what new pitching coach Mike Maddux can get out of this rotation. The Angels got Grayson Rodriguez from Baltimore in the Ward deal, so they got a high-upside arm with a high risk profile. Speaking of dice rolls, Alek Manoah is one. Yusei Kikuchi's SwStr% dropped to 10.4% and he saw a BB% spike in his age-34 season that is super worrisome. Extreme worm killer Jose Soriano had a 65.3% GB% with a high walk rate. I'll never give up on Reid Detmers, who was used as a reliever 61 times last season and had a 3.96 ERA with a 3.12 FIP, but he moves back to the rotation. Maddux has been around a long time, so I'm cautiously optimistic this group can improve.

PROSPECT WATCH

This is a very poor minor league system. The best prospect is easily Tyler Bremner, who the Angels just took second overall out of UC Santa Barbara this past June. I'm going in a different direction and looking at a non-prospect in Vaughn Grissom. In some respects, the 25-year-old, who debuted at 21, is a prospect because he only has 350 plate appearances to his name. The Braves fast-tracked him and maybe it was too much too soon, but he raked at every minor league level at a young age for that level. This is the kind of team that can give a career .303/.392/.458 minor leaguer a chance, especially with improved contact quality metrics last season for the Red Sox AAA team.

OUTLOOK

There was a lot of dead weight on this roster that included guys with some track records like Logan O'Hoppe and Jorge Soler. The Angels also moved 2024 first-round pick Christian Moore up the ranks quickly. This won't be a good team, but there will be reasons to be interested in them, if for nothing else to see how the soap opera of a one-year manager and GM joined at the hip plays out. Maddux, Suzuki, and some new ideas can't hurt, but a high K% lineup and a low K% pitching staff are not a good pairing.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 70.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
Yusei Kikuchi and Jo Adell are traded together to a contender at the Trade Deadline

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Light up the Halo! Breakout campaigns from Zach Neto and Jo Adell produced some of the highlights for a lineup that actually crushed homers (fourth in MLB), but somehow still finished 25th in runs scored. A surprising trade of OF Taylor Ward to Baltimore, in exchange for oft-injured SP Grayson Rodriguez, leaves a lot of uncertainty for production in the middle of the order. It's a mixed bag entering 2026: returning veterans Mike Trout and Jorge Soler will team with youngsters Nolan Schanuel and Logan O'Hoppe, along with newcomers OF Josh Lowe and 2B Vaughn Grissom. Is 2026 the year that 3B Christian Moore puts it all together? Can the overall lineup avoid major injuries that plagued them the last couple seasons? There's plenty of power, but this offense provides more free air conditioning than the Southern California breezes, leading MLB by a mile in strikeouts last season. If

you want to be bullish on one player in particular, Neto has a legit shot for 30+ HR and 30+ stolen bases this season.

PITCHING

This unit represents one of the truest "it could go either way" scenarios of any team entering 2026. Things they got right: bringing in Yusei Kikuchi last year to team with Jose Soriano for a much more respectable 1-2 punch atop the rotation. The acquisition of Rodriguez is a serious roll of the dice; if it comes out right, GM Perry Minasian stole a potential top of the rotation arm for years to come. Veteran lefty Reid Detmers slots somewhere in the middle or bottom of the rotation and the Angels will give reclamation project Alek Manoah a chance to earn a spot. The bullpen might actually be a great risk-reward asset in 2026, adding proven arms in Drew Pomeranz, Kirby Yates and Jordan Romano. Robert Stephenson

probably gets to start the season as the closer, but plenty of former stoppers now are in the fold in case he falters. Shortening the game is definitely the buy-low strategy that just might work out for this group.

PROSPECT WATCH

Perhaps the shock of the 2025 MLB Draft came when Los Angeles made the No. 2 overall pick for RHP Tyler Bremner from UC Santa Barbara. Armed with a heater that touches 98 mph and a gyro-type slider in the mid-to-high 80s, he's the latest in a recent line of college starters that will be fast-tracked through the Angels system (Ryan Johnson is a perfect comp from draft in 2024 to call-up in 2025). A debut in 2026 is definitely in the cards. Add in fellow phenom SP George Klassen, who may have the highest ceiling of any Halos pitching prospect and you've got the window into LA's rotation future. OF Nelson Rada is considered one of the best signings out of the 2022 international class

and really turned heads to finish the 2024 season. He's only 20 years old, so a little seasoning at Triple-A will do him good.

OUTLOOK

Newly-hired manager Kurt Suzuki only received only a one-year deal (incredibly odd) so the urgency will be high when everyone descends on camp in Tempe, Arizona. He's surrounded himself with pitching coach and guru Mike Maddox, hitting coach Brady Anderson and bench coach John Gibbons. The Halos face an absolute gauntlet to start the regular season: road trips to face the Astros, Cubs, Reds and Yankees with homestands against the Mariners, Braves, Padres and Blue Jays. Yikes. The rotation will need to find a way to keep those offenses at bay and pray the offense can hit with runners in scoring position right from the jump. So many facets of this team need to break the right way to achieve even a .500 season.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: ZACH NETO BECOMES A TOP-10 SHORTSTOP IN MLB

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
72-90
-6.1 UNITS

TOTAL
86-72-4

•

RUN LINE
85-77

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
58-76-28
-11.9 UNITS

TOTAL 1ST 5
84-78

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
80-82

•

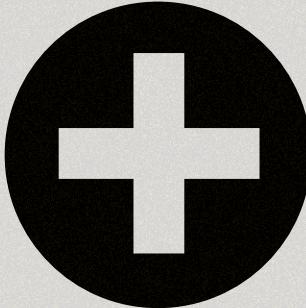
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
92-70



LOS ANGELES
ANGELS

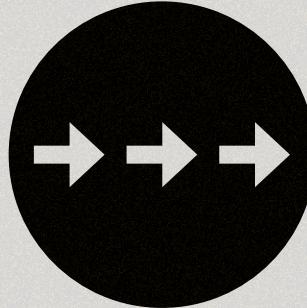
2025 RECORD: 72-90
LAST IN AL WEST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 70.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

OF Josh Lowe
INF Vaughn Grissom
SP Grayson Rodriguez
SP Alek Manoah
RP Drew Pomeranz
RP Kirby Yates
RP Jordan Romano



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

INF Yoan Moncada
RP Kenley Jansen
RP Andrew Chafin
SP Tyler Anderson
INF Luis Rengifo
RP Connor Brogdon
INF Chris Taylor
INF Kevin Newman
INF/OF LaMonte Wade Jr.

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
Logan Gilbert's slider returns to form and he is your
American League Cy Young winner

HITTING

Something I mentioned in last year's Mariners write-up that seemingly carried over to 2025 is how well they performed offensively in September 2024. Scott Servais was fired, Wilson took over, and Edgar Martinez returned as the interim hitting coach. Martinez was jumping around the org as a hitting advisor, and was called into duty in Seattle. He's now the team's Senior Director of Hitting Strategy, but with one of the game's purest hitters in the dugout, the Mariners slashed .264/.347/.433 in September 2024 with a .339 wOBA and a 129 wRC+ that both ranked third in the league. Prior to September, the Mariners were 28th in wOBA at .296, had a 99 wRC+, and slashed .216/.304/.364.

While that torrid final-month pace proved unsustainable as expected, Seattle did make huge strides offensively in 2025, slushing .244/.320/.420 with a .321 wOBA and a strong 113 wRC+, influenced by how T-Mobile Park requires a team to be graded on a curve. The team went from seventh at 40.5% and fourth in Barrel% at 8.9% to fourth in HH% at 42.8% and improved their Barrel% to 9.5%. Along with improved contact quality and authority, the M's simply made more contact, cutting their K% from 26.8% to 23.3%. With the same group, plus a full season of Naylor, a strong trade addition in Brendan Donovan, and a good platoon stick in Rob Refsnyder, this should be a very good offense again.

PITCHING

While it seemed like the Mariners were up against it because of injuries to Logan Gilbert and George Kirby, the reality is that they had it a lot better than most. Seattle only used nine different starting pitchers and seven of them made at least 15 starts, anchored by 32 from Luis Castillo and 30 from Bryan Woo. Kirby's early-season injury led to a career-worst 4.21 ERA and Bryce Miller never got on track with multiple IL stints, posting a 5.68 ERA with a 5.36 xERA and a 5.17 FIP one season removed

from going 2.94/3.71/3.58 in those metrics.

The Mariners were second in ERA and third in FIP as a staff in 2024. They were 13th in ERA and ninth in FIP this past season, so if they can stay a little bit healthier and regain that 2024 form with an improved offense, this team has a remarkably high ceiling. Given that not much has changed with this group from a personnel standpoint, and the park factor remains very favorable, I'd expect strong numbers again, including a bit of a K% bump that was lacking last season with some of the injuries.

PROSPECT WATCH

Third base was a real sore spot for the M's, which is why they reacquainted with Eugenio Suarez for the playoff push. He wasn't very good for Seattle, but that position group posted a .242/.299/.374 slash with a .295 wOBA last season. Fortunately, Colt Emerson is coming. Emerson was drafted as a shortstop, but probably wasn't going to stick there anyway, as the 20-year-old prep product taken 22nd overall in 2023 will have the chance to break camp with the club. Ben Williamson was 24% below league average offensively last season, so Emerson, who mostly played at A+ and AA, is a guy to follow very closely in the Cactus League and early in the season if he doesn't make the Opening Day roster with his advanced tools.

OUTLOOK

It's pretty clear that I love the composition of this team. Maybe Wilson brought some new vibes to the clubhouse and Kevin Seitzer, who did some excellent things as the Braves hitting coach for a decade, seems to be improving this group. Pitching coach Pete Woodworth was hired at 31 years of age and has held this role since November 2019 with a lot of positive results. It's taken a ton of maneuvering over the years, but Jerry Dipoto has this team where he wants it and I'd be very surprised if they don't repeat in the AL West.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 89.5**



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 89.5

DIVISION: +110

PENNANT: +500

WORLD SERIES: 13-1

SEATTLE MARINERS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

How can you not feel good for a team whose star player goes by "Big Dumper" winning the division for the first time in 25 seasons? Though Cal Raleigh didn't win the AL MVP, he did get to play in the ALCS, a series that the Mariners lost after blowing leads of 2-0 and 3-2, falling so painfully short of their first World Series appearance in franchise history. As bitter as the ending was, a team so close in recent seasons got over the hump and they should be better for it moving forward.

Despite five straight seasons with 85+ wins, and three of

them with exactly 90 wins, the Mariners only have two playoff appearances because of how the Wild Card bubble has played out and Houston's dominance in the AL West. The balance of power seems to be shifting now, though, and the Mariners, division champs in their first full season under manager Dan Wilson, are the team to beat in 2026.

While the Mariners didn't do much this offseason, they have a top-10 prospect in waiting, locked in spark plug Josh Naylor, and brought in a lot of depth arms to try and withstand the grind of 162 games.

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
96-78
.5 UNITS

TOTAL 95-73-6	TOTAL 1ST 5 93-81
•	•
RUN LINE 77-97	RUN LINE 1ST 5 82-92

MONEYLINE 1ST 5 75-71-28 -20.9 UNITS	YES RUN FIRST INNING 84-90
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SEATTLE
MARINERS

22025 RECORD: 90-72
1ST IN AL WEST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 89.5

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

What a magical run in 2025. Storybook season with so many memorable moments - and we may be in for another one just like it in 2026. AL MVP runner-up C Cal Raleigh put together arguably the greatest single season from a catcher we've ever seen. He'll lead a Mariners attack absolutely stacked with newly-acquired leadoff man 3B Brendan Donovan, superstar CF Julio Rodriguez, 1B Josh Naylor and LF Randy Arozarena. Speed and versatility will play a huge role in this back half of the lineup, with DH Dominic Canzone, RF Victor Robles, SS J.P. Crawford and youngster 2B Cole Young rounding out the starting nine. T-Mobile Park isn't known for being a hitter's paradise by any stretch of the imagination, but it didn't hold down the home offense, seeing this Mariners team hit for the third-most HR in MLB. A top-10 scoring group is

well within reach again and role players INF Leo Rivas, as well as 1B/OF Luke Raley and newly signed 1B/OF Rob Refsnyder, provide plenty of diverse options in late game situations.

PITCHING

It's been the envy of pretty much every other organization in the game for the last half decade. This starting rotation can be stacked up against any lineup, anywhere, any time. Pick your poison with multiple aces, from Bryan Woo, Logan Gilbert and George Kirby. Veteran Luis Castillo is still as reliable as any starting pitcher in MLB. Bryce Miller is really the No. 5 starter in name only - he'd likely be at least a No. 2 or No. 3 in many other rotations. Oh, then you deal with the nastiness of the Seattle bullpen. Closer Andrés Muñoz finished second statistically to Aroldis Chapman as the best reliever in the sport last season.

Setup men Matt Brash, Eduard Bazardo and Gabe Speier get another power arm to add in the fold, with Jose A. Ferrer coming over in a trade with the Nationals. The scariest part of the Mariners staff is they didn't really pitch to their full capabilities for most of the 2025 regular season. Best of luck trying to win series against this incredible force of nature.

PROSPECT WATCH

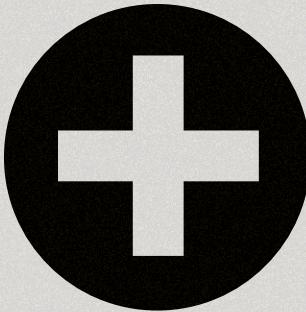
Top organizational prospect and No. 9 overall in MiLB is SS Colt Emerson. Widely viewed as one of the best pure hitters in any minor league system, his only real question is what position will be a fit at the big league level? A switch to third base may fast track his call-up here in 2026. 2025 No. 3 overall selection and No. 21 overall MiLB prospect LHP Kade Anderson helped pitch LSU to a national championship and cemented his stock as one of the best arms in the entire draft. He's

got a great shot to rocket through multiple minor league levels in 2026. Seattle also holds two more Top-50 overall MiLB prospects in RHP Ryan Sloan (No. 33) and OF Lazaro Montes (No. 43), as well as a total of six in the Top 100. 2B Michael Arroyo (No. 67) is a name to watch for a potential call to the Pacific Northwest this year. Add OF Jonny Farmelo (No. 78) in and it's as loaded a farm system there is.

OUTLOOK

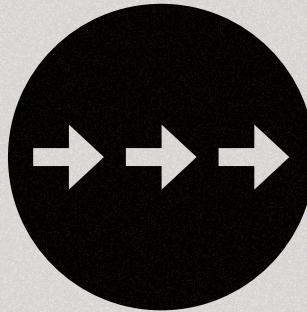
Manager Dan Wilson brought this team within one win of the franchise's first trip to the Fall Classic. Gut-wrenching way to blow a 2-0 ALCS lead, but it will only fuel the desire and fire for the 2026 group. "Unfinished business" for sure and with Raleigh reprising his role as an MVP candidate, alongside a vaunted a pitching staff there is in the game, the Mariners are poised for another deep postseason run.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: THE MARINERS WIN THE AL WEST, EN ROUTE TO PUNCHING THEIR FIRST-EVER TICKET TO THE WORLD SERIES



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Brendan Donovan
C Andrew Knizner
OF/1B Rob Refsnyder
RP Jose A. Ferrer
RP Cooper Criswell



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

INF Eugenio Suárez
INF Jorge Polanco
RP Caleb Ferguson
C Mitch Garver
RP Tayler Saucedo
RP Luke Jackson
RP Gregory Santos
RP Trent Thornton
OF Leody Taveras
INF Ben Williamson



TEXAS RANGERS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Chris Young got precisely what he wanted when he hired Bruce Bochy. As the president of baseball operations, Young inherited Chris Woodward from Jon Daniels and gave him a fair amount of leash. But, Woodward was ultimately canned with a little more than a quarter of the season left in 2022. Young, who played for Bochy in the skipper's final year in San Diego back in 2006, pulled the wily veteran and three-time World Series winner out of retirement looking for lightning in a bottle.

Well, he got it, as the Rangers went 90-72 and won the World Series for the first time in franchise history in their first playoff appearance since 2016. Unfortunately, despite a

+79 run differential last season, Bochy was 78-84 and 81-81 over the final two seasons in Arlington. Now the Rangers go from the 70-year-old Bochy to 45-year-old Skip Schumaker, who got a raw deal in two seasons as the manager of the Marlins, despite winning NL Manager of the Year in 2023. He joined the Rangers as a senior advisor in November 2024 and was named the manager a couple days after this past season ended.

That 2023 Marlins team was something. They made the playoffs and finished 84-78 with the worst run differential ever for a playoff team (-57), but went an outrageous 33-14 in one-run games. Guess we'll see if Skip brought his rabbit's foot to the American League.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 83.5

DIVISION: +340

PENNANT: 13-1

WORLD SERIES: 30-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
MacKenzie Gore finishes in the top 10 in
AL Cy Young voting

HITTING

The 2023 Rangers batted .263/.337/.452 with a .340 wOBA and a 118 wRC+. The 2024 Rangers slashed .238/.305/.380 with a .300 wOBA and a 97 wRC+. The 2025 Rangers were actually worse, posting a .234/.302/.381 slash with a .299 wOBA and a 92 wRC+. Incredibly, the 2023 team had the highest K% of the bunch, but the staggering declines from Marcus Semien and Adolis Garcia had a lot to do with what happened. Corey Seager hasn't come close to replicating his MVP runner-up '23 season, but he's still been a very productive bat when he's been out there. Some players have come and gone and some haven't developed or sustained as hoped like Josh Jung and Jonah Heim.

Along with the managerial change, Young pushed the reset button a little on the offense. Garcia and Heim were non-tendered and have been replaced with Brandon Nimmo and Danny Jansen. When it comes to season outlooks and win total wagers, you look at the aggregate, but you look at it through individual position upgrades. Garcia was 17% below league average offensively and Heim was 31% below league average. Nimmo has been at least 8% above league average every season but his rookie year back in 2016. Jansen had a similar year to Heim in 2019, but has been an above average bat in four of the last five seasons. Marcus Semien was also replaced, as he was part of the Nimmo deal. Josh Smith is slated for 2B and he was a league average bat. Surround those upgrades with the rest of the returnees and this should be a substantially better offense.

PITCHING

It had been a pretty quiet offseason on the pitching side until the Rangers traded for MacKenzie Gore from the Nationals in January. A 4.19 ERA with a 4.61 xERA and a 4.02 FIP doesn't sound terribly impressive, but we know that Gore's raw stuff is good with a 25.6% K% over four MLB seasons. Consider that the Rangers promoted bullpen coach Jordan Tiegs, whose relief corps ranked fifth in ERA, to pitching coach. The Rangers also had the lowest starting rotation ERA in baseball and fourth-lowest home BABIP against as a staff. This seems like a great landing spot for Gore, right?

Not only is there a pitching (and an assistant pitching coach) by title, but Gore now gets to throw bullpens and chat with Jacob deGrom and Nathan Eovaldi. Not too shabby. Speaking of those two, they're aging like a fine Caymus, as Eovaldi was an injury away from contending with Tarik Skubal for the AL Cy Young and deGrom posted a sub-3.00 ERA in 30 starts at the age of 37 after missing basically 2.5 seasons of baseball because why the hell not? deGrom hadn't made more than 15 starts since 2019 and he was magnificent anyway. With a variety of buy-low mid-leverage relievers and last season's high-leverage guys back, this should be a top-tier staff, barring any major health challenges with limited organizational depth.

PROSPECT WATCH

This system is extremely light on prospects right now, but Sebastian Walcott is a top-10 overall prospect and an enthralling player to follow. In a midseason update, FanGraphs actually made Walcott their No. 4-ranked prospect across all of baseball. The tools are wild and a lot of the things that evaluators are focusing on these days, including bat speed, exit velocity, and room to grow into his 6-foot-4 frame. Not only does he have power, but he's stolen 59 bases over the last two seasons. The 2023 signee out of the Bahamas was also playing AA baseball at 19. Eric Longenhagen and others have thrown a Fernando Tatis Jr. comp at him. He's a pretty decent player, eh?

OUTLOOK

I'll be honest and say that the offseason for the Rangers snuck up on me. Schumaker is a good hire. Nimmo and Jansen are great upgrades and Semien is addition by subtraction. Year over year, from 2024 to 2025, Rangers pitchers went from an 8.7% BB% that ranked 23rd to a 7.8% BB% that ranked sixth, another characteristic of why Gore has the chance to truly blossom here. If a team is going to run down the Mariners in the AL West, I believe it will be this one as they are much improved. Also, this was a team that was 90-72 by Pythagorean Win-Loss, 86-76 by BaseRuns, and roughly 85-77 by 3rd Order Win% so positive regression was coming anyway.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: OVER 83.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

81-81

-11.3 UNITS

•

TOTAL

71-89-2

•

RUN LINE

86-76

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

79-60-23

+8.0 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

74-87

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

89-73

•

YES RUN

FIRST INNING

72-90

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Everything is bigger in Texas - except the 2025 Rangers offense. A rash of injuries derailed what looked to be a promising group, leading the Rangers to bottom-five rankings in OBP and OPS. What to expect in 2026? Let's start with the massive trade, sending Marcus Semien to the Mets straight up for RF Brandon Nimmo. That will jumpstart a top of the order that features young standout LF Wyatt Langford, setting the table for SS Corey Seager and DH Joc Pederson. The rest of the lineup is due for a bounce back in 1B Jake Burger, CF Evan Carter and 3B Josh Jung. Newly added C Danny Jansen rounds out an order that needs to drastically improve their slugging if they hope to contend in the all of a sudden strengthened AL West. Theme for this lineup on paper: solid, but inconsistent. Langford, Seager and Carter are the trio that need to carry this group.

PITCHING

Which starting rotation had the best ERA in all of baseball last year? Yep, you guessed it - these Texas Rangers. The high

octane duo of Jacob deGrom and Nathan Eovaldi each dealt with bumps in the road from an injury perspective, but still put together top-20 caliber statistical performances. Add in the "win-now" trade, acquiring MacKenzie Gore from the Nationals and it's clear that president of baseball operations Chris Young believes the time to strike is here. Jack Leiter took massive steps forward last year and can be yet another power arm lengthening this rotation. The bullpen saw a major overhaul and welcomed new members Jakob Junis, Alexis Diaz, Tyler Alexander, Josh Sborz and Carter Baumier in front of closer Robert Garcia, alongside setup men Christ Martin and Cole Winn. It's a group that finished top five in ERA, BB/9 and had the third-lowest WHIP amongst bullpens in 2025.

PROSPECT WATCH

No. 7 overall MiLB and top Rangers prospect Sebastian Walcott will turn 20 on March 14th, but he may be turning up the heat on a rapid ascent to the big leagues. The elite bat speed and bat-to-ball skills

put him on the doorstep of The Show in 2026. The other contenders for meteoric risers in the Rangers system are RHP Caden Scarborough and RHP David Davalillo. Scarborough (High A) and Davalillo (Triple A) team with other top pitching arms RHP Winston Santos and RHP Jose Corniell, who earned a late-season promotion to the major league roster. It's not the most loaded farm system, but Walcott is the potential All-Star caliber prospect you want to build a future around.

OUTLOOK

Newly-hired manager Skip Schumaker takes over for sure-fire Hall of Fame skipper Bruce Bochy and looks to hit the ground running with a group that's built to make noise in the AL. The rotation is top-heavy, perfectly built for a deep October run. The bullpen depth and injury risks in both the offense and pitching staff as a whole are the main concerns. It's as sneaky a group to back in the American League out of the gates, but they can be a real force to be reckoned with if they hit their stride and stay healthy into September.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: WYATT LANGFORD HITS 25+ HR AND STEALS 25+ BASES

NOTABLE ADDITIONS

OF Brandon Nimmo
C Danny Jansen
SP MacKenzie Gore
RP Jakob Junis
RP Alexis Diaz
RP Tyler Alexander
RP Josh Sborz
RP Carter Baumier

NOTABLE DEPARTURES

INF Marcus Semien
SP Merrill Kelly
SP Tyler Mahle
SP Patrick Corbin
RP Phil Maton
RP Shawn Armstrong
RP Hoby Milner
OF Adolis Garcia
RP Jacob Webb
INF Rowdy Tellez
INF Dylan Moore
SP Jon Gray
C Jonah Heim

TEXAS RANGERS

2025 RECORD: 81-81, 3RD IN AL WEST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: OVER 83.5



NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST

VSIN

2026 SEASON

The NL East? More like the NL LEAST, am I right? The Phillies went 96-66 to win the division by 13 games over the Mets, who were the only other team with a winning record (83-79). Every other division in the league had at least two teams with a winning record and had three teams .500 or better. Things weren't supposed to go that way, as New York spent a ton of money in hopes of getting over the hump, including a mega contract to top free agent Juan Soto, and the Braves were supposed to be better than they were, ending a streak of seven straight postseason appearances.

The Mets kept up their money-driven push, locking down

Bo Bichette, Devin Williams, Jorge Polanco, and Luke Weaver among their MLB-level free agent haul, while the rest of the division didn't put forth a major effort on the open market. The Phillies did reunite with Kyle Schwarber at a hefty price and also retained the services of J.T. Realmuto, but Brad Keller and Adolis Garcia were the only notable signings otherwise. The Braves kept guys from last year, retaining Raisel Iglesias, Tyler Kinley, Joel Payamps, and Ha-seong Kim, who slipped on ice in his native South Korea and will miss at least the first three months of the season. The Marlins grabbed a couple of

ex-Rays from the Gulf Coast and the Nationals traded away MacKenzie Gore.

With the lockout looming following the 2026 season, the NL East is a microcosm of the reasons why. The haves go out and spend and the have-nots try to duct tape the holes in the boat or go deeper into the rebuilding cycle. In that respect, the NL East is probably a three-team race. It also appears that the division should have more say in the NL Wild Card proceedings, but time will tell if that's the case.

In looking at the 10,000-foot view to see where improvement might come, note that the

Phillies had the best record within the division at 31-21, but it was the Braves next at 30-22, despite finishing 10 games below .500 overall. The Mets were just 25-27 over the 52 games against division foes. The Marlins and Nationals, unsurprisingly, had a tough time with the three big payrolls.

Spending isn't everything. We've seen enough examples of that. But, spending is something and the three teams expected to set the pace in this division need to live up to the expectations.

- Adam Burke



ATLANTA BRAVES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Things have changed, but they've also kind of stayed the same for the Braves. Ex-manager Brian Snitker was forced out/stepped down after the season and has taken on an advisory role in the front office. Atlanta simply promoted bench coach Walt Weiss to take over and he shuffled things around, including the appointment of new pitching coach Jeremy Hefner, who was fired by the Mets at the end of last season. The Braves hired Hefner about a month after he was let go, so they moved quickly on the soon-to-be 40-year-old.

Hefner has ties to the Twins, along with new bullpen coach JP Martinez and new third base coach Tommy Watkins. New bench coach Tony Mansolino has ties to the Cleveland

system, as well as the Orioles. These are all organizations that are very forward-thinking, as the Twins were led by former high-ranking Cleveland exec Derek Falvey before he was fired prior to Spring Training, and the Orioles went heavy on analytics when they hired Sig Mejdal and Mike Elias from the Astros. The 62-year-old Weiss had a tough go of it as manager of the Rockies from 2013-16, but he has a way stronger roster here and doesn't have to deal with Coors Field.

While Weiss calls the shots, the most important coach is Hefner, as the drop-off for the Braves pitching staff, which allowed 127 more runs in 2025 compared to 2024, had a lot to do with last season's poor finish.

HITTING

The three-year tumble for the Atlanta offense is something to discuss as well. The 2023 version led MLB in wOBA by 18 points, posting an obscene .359 mark with a .126 wRC+, slushing .276/.344/.501. To put that into perspective, the 2023 Braves are the only MLB team to ever slug over .500 as a group. The closest is the 2019 Astros during the juiced ball season, a season in which four teams broke the league record for home runs in a season. The 2023 Braves tied that record with 307. Rafael Devers had a .271/.351/.500 slash that season, so Atlanta hitters collectively performed at his level.

Since then, the Braves have had wOBAs of .315 (12th) and .315 (13th). Admittedly, I have no idea why 2023 was such an extreme outlier, with three 40+ homer guys and two more with 33+. Things have very much leveled off since then and the Braves had four guys with 20+ dingers last season, but nobody hit 30. Ronald Acuna Jr. would have, but he was limited to 95 games recovering from an ACL tear and then from some Achilles inflammation. Most of the lineup is

pretty similar heading into 2026, though the Braves did get rid of Marcell Ozuna and picked up Mike Yastrzemski and Mauricio Dubon. Based on their batted ball data, the Braves were pretty unlucky last season with a .399 SLG and a .418 xSLG. They're banking on track records and it's hard to argue.

PITCHING

While there are some players who may need to revamp their swings, work on their launch angles, or simply find another way to get back to their usual standards on the offensive side, the pitching staff just needs to stay healthy. Bryce Elder led the team in starts with 28 and innings with 156.1 last season and hung a 5.30 ERA with a 4.72 xERA and a 4.55 FIP. It was a wasted season for Spencer Strider, who came back from Tommy John surgery, only to lose time to a strained hamstring. Spencer Schwellenbach suffered a fractured right elbow that cut his season short and will start the 2026 season on the 60-day IL, a huge blow before the team even started Grapefruit League play.

I cautioned buying stock in Reynaldo Lopez entering last



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 88.5

DIVISION: +190

PENNANT: +800

WORLD SERIES: 16-1

season, as he threw 135.2 innings and made 25 starts in his first full season as a starter since 2019. He made one start for the Braves. Chris Sale was limited to 20 starts, but he was awesome when he was out there with a 2.58 ERA, 2.85 xERA, and a 2.67 FIP. In total, the Braves needed 19 different starting pitchers. When healthy, this is a good group and Grant Holmes proved his worth as a starter if need be. Didier Fuentes is also knocking on the door. The bad luck on the health front coincided with a big drop in performance by the bullpen, going from a 3.32 ERA and a 3.41 FIP to a 4.19 ERA and a 4.26 FIP.

PROSPECT WATCH

The Braves are in a tough spot. Most of their best prospects are in the lower levels of the minors and virtually none of them are position players, so it will be up to the proven big leaguers to play to their usual standards. The top pitching prospect is the aforementioned Fuentes, who made his MLB debut last season with four rather poor starts, allowing 20 runs on 23 hits in 13 innings of work. Atlanta has never had a problem with service time

or putting kid gloves on prospects. They aggressively move them up the system. Fuentes won't turn 21 until June and has 202.2 minor league innings to his name. I'd expect to see the Braves with a long list of non-roster invites to try and find depth in case of injury because it's unlikely to come from below.

OUTLOOK

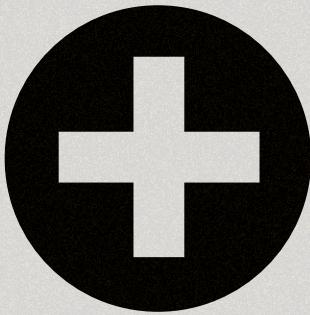
Like I mentioned above, the pitching staff is the key for Atlanta and if the Spencers can get and stay healthy, they'll greatly improve upon last year's numbers. Offensively, it's about bounce back seasons for Michael Harris II and Ozzie Albies. Most of the others were solid, but Albies was second in PA with an 87 wRC+ and Harris was third in PA with an 83 wRC+, so 13% and 17% below league average, respectively. It's the third season out of four for Albies as a below average bat and second in a row for Harris. To reach the expectations placed upon this team, it would help a lot for those two to be better.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: UNDER 88.5



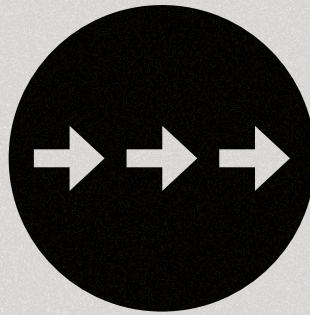
ATLANTA BRAVES

2025 RECORD : 76-86, 4TH IN NL EAST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN : OVER 88.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

OF Mike Yastrzemski
INF/OF Mauricio Dubon
INF Ha-Seong Kim
RP Robert Suarez
INF Jorge Mateo
C Jonah Heim



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

DH Marcell Ozuna
SP Cal Quantrill
SP Charlie Morton
OF Jake Fraley
RP Pierce Johnson
RP John Brebbia
RP Alexis Diaz
OF Alex Verdugo

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
76-86

-40.1 UNITS

•

TOTAL
72-80-10

•

RUN LINE
73-89

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
61-80-21

-47.3 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5
76-84

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
68-94

•

YES RUN
FIRST INNING
82-80

HITTING

When healthy, this lineup is one of the most prolific in all of baseball. The operative phrase “when healthy” is front and center the last couple years with so many high-profile injuries, hindering the production over the last two seasons. All-stars RF Ronald Acuña Jr., 1B Matt Olson, 3B Austin Riley and 2B Ozzie Albies return with veteran DH Jurickson Profar taking over for free agent DH Marcell Ozuna. 2025 NL Rookie of the Year backstop C Drake Baldwin solidifies the middle of the order while 2022 Rookie of the Year CF Michael Harris II slots towards the bottom of the order. Offseason acquisition SS Ha-Seong Kim sustained a torn tendon in his right middle finger, so the earliest he might return will be mid to late-May, meaning INF's Jorge Mateo, Nacho Alvarez or Mauricio Dubón likely get the first shots to start. C Sean Murphy is recovering from hip surgery last September, so the bench consists of new signees C Jonah Heim and LF Mike Yastrzemski, with OF Eli White rounding out the depth options. On paper, this lineup should improve dramatically over a very average 2025 campaign (if healthy). I'd target Olson for another 30+ HR season and take shots on Riley at 25+ HR, as well as Harris II at 20+ HR too.

PITCHING

Health. That's it. If this rotation stays healthy, it'll be one of the best bounce-back years for a starting five in recent memory, as 2024 NL Cy Young winner Chris Sale anchors the top of the rotation, alongside Spencer Strider. Keep an eye on the velocity drop with Strider last year, as the post-injury problems presented themselves and affected performance significantly. Getting Reynaldo Lopez back to full strength will be a huge boost with the news early in camp that Spencer Schwellenbach will miss significant time with bone spurs. AJ Smith-Shawver is recovering from Tommy John surgery and likely won't be available until after the All-Star Break either. Re-signing closer Raisel Iglesias AND getting free agent stopper Robert Suarez from the Padres makes the Braves back-end about as potent a 1-2 punch there is. Dylan Lee and Tyler Kinley will fill the early setup roles, alongside Aaron Bummer and Joel Payamps. The potency of the pitching staff takes a big hit with the early loss of Schwellenbach, so guys like Grant Holmes and Bryce Elder get opportunities to earn rotation spots. With rotation health already a prominent question mark, how many starters will be standing in September?

PROSPECT WATCH

Lots of intrigue atop the pitching prospect list for the Braves in LHP Cam Caminiti (cousin of the late Ken Caminiti), RHP JR Ritchie and RHP Didier Fuentes. All three are 22 years old or younger, but can provide impact anywhere from late 2026 to early 2027. There's no question the bedrock of the Atlanta minor league system is rooted in their arms. Keep an eye on position players developing the next couple years in SS/OF Tate Southisene & SS Alex Lodise.

OUTLOOK

Longtime manager Brian Snitker retired and Walt Weiss took over as the leading man in the Braves dugout. He's incredibly familiar with the culture, expectations and urgency to get Atlanta back to prominence atop the NL East. There's no sugar-coating where this organization is: the stars must be healthy and return to producing like the back of their baseball cards show. The excitement is worthy for a group that has championship DNA. No excuses for this team in 2026: challenging the Phillies and Mets for the top spot in the division is not only viable, but expected.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: THE BRAVES WIN THE NL EAST AND FLY OVER THEIR WIN TOTAL, TAKING HOME 92+ VICTORIES



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 72.5

DIVISION: 40-1

PENNANT: 100-1

WORLD SERIES: 200-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: The Marlins have a league average offense for the first time since 2017 when they had a 101 wRC+

HITTING

Miami has basically produced a lineup of guys who were blocked in other organizations by better players or other top prospects. It is likely that the oldest position player to break camp with the Fish will turn 29 in July. This roster is cheap, which is an important part of the equation for owner Bruce Sherman. It is also a major unknown. loanDepot Park is a pretty good pitcher's park typically, so it's only fair that we look at the Marlins on a curved grading scale, where they had a 96 wRC+ with a .309 wOBA. With a bunch of young hitters, they did have the fourth-lowest K% in baseball. They were also seventh in stolen bases.

As these guys adjust to the league and the league adjusts to them, there's no way of knowing how this will all play out. Here's what we do know - of the top 10 in plate appearances last season, only two players - Kyle Stowers (149 wRC+) and Jesus Sanchez (104 wRC+) were above average hitters. Sanchez was traded to Houston at the Trade Deadline.

Xavier Edwards, who led the team in PA, had a 129 wRC+ in 2024 and just a 95 wRC+ in 2025 with a ton of regression to the mean in his BABIP (.398 to .330). Otto Lopez got very unlucky with a .246 BA and .368 SLG with a xBA of .271 and a xSLG of .426. Stowers had his magnificent season cut short by an oblique injury. But, all of these guys, including Stowers' Orioles teammate Connor Norby, have wide ranges of outcomes for this season.

PITCHING

Similarly, the pitching staff has a wide range of outcomes, too. Sandy Alcantara is still around, despite all sorts of trade talks last season and some this offseason, as he had a 5.36 ERA over a team-leading 174.2 innings of work, but he had a 61.9% LOB%, among the lowest in the league, so his advanced metrics painted a better picture. Instead of moving Alcantara, Miami traded Edward Cabrera to the Cubs for a highly-touted prospect in Owen Caissie, another hitter with a difficult projection. Cal Quantrill made 24 starts for the Marlins and he's gone.

MIAMI MARLINS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The Marlins bottomed out in 2024 when they went 62-100, as there were a ton of things going on within the organization. It started well before October 2023, but that was the first big domino to fall, as widely-respected executive Kim Ng declined her option to stick around for 2024. The Marlins also opted not to give a contract extension to manager Skip Schumaker, who was coming off of being the NL Manager of the Year in his first season at the helm. With the dark cloud of Schumaker hanging over the team, coupled with all sorts of trade rumors and uncertainty, things were really, really bad.

Schumaker indeed left after the 2024 season and the Marlins wound up with Clayton McCullough, a man well-

respected in baseball circles, but not exactly a recognizable hire in a line that featured Schumaker, Don Mattingly, Mike Redmond, and one season of Ozzie Guillen. McCullough had a fine first season, going 79-83 with a 35-32 second half. McCullough sort of embodies the roster as a whole, as Miami is filled with no-name players. People know Sandy Alcantara. They maybe know Eury Perez. The average baseball fan probably couldn't name a single position player.

The projected starting lineup features eight players acquired via trade, one off waivers, and seven of them were acquired within the last two calendar years. Could this ragtag team of youngsters produce a darkhorse Wild Card contender?

There's some measure of addition by subtraction here with Braxton Garrett back after missing all of last season. He was very solid in 2022 and 2023 before getting hurt in 2024. Max Meyer and Perez are two arms that evaluators have loved for a long time, but health is a skill. The oldest player on the 26-man roster is likely to be closer Pete Fairbanks at 32 years of age. This is a bullpen that was completely stripped apart by trades two seasons ago and a lot of guys got valuable high-leverage experience last season.

PROSPECT WATCH

Whatever the Marlins do to isolate young pitching talent is still working, as we're likely to see the MLB debuts this season of Thomas White and Robby Snelling. White has enormous strikeout numbers to go with concerning walk numbers, as he's just overpowered hitters in the minors. The 6-foot-5 southpaw has only allowed eight homers out of 811 batters and has 272 strikeouts (33.5% K%). Meanwhile, Snelling, who was part of the Tanner Scott deal in that aforementioned bullpen sell-off, has given up more homers, but has

much better control. I would guess that Alcantara is traded at some point and if Garrett is healthy, the Marlins could move him before he gets deeper into arbitration.

OUTLOOK

I don't know that the ceiling is very high for the Marlins, but the floor could be pretty low. There are a lot of hitters with limited MLB track records and guys that could absolutely go one way or the other. Many of them have great minor league numbers, especially a guy like Caissie. There are injury risks left and right in the rotation, but a lot of productive pitchers when healthy. Plus, the Marlins are scrappy more often than not. Last year's team was +7 in actual record vs. Pythagorean Win-Loss because they only had 13 wins by 5+ runs and 29 losses by 5+ runs, putting a huge dent in their run differential. That 35-32 second half record? They were -34 in run differential.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 72.5**



MIAMI MARLINS

2025 RECORD: 79-83, 3RD IN NL EAST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: OVER 72.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
79-83
+13.5 UNITS

TOTAL
80-80-2
•

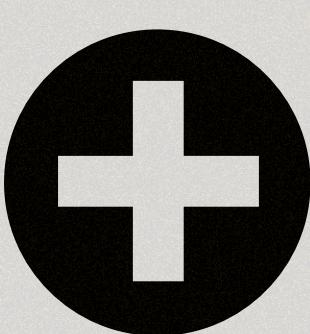
RUN LINE
94-68
•

YES RUN FIRST INNING
82-80

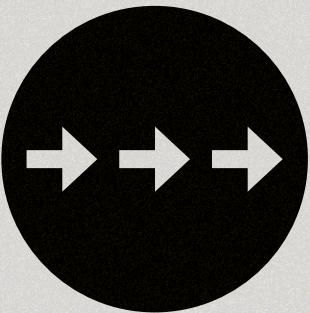
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
59-80-23
-18.5 UNITS

TOTAL 1ST 5
81-80
•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
80-82
•



NOTABLE ADDITIONS
OF Owen Caissie
INF/OF Christopher Morel
RP Pete Fairbanks
OF Esteury Ruiz
SP Chris Paddack



NOTABLE DEPARTURES
SP Edward Cabrera
SP Ryan Weathers
INF Eric Wagaman

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Signs of life in South Beach? You bet. The emergence of budding stars 2B Xavier Edwards, LF Kyle Stowers and C Agustín Ramírez highlight the foundation this Marlins offense can bank on moving into 2026. Add in a big-time trade, sending Edward Cabrera to the Cubs in exchange for highly touted RF Owen Caissie and the cautious optimism continues growing. It's still a severely inexperienced lineup, but DH Griffin Conine, SS Otto Lopez and 3B Connor Norby can all take big steps forward this season. Leadoff hitter and CF Jakob Marsee is a real threat to be amongst the league-leaders in stolen bases, so the 1-2 punch of Marsee & Edwards can be table-setters for years to come. The one glaring hole? Power. Only Stowers is projected to hit 20+ bombs and that's a tough way to do business in the NL East. They'll need to rely a lot on speed and taking the extra base in spacious Marlins Park, while hoping their very talented rotation can keep them in games. It's an offense that finished right around league average in runs scored, but they're not sneaking up on anyone this year.

PITCHING

At one point, the top two rotation arms in Sandy Alcantara and Eury Perez were the envy of the league. It looked like Alcantara may fall off the deep end with ineffectiveness to start 2025, but he finished in stride and Miami neglected to trade him at the deadline. Perez, in the words of Marlins president of baseball operations Peter Bendix, "is just scratching the surface of what he can do." Young phenom Max Meyer is back from injury, as well as Braxton Garrett and Janson Junk made last year's rotation as a non-roster invitee. Chris Paddack assumes the No. 5 spot after signing in February, so the talent of the rotation is definitely deeper than a year ago. Can their health

be consistent enough to give their team a chance to hang around? One way to help the cause - go get a proven closer. Enter former Tampa Bay Ray stopper, Pete Fairbanks. One of the best leverage relievers in the sport, Fairbanks will lead a Miami pen with setup men Calvin Faucher and former closer Anthony Bender. The work in progress will be the bridge to that trio. Find those answers to help shorten games and the Fish may be dangerously close to contention.

PROSPECT WATCH

Owen Caissie would headline the Marlins farmhands, but he's likely ticketed for a spot on the Opening Day roster. Right behind him is power-hitting C Joe Mack and LHPs Thomas White and Robby Snelling. The real excitement is potentially the Miami face of the future: SS Aiva Arquette. The seventh overall selection out of Oregon State in last year's draft, he became arguably the best college position player in the country and can rocket through the minor leagues, knocking on the door of The Show probably in 2028. It's widely regarded as an underrated farm system, but the secret may be out soon enough.

OUTLOOK

Manager Clayton McCullough brought the winning culture from his days in the Dodgers organization and turned it into an exciting product on the field. After finishing the first half seven games under .500, he led them to a 35-32 second half, including a 13-4 surge to finish the regular season. Momentum and confidence are quietly rampant amongst this group and the NL East divisional foes got a first-hand look at this revamped roster. If a handful of young position players take off and the rotation remains healthy for the majority of the season, this team will be around come September.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: MIAMI FINISHES ABOVE .500 AND CHALLENGES FOR THE WILD CARD

NEW YORK METS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

For all of the resources, all of the great pitchers and position players, and the all-in nature of what owner Steven Cohen is pursuing, the Mets haven't won the NL East title since 2015. They've made the playoffs twice since 2016 and simply have not found any consistency. They haven't finished in the same spot in the division since finishing fourth in back-to-back seasons in 2018 and 2019. They've been all over the place and last season was another example, using a total of 63 players and 46 pitchers to finish 83-79.

Cohen bought the team in November 2020. Since then, he's bought Juan Soto for \$765 million, Bo Bichette for \$126 million, Francisco Lindor

for \$341 million, Sean Manaea for \$103 million in total thus far, Kodai Senga for \$75 million plus the posting fee, and he added more salary this winter by trading for Marcus Semien, Luis Robert Jr., Freddy Peralta, plus three new free agent relievers and Jorge Polanco. To show for all that spending, the Mets have eight playoff wins in five postseasons.

To say that the pressure is on this team and this organization is an understatement. From a betting standpoint, they're a hard handicap because there are so many good players to respect, but even with all those good players, the Mets have hit 90 wins once since 2015.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 89.5

DIVISION: +165

PENNANT: +700

WORLD SERIES: 14-1



HITTING

Soto had 715 plate appearances in his first season with the Mets, as he continued to be one of the league's most durable and productive players. It was Soto's first season with an OBP under .400 at .396, which was still third in baseball. His 5.8 fWAR ranked 11th, as his defensive metrics were really poor (-7 Defensive Runs Saved, -12 Outs Above Average). He's not a great outfielder to begin with, but last season was worse, so the Mets are moving him to LF. While he saw decreases in some areas, he also hit a career-high 43 homers and stole 38 bases. His previous high in SB was 12.

That's basically a long-winded way to say that Soto came as advertised and the Mets still lost six more games than the previous season without him. Overall, the offense was sixth in wOBA and fifth in wRC+. They were also third in wOBA with RISP and third in wRC+. The top eight hitters were all 11% above league average or better. Of course, four of them are gone now in Pete Alonso, Brandon Nimmo, Starling Marte, and Brandon Nimmo, replaced by Bichette, Polanco, Semien, and Robert. The offense, which was second in Hard Hit% and third in Barrel%, should be fine again.

PITCHING

A projectable offense did what it was expected to do for the most part and should do it again this season. What sticks out to me about last season is that I think the Mets actually got pretty lucky on the pitching side in some areas. Clay Holmes hadn't been a starting pitcher at the MLB level since 2018 and made four starts in 11 appearances. Somehow he stayed healthy and productive through a team-high 31 starts with a 3.53 ERA and a 4.11 FIP. The Mets got meaningful innings out of Griffin Canning with a 3.77 ERA and 4.04 FIP. Same with Tyler Megill, who was limited to 68.1 innings, but had a 3.95 ERA with a 3.43 FIP. Those were strokes of good fortune, at least until injuries derailed everything.

Sure, it was definitely unfortunate that Kodai Senga was limited to 22 starts, but he was very good when he was out there. It's

unfortunate that David Peterson had a 4.22 ERA with a 3.48 FIP. Frankie Montas was a huge bust, but Nolan McLean looked great and Jonah Tong got his feet wet. A revolving door of relievers didn't help, especially with Ryne Stanek's 5.30 ERA and 4.40 FIP while leading the team with 65 appearances. Edwin Diaz was great. The rest of the relievers were mid to bad overall, hence the signings of Luke Weaver, Devin Williams, and Luis Garcia. With another rotation workhorse in Peralta, this staff looks better overall.

PROSPECT WATCH

Tong and McLean grab a lot of the attention on this team, but there is a potential player who might get a chance with Marte and Jeff McNeil gone. Carson Benge was taken 19th overall out of Oklahoma State and has a pretty good opportunity with the MLB losses, plus the trade of Jett Williams in the Peralta deal. He's already 23 and walked more than he struck out in college with a .339/.455/.609 slash. For what it's worth, he also threw 72 innings in college and had a 3.16 ERA in 2024 over four starts and 14 relief appearances. Benge swiped 22 bags and hit 15 homers across four minor league levels last season and posted a 52.8% Hard Hit% in 72 batted ball events in AAA, so his .178 BA probably wasn't a good indicator of how well he hit the ball.

OUTLOOK

The story remains the same for the Mets. They are an example of a great collection of players that can be assembled when money is not a hindrance. The pitching staff certainly seems upgraded and the offense could be better, though I think it'll stay about the same or maybe be slightly worse. That projects out to a really good record, but we all thought that last season too. And we thought that during the season, as the Mets started 45-24 and played .409 baseball the rest of the way to finish 83-79. That's a 66-win pace over 162 games to finish the season. So nothing is guaranteed.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 89.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
Devin Williams leads MLB in saves

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

These 2026 Mets might just be better than their 2025 version, who finished top six in HR, OPS and stolen bases. The anchor in Pete Alonso has been replaced by a trio of bats, highlighted by 3B Bo Bichette, 1B Jorge Polanco and 2B Marcus Semien. That completes a near overhaul of the infield, punctuated by Bichette and Polanco both learning new positions and getting a multitude of run-scoring opportunities with SS Francisco Lindor and LF Juan Soto in front of them. Trading for CF Luis Robert Jr. is a gamble that he will return to former stardom, but worth the risk. Bounce-back campaigns out of DH Brett Baty and C Francisco Alvarez will aid an offense that really packs a punch top to bottom. Young RF Carson Benge will likely get first crack at the starting spot in left field, but his primary objectives are just getting on base consistently, turning the lineup over to the behemoths at the top of the order.

The pressure is on for Bichette and Polanco to make up for the production from the departed Polar Bear and Semien can also keep the line moving. Will a trade involving INF Mark Vientos be in the offing? Depth is always a key through the marathon of a season and he'd be a hot commodity for clubs looking to infuse offense in their respective lineups. This collective group should find themselves comfortably in the Top 10 offenses of 2026.

PITCHING

The search for a staff ace is over after president of baseball operations David Stearns brought in his old pal from their Milwaukee days, acquiring Freddy Peralta. He's the much needed answer to a rotation overdue for a horse to ride from Day 1. The emergence of top organizational prospect Nolan McLean in 2025 gives the Mets a lethal one-two punch alongside Peralta and veterans David Peterson, Clay Holmes and

Sean Manaea fill in behind. Can Kodai Senga, who actually stayed healthy for most of last season, do it all over again? The potential six-man rotation may not need a lot of length early with a fully restocked bullpen, even after Edwin Díaz signed with the Dodgers. Closer Devin Williams figured out a lot at the end of 2025 after a disastrous start to his Yankee tenure and was joined by fellow former Bronx teammate Luke Weaver to form the back-end bullpen tandem finishing out games. Brooks Raley, Luis García, Huascar Brazobán and Tobias Myers (also acquired in the Peralta deal) lengthen a very formidable relief corps that will be quite versatile if they stay healthy.

PROSPECT WATCH

The Freddy Peralta trade did come with a significant prospect cost, seeing RHP Brandon Sproat and SS Jett Williams heading to the Brewers. Add in 2B Luisangel Acuña from the Robert trade with

the White Sox and the Mets farm system certainly is leaner heading into 2026. The graduations of McLean and SP Jonah Tong represented a clear indication the future is bright on the mound in Flushing, as well as the potential for Benge to win the LF starting job. INF/OF A.J. Ewing is another Top 100 MiLB prospect who's got a shot at reaching Triple A by year's end.

OUTLOOK

Manager Carlos Mendoza gets another chance to prove he's the man for the job. There's going to be real scrutiny on Bichette and Polanco both playing new defensive positions for the first time in their careers and the pressure to produce with Semien in the middle of the lineup. If Lindor and Soto get anywhere close to what they did last season, the rotation arms behind Peralta stay relatively healthy and there's no clunkers out of Williams, this team may finally live up to expectations.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: FRANCISCO ALVAREZ HITS 30+ HR & FREDDY PERALTA FINISHES TOP 3 IN NL CY YOUNG VOTING

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
83-79
-28.0 UNITS

TOTAL
76-79-7
•
RUN LINE
74-88
•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
78-66-18
-13.7 UNITS

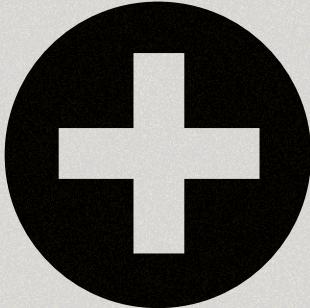
TOTAL 1ST 5
78-83
•
RUN LINE 1ST 5
81-81
•
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
74-88



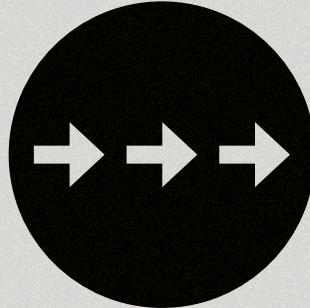
**NEW YORK
METS**

2025 RECORD : 83-79
2ND IN NL EAST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN : OVER 89.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS
INF Bo Bichette
INF Jorge Polanco
INF Marcus Semien
OF Luis Robert Jr.
SP Freddy Peralta
RP Devin Williams
RP Luke Weaver
RP Luis García
RP Tobias Myers



NOTABLE DEPARTURES
INF Pete Alonso
RP Edwin Díaz
OF Cedric Mullins
RP Tyler Rogers
SP Griffin Canning
RP Gregory Soto
OF Starling Marte
RP Ryan Helsley
RP Ryne Stanek
SP Frankie Montas
OF Jesse Winker
INF Nick Madrigal

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
The Phillies barely sneak into the playoffs as the third NL Wild Card team

HITTING

It is entirely possible that the aging curve slows down, as players are far more cognizant of their health and well-being these days than they were in the past. But, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't worried about a team that just signed a 32-year-old DH to a massive extension with four other 32+ position players in the lineup. I'll get to Zack Wheeler and Aaron Nola in a minute, but it is worth pointing out that Bryce Harper had his lowest wRC+ (131) since 2019. Trea Turner (125 wRC+) and Kyle Schwarber (152) improved upon the previous season's numbers, but both were above their career averages and projection systems are calling for regression.

That's not to say that all three will drop off dramatically, but as they go from 125 to 115 or 152 to 125, somebody else has slack to pick up. While Turner was technically a better hitter, he had his lowest SLG since 2018 and lowest HR total since 2017. Harper had his lowest OBP since 2014 when he was a young pup at 21. Brandon Marsh ran a .363 BABIP to carry his .280 batting average and .342 OBP, two numbers I'd expect to drop. Alec Bohm didn't take a leap. And now the Phillies are hoping Adolis Garcia, who will turn 33 about a month before the season starts, has something left in the tank.

PITCHING

With Ranger Suarez gone, the Phillies have a thinner margin for error on the health front. Wheeler has over 1,700 innings on his arm as he looks to come back from thoracic outlet surgery, a procedure that doesn't have nearly the track record or blueprint for return that Tommy John does. Nola was brutal last season and also missed half the year with injury, as he posted a 6.01 ERA. The advanced metrics were more favorable, but he allowed career-highs in Hard Hit% and Barrel%, plus he had the lowest fastball velo of his career. I won't call it a miracle that Jesus Luzardo made 32 starts and covered 183.2 innings, but you have to assume the Phillies were ecstatic that he did.

Cristopher Sanchez has morphed into a true ace and I hope the 6-foot-6 southpaw can stay healthy. He's super fun to watch and his 57.5% career GB%

paired with over a K per inning last season for the first time is the recipe for a frontline starter. In a world without Paul Skenes, he'd have been an overwhelming NL Cy Young Award winner. The Phillies did shed some dead weight in the bullpen and get a full year of Jhoan Duran, but they are really going to miss Matt Strahm, especially if Jose Alvarado, who was suspended for 80 games due to steroids and then shut down in September with a forearm injury, isn't right.

PROSPECT WATCH

After missing all of 2023 and 2024, Andrew Painter threw 118 innings in the minors last season. The 13th overall pick in 2021 has a ferocious arm, but he posted a 5.40 ERA with a 4.90 FIP in the better of the two leagues for pitchers in AAA. Eric Longenhagen of FanGraphs noted that Painter's arm slot lowered over the course of the season and his fastball became very hittable. Before trying to go the rehab route for UCL damage and then subsequent surgery, Painter allowed five homers in 103.2 minor league innings. He allowed 20 in 118 last season, albeit against better hitters. Still, with those age and health questions for the Phillies rotation that I mentioned, Painter's a key piece as it pertains to keeping the contention window open.

OUTLOOK

To clarify, getting older doesn't mean that a player falls off a cliff. Some do, but most of the elites and great players don't. But, they do get less productive. They do have more soft tissue injuries and other ailments that limit playing time. I'm not saying that the Phillies need to stock the clubhouse with canes and walkers, but I am saying that the lofty goals and expectations for this team will be incrementally harder and harder to reach. Last year's Phillies benefitted from a 31-21 record in the division and were able to put a lot of distance in their division lead over the final two months of the season as the Mets were in freefall and the Braves were resigned to their fate. This year is likely to go differently.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: UNDER 90.5**



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 90.5

DIVISION: +180

PENNANT: +700

WORLD SERIES: 14-1

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The Phillies wrapped up another strong regular season with another premature playoff exit. The 96 wins racked up by Philadelphia were the most since 2011 when the team went 102-60. Just like that 2011 team, the 2025 team lost in the NLDS. Last year's 3-1 series loss to the Dodgers was the second straight 3-1 NLDS exit, but maybe this one didn't sting quite as much as losing to the rival Mets did. Nevertheless, the Phillies are not a team constructed to go to the playoffs only to bow out after four or five games.

Some would say that Joe Girardi's firing was the catalyst for a playoff berth in 2022, which the Phillies

rode all the way to the World Series. Under Thomson, Philadelphia is 346-251 in the regular season, but just 21-17 in the postseason. I don't want to be hyperbolic, but the window is starting to close on this team and they're going to need to find a way to break through sooner rather than later.

Based on Baseball-Reference's Average Age calculations, which are derived from playing time and player age, the Phillies had a Batting Age of 30.3 last season and a Pitching Age of 30.0. The last time they were 30+ in both? The 2014 season when they went 73-89, three years removed from five straight playoff appearances. That time is coming again.

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
97-69
+1.3 UNITS

TOTAL
72-83-11
•
RUN LINE
84-82
•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
80-54-32
+4.4 UNITS

TOTAL 1ST 5
74-92
•
RUN LINE 1ST 5
87-79
•
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
80-86



PHILADELPHIA
PHILLIES

2025 RECORD: 96-66,
1ST IN NL EAST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
PLAY: UNDER 90.5

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

For all the talk of 2025 being the Phillies version of “the Last Dance”, this offseason played out much more positively to run things back in 2026. DH Kyle Schwarber finished runner-up in NL MVP voting and signed a five-year, \$150M extension to return atop a lineup featuring perennial All-Stars SS Trea Turner and 1B Bryce Harper. Cleanup hitter 3B Alec Bohm will look to overcome a paltry production year in the RBI department, alongside December acquisition RF Adolis García, LF Brandon Marsh and 2B Bryson Stott. Familiar face C J.T. Realmuto also decided to come back on a three-year, \$45M deal and non-roster invitee CF Justin Crawford rounds out the starting nine. INF Edmundo Sosa and INF/OF Otto Kemp represent the prime platoon pieces off the bench. The regular season offense is no problem. The postseason offense, however? That disappearing act can't happen again in 2026 if Philadelphia plans on advancing deep into October.

PITCHING

At one point in 2025, this rotation presented the toughest challenge in any series. Ace Zack Wheeler suffered a thoracic outlet injury late in the second half last year. However, reports indicate he may return some time after Opening Day to late May. Cristopher Sánchez broke out in a massive way last year and he'll be “the man” until Wheeler returns. Fellow southpaw Jesús Luzardo, who also provided his best career single-season performance in 2025, is back with veterans Aaron Nola and Taijuan Walker filling the three and four slots. Highly anticipated top pitching prospect Andrew Painter is slated to get every shot at winning the No. 5 spot. The bullpen, which presented itself as a gaping hole in last year's staff, might be one of the best leverage units in the game entering 2026. Led by closer Jhoan Duran and primary setup men José Alvarado, Orion Kerkering and newly-signed Brad Keller, those four horsemen can sling it with anyone in the

sport. Tanner Banks, RHP Jonathan Bowlan and a couple other candidates fill out the remaining relief corps. The Phils will miss Ranger Suárez and his durability, departing for the Red Sox on a free agent deal. Nevertheless, while the early rotation version will look a bit different, a fortified bullpen can overcome that early weakness with a fast start.

PROSPECT WATCH

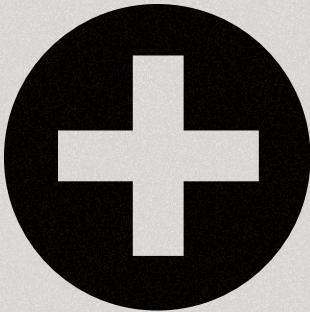
Both sides of the ball get top billing within the Phillies minor league system, headlined by three Top 100 MiLB prospects in SS Aidan Miller (No. 23), RHP Andrew Painter (No. 28) and OF Justin Crawford (No. 53). Painter and Crawford look like legit candidates to make the big league Opening Day roster and Miller may not be far behind. 2B Aroon Escobar puts himself on the map, rocketing through three minor league levels last year. Excitement abounds around 2025 No. 26 overall pick, RHP Gage Wood, who pitched a 19-strikeout

no-hitter in last year's College World Series for the University of Arkansas. Many scouts believe his premium power fastball and curveball can play in either the rotation or in a prime leverage relief role.

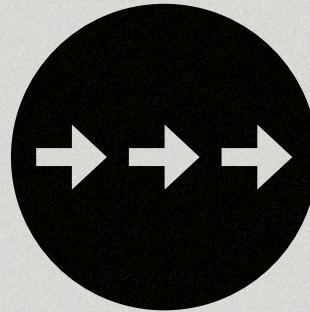
OUTLOOK

Manager Rob Thomson returns after much speculation that his time in the Philly dugout ran its course at the end of 2025. As respected as they come in the game, he'll run a well-oiled machine back out for a chance to three-peat as NL East division champs. Health challenges, an aging core and improved Braves, Mets and Marlins clubs provide incredibly tough hurdles to overcome. The bullpen depth is a real asset to start the season and they'll be leaned on heavily from the get-go. Can the offense finally stay awake when the fall leaves start to drop in the postseason? They're potent in many respects, but there isn't much sand in the hourglass left for a title run.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: PHILADELPHIA SECURES ANOTHER POSTSEASON BERTH, BUT FALLS IN THE WILD CARD ROUND



NOTABLE ADDITIONS
OF Adolis García
RP Brad Keller
RP Jonathan Bowlan
RP Zach Pop
RP Zach McCambley



NOTABLE DEPARTURES
SP Ranger Suárez
OF Harrison Bader
OF Max Kepler
RP Lou Trivino
RP Joe Ross
SP Walker Buehler
RP Jordan Romano
OF Nick Castellanos



WASHINGTON NATIONALS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The 2019 season feels like an eternity ago for the Nationals. Since winning the first and only World Series in franchise history, the team has finished in fifth place in the NL East in five of six seasons, including last season. In those years, the Nats have lost 34 (90-loss pace), 97, 107, 91, 91, and 96 games. Last season's squad was outscored by more than 200 runs and actually should have been even worse than 66-96 by Pythagorean Win-Loss. And it wasn't a very inspiring offseason.

MacKenzie Gore was traded to the Rangers for a handful of prospects, as Washington is poised to let a lot of young players learn on the job and take their lumps. Some of those

youngsters have been around for a couple of seasons already, but the nice thing about having a very young roster in this case is that nobody projected to make the Opening Day roster is older than the 33-year-old manager. No, that's not a typo. The Nationals tabbed Blake Butera as the successor to Miguel Cairo, who took over for Dave Martinez during the 2025 season. Butera, who was in the Rays organization previously, is the youngest MLB manager in over 50 years.

Things can change, but one position player over 27 is projected to break camp with the team and the oldest player on the team is likely to be 30 with Trevor Williams on IL following Tommy John surgery.

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:
CJ Abrams gets traded for a massive haul
at the Trade Deadline

HITTING

To give you an idea of how the Nationals offense performed last season, let's start by noting that they had the third-fewest plate appearances in the league. Volume helps when trying to score runs because you need as many chances as possible to get hits, draw walks, and step to the plate with runners in scoring position. While the Nationals were 21st in hits, they were 28th in walks. With their lack of positive outcomes by plate appearance, they did what they could to try and manufacture runs with 132 stolen bases. Butera comes from a Rays team that stole 30 more bases than any other team, so expect the Nats to be aggressive on the bases.

Washington had plenty of inquiries about CJ Abrams, but they opted to keep the team leader in steals with 31. Abrams fell one homer short of 20, as the Nats only had one guy surpass that number in James Wood (31) who is still on the roster this season. The other was Josh Bell. The guys who had the most plate appearances for the Nationals were a mixed bag to some degree, but Wood and Abrams were the best hitters who are still there. Daylen Lile posted a team-high 132 wRC+ in 351 PA as easily the most promising of the younger guys who got regular reps last season. All in all, this was a poor offense all the way around and projects that way again.

PITCHING

While the offense didn't do the team any favors, the pitching staff was downright awful. The Nationals were 29th in ERA and the team below them has to play 81 games a year at Coors Field. Washington was also 29th in xERA and 28th in FIP. As a staff, they accumulated just 6.9 fWAR. Gore was responsible for 2.9 of that and he's now a Texas Ranger. Reliever Jose Ferrer was next and he had a 4.48 ERA, but his advanced metrics were good enough for 1.4 fWAR. He, too, was traded. In fact, with Williams hurt and other transactions, the Nationals return exactly one pitcher who amassed at least 1.0 fWAR last season.

On the plus side, the return of Josiah Gray should help, as he only made two starts last season, and Cade Cavalli is another year removed from major surgery, so he got to spend the offseason training instead of rehabbing. Gray racked up 1.6 fWAR in 2024, but he paired his 3.91 ERA with a 5.02 xERA and a 4.93 FIP. Cavalli, who was the team's top pitching prospect not that long ago, made 10 starts with a 4.25 ERA and 4.53 FIP. None of the relievers are rich with high-leverage experience and this might be the worst bullpen in baseball again. Last year's group had a league-worst 5.59 ERA and a 29th-ranked FIP at 4.86.

PROSPECT WATCH

In return for a solid reliever in Ferrer, the Nationals got catcher Harry Ford from the Mariners. Ford, who was taken 12th overall in the 2021 draft, is pretty much ready. He slashed .283/.408/.460 in the hitter-happy PCL last season and has hit at every minor league level to this point. He did have eight plate appearances across eight games for the Mariners last season, but there wasn't much to go on there. Keibert Ruiz has had four straight below average offensive seasons and has consistently graded as a poor pitch framer. Ford's coming for his job and it could be very soon.

OUTLOOK

I wish I had unicorns and rainbows to give out here, but this will not be a good baseball team at all. I don't think we're looking at a 110-loss team or anything like that, though 100 losses is very much in play. The front office just wants to see growth from guys like Lile, Dylan Crews, and Brady House. Crews, the second overall pick out of LSU in 2023, owns a .211/.282/.352 slash in 454 MLB PA. House struggled with MLB pitching and has struggled to make contact in the minors. This is a sink-or-swim year for some guys and I'd expect anything not nailed down to be available as the summer goes along with a full-fledged rebuild in progress.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 65.5

DIVISION: 100-1

PENNANT: 300-1

WORLD SERIES: 500-1

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 65.5**

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

66-96

-12.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL

81-73-8

•

RUN LINE

79-83

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

56-86-20

-25.1 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

79-82

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

67-94

•

YES RUN

FIRST INNING

84-78

•

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

The breakout 2025 campaign from James Wood, another solid season from CJ Abrams and “welcome to the show” seasons out of Daylen Lile and Luis Garcia Jr. bring hope in 2026. 2023 No. 2 overall pick Dylan Crews will be in the everyday lineup from Opening Day, so the top half of Washington’s lineup provides potency and thump. Outside of C Keibert Ruiz, lots of inexperience fills out the bottom of the order, with a fair amount of speed from 2B Nasim Nunez and CF Jacob Young. Can rookie 3B Brady House grab hold of the hot corner and produce? Are pitching staffs going to attempt pitching around James Wood in run-scoring situations? This offense will need some more slug throughout to stay afloat in the NL East.

PITCHING

What a shocker towards the end of January: staff ace MacKenzie Gore was dealt to the Rangers in exchange for five prospects, leaving a massive hole atop the Washington rotation to start 2026. Cade Cavalli isn’t a bad

place to begin, but a lot will be asked of fellow right-handers Brad Lord, Jake Irvin and Josiah Gray. Free agent Foster Griffin comes over from the NPB, but with Gore departed, good luck finding a smooth turn through these five starters. The Nats traded closer Kyle Finnegan at the ’25 deadline, leaving a closer-by-committee between Clayton Beeter and Cole Henry. It’s a 2026 bullpen projected as one of the worst in the sport. That’s saying something, considering they don’t pitch 81 games at Mile High in Denver.

PROSPECT WATCH

3B Brady House likely gets the first shot to lock down the hot corner on Opening Day. 2023 3rd rounder Travis Sykora had his 2025 campaign cut short, needing Tommy John surgery in late August. The buzz continues on SP Jarlin Susana, the final piece of the 2022 Juan Soto trade, throwing 100+ mph missiles, but still needing to harness his command. Control is all that stands in Susana’s way of rocketing up the Double-A and Triple-A ladder for a potential 2026 debut.

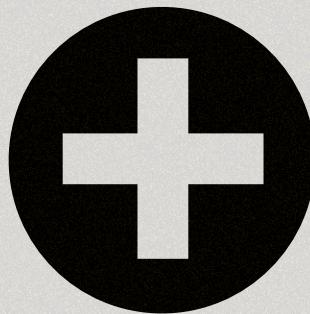
OUTLOOK

The most eyebrow-raising hire of the offseason is new manager Blake Butera, named the new skipper on October 30th, 2025. He’s the youngest manager (33-years-old) since 1972 and accumulated a 258-144 record calling the shots in minor league dugouts for four seasons. newly-hired president of baseball operations Paul Toboni, alongside freshly-installed GM Ani Kilambi will team with Butera, focusing on improving player development. Stealing Kilambi from the Phillies front office, well-versed in what building a championship team looks like, is already a win for the organization. I want to get excited about the young position player stars in Wood, Abrams, Lile and Crews. Serious questions remain about the Nationals team defense, with major liabilities especially on the infield. I can’t get stoked about a rotation that’s going to take a fair amount of lumps through the year either, leaving many in our nation’s capital longing for football season.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: THE NATIONALS CHALLENGE FOR THE WORST REGULAR SEASON RECORD IN 2026

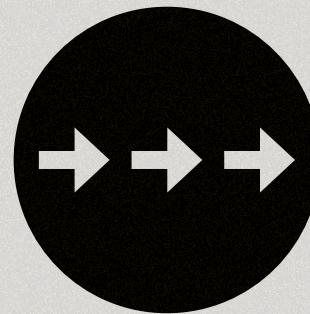
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

OF Joey Wiemer
SP Foster Griffin
RP Paxton Schultz
RP Griff McGarry



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP MacKenzie Gore
RP Jorge Lopez
INF Paul DeJong
INF Josh Bell
RP Colin Poche
C Jorge Alfaro
RP Lucas Sims
RP Derek Law



WASHINGTON NATIONALS

2025 RECORD : 66-96, LAST IN NL EAST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN : UNDER 65.5



NATIONAL LEAGUE CENTRAL

VSIN

2026 SEASON

Just as we all expected, the NL Central got three teams into the playoffs this past season. The Reds snuck in at 83-79 for their first postseason appearance in a 162-game season since 2013. Cincinnati's 83-79 record marked the fewest wins to clinch a playoff berth since the 83-78 St. Louis Cardinals in 2006, who actually went on to win the World Series after winning the division with that record. The Brewers (97-65) and Cubs (92-70) had much more traditional win-loss records for playoff teams.

It was actually the third straight postseason appearance

and seventh in the last eight seasons for the Brewers, who won a playoff series for the first time since 2018. It was made that much sweeter by defeating the rival Cubs in the NLDS before getting swept out of the postseason by the Dodgers in the NLCS. What the Brewers have achieved while being one of the league's smallest-market teams has been incredibly impressive, as they also set a franchise record with 97 wins and a franchise-best .608 Pythagorean Win-Loss Percentage.

Once again this season, the Cubs are the closest contender

to the Brewers, as the Reds didn't really do much to try and improve upon last year's playoff team. The Pirates still don't have the lineup and the Cardinals are stuck somewhere between a rebuild and a hard place. Chicago, with a much larger payroll than Milwaukee, made the playoffs in a 162-game season for the first time since 2018 and won a playoff game for the first time since 2017.

Even though Milwaukee won the division by five games, the Cubs spent 111 days in first place, while the Brewers spent 81, with a

14-game winning streak to begin August that took their division lead from one game out to nine games as the biggest turning point of the season for both teams.

Introductions will be brief in Spring Training for Milwaukee, while there are more new faces to get to know for Chicago. Are those new contributors what will be able to get the Cubs over the hump and dethrone the reigning three-time champs?

- Adam Burke



CHICAGO CUBS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

It is amazing how one season can dramatically shift a narrative. Had the Cubs not won the 2016 World Series to snap their 108-year drought, how would this team and this organization be viewed in present day? Since winning Game 7 that year, the Cubs have four postseason appearances and two playoff series wins. While they haven't partaken in the immense spending sprees that some teams have, this was a top-six Opening Day payroll in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 before ownership pulled back a bit as that mid-2010s core aged out.

Still, this was a top-10 payroll in 2024 with a team that went just 83-79. With some of the talent that has rolled through the North Side of the Windy City, doesn't it feel like pundits and prognosticators haven't been tough enough on the Wrigley dwellers over the years? Coming off of a 92-win season - the most since 2018 - the Cubs have decided to spend and try and build on that success.

Armed with a retooled bullpen, a new third baseman, and a taste of the postseason, the push for NL Central supremacy seems a bit more aggressive this time around.

HITTING

No park in baseball is more impacted by the wind than Wrigley Field. When the wind is blowing out, hitters have the chance to put up video game numbers and we regularly see totals in the 11+ range. When the wind is blowing in, you'll get a rogue 5.5, but a lot of 6s, 6.5s, and 7s. The seasonality and the temperatures matter as well, but you're going to get a high-variance of data on a daily basis depending on how Mother Nature is feeling that day. While that's something to chew on, here's something else - the Cubs offense was a lot better in 2025 than it was in 2024 and it wasn't just more favorable weather.

The Cubs were 13th in wOBA at .311 in 2024 and had a 100 wRC+, meaning they were exactly league average when adjusted for the league-wide run environment and park factor. They were seventh in wOBA at .325 in 2025 and had a 110 wRC+. Unfortunately, one of the big bats that helped the cause was Kyle Tucker, who is now with the Dodgers. He slashed .266/.377/.464 with a .363 wOBA, second only to Michael Busch among regulars. Seiya Suzuki had a big drop in production, attributed to his .370 BABIP normalizing to

.282. That's probably a little low for him, so he should improve. Also, Alex Bregman comes in off of the highest average exit velo and highest Hard Hit% of his career, so that's a good sign moving forward.

PITCHING

As Justin Steele works his way back from UCL surgery, the Cubs will hope for Edward Cabrera to pick up some of the slack. The longtime Marlin is hardly a workhorse with a career-high of 137.2 innings at the MLB level, but he's had a couple of good seasons, including a 3.53 ERA with a career-best 3.99 xERA and 3.83 FIP last season. Cabrera is a pretty valuable piece of this rotation at the outset because there are red flags littered throughout the rotation. Matthew Boyd was awesome over 179.2 innings of work with a 3.21 ERA and a 3.65 FIP, but he topped 79 MLB innings for the first time since 2019 and he turned 35 on Groundhog Day.

The pitch-to-contact stylings of Shota Imanaga are ripe for regression, as he had a 3.73 ERA with a 4.06 xERA and a 4.86 FIP thanks to a .219 BABIP and an 81.5% LOB%. His K% dropped from 25.1% to 20.6%



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 88.5

DIVISION: +120

PENNANT: +950

WORLD SERIES: 18-1

and his Hard Hit% jumped over 4% with a 3% increase in Barrel%. All stats going in the wrong direction. Cade Horton was also living right with a .258 BABIP against and a 78.3% LOB%. Same with Jameson Taillon's .232 BABIP and 80.3% LOB%. Cubs starters were eighth in ERA at 3.83, but 13th in xERA and 4.14 and 19th in FIP at 4.25. Only the Brewers and Rangers had higher ERA-FIP discrepancies to the negative side. Staying elite defensively will help stave off some regression, but likely not all of it.

PROSPECT WATCH

Cade Horton isn't really a prospect anymore after throwing 118 MLB innings last season, but he merits more virtual ink here. The 24-year-old worked 147 innings across two levels last season and that was on the heels of working just 34.1 innings in 2024 across two levels and 88.1 innings in 2023 across three levels. The NL Rookie of the Year runner-up had a 4.86 ERA over 53.2 innings in his final season at Oklahoma. I think Horton overperformed last season, especially with a Hard Hit% over 41% and a 10% Barrel%. At any minor league level, he hadn't had a F-Strike% over 55.6%. He was at

67.2% at the MLB level. Projection systems are calling for an ERA around 4.00 and I think those are fair.

OUTLOOK

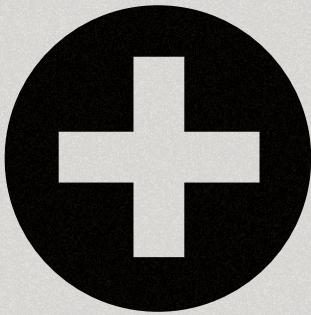
While the Cubs won 92 games and actually had a 96-66 record by Pythagorean Win-Loss, they only went 35-31 in the second half and have to replace Tucker's production, while also hoping collective regression doesn't hit the pitching staff. They were tied for first in Outs Above Average last season, but Pete Crow-Armstrong was +24 OAA himself and Nico Hoerner was +15, so the rest of the team was -3 OAA. While Matt Shaw was -1 OAA, he was +12 Defensive Runs Saved, so we'll see how Bregman does over there and if Dansby Swanson (+57 OAA from 2022-24, +2 OAA last season) can bounce back. I still think this is a very good team, but asking for "great" might be a big ask with a lot of tipping points among individual players that could impact the whole group.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 88.5



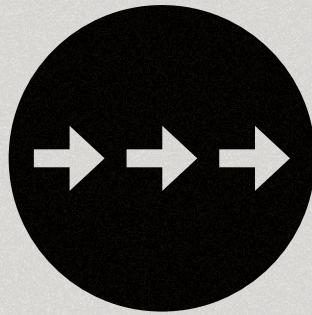
CHICAGO CUBS

2025 RECORD : 92-70, 2ND IN NL CENTRAL
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN : OVER 88.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Alex Bregman, 1B/
OF Tyler Austin
OF Chas McCormick
SP Edward Cabrera
RP Phil Maton
RP Hunter Harvey
RP Jacob Webb
RP Hoby Milner



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

OF Kyle Tucker
RP Brad Keller
SP Michael Soroka
SP Aaron Civale
C Reese McGuire
RP Drew Pomeranz
INF Willi Castro
INF Carlos Santana
RP Ryan Brasier
RP Taylor Rogers
SP Nate Pearson
INF Nicky Lopez
RP Eli Morgan
INF Justin Turner
INF Jon Berti
RP Keegan Thompson

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
96-74

+1.3 UNITS

•

TOTAL
76-83-11

•

RUN LINE
81-89

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
87-56-27
+18.2 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5
88-80

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
93-77

•

YES RUN
FIRST INNING
86-84

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

How much fun did fans have watching this group on the North Side in 2025? Get ready for more afternoon delights with almost the entire gang back. The newest addition in 3B Alex Bregman came as a shock to many around the league, but he joins 1B Michael Busch, LF Ian Happ and RF Seiya Suzuki to headline an attack that produced a top-five scoring offense and the sixth-most HR in MLB. Rookie sensation CF Pete Crow-Armstrong dazzled with his power and defensive prowess, but fell off a cliff in the second half. He'll be looking to start 2026 with a bang, as will veterans 2B Nico Hoerner and SS Dansby Swanson. Youngster DH Moisés Ballesteros will see the lion's share of designated hitter duties and C Carson Kelly fills out the rest of the lineup. A deeper bench with free agents 1B/OF Tyler Austin and OF Chas McCormick alongside C Miguel Amaya and INF Matt Shaw provide plenty of extra options as well. You can't ask much more than what this group did a year ago. That will be the expectation, now with Bregman in tow, to replicate one of the best top-to-bottom lineups in baseball.

PITCHING

The league's lowest WHIP and BB/9 for rotations in 2025?

You're looking at them: the Chicago Cubs starting pitching. LHP Matthew Boyd produced one of the most incredible individual seasons for a pitcher not really expected to perform the way he did. He'll join budding staff ace and young phenom Cade Horton, back from a September injury that derailed what could've been an NL Rookie of the Year campaign. Holdovers Shota Imanaga and Jameson Taillon return with newly-acquired RHP Edward Cabrera in a big time trade with the Marlins. There's also hope that former ace Justin Steele may be ready early in 2026 after rehabbing his UCL injury. What a makeover the Cubs bullpen undertook too, even after a stellar season a year ago. Closer Daniel Palencia is as vibrant a personality as he is a game finisher. Setting up for him will be new additions in Phil Maton, Hunter Harvey, Jacob Webb and Hoby Milner. An additional lefty in Caleb Thielbar gives the Cubs some of the best late-game matchups anywhere in baseball. Shortening games won't be a problem on the North Side in 2026.

PROSPECT WATCH

Lots of graduations for former top prospects in Crow-Armstrong, Horton and Ballesteros leaves the minor league cupboard a bit bare at the moment, especially

with highly touted OF Owen Caissie now in Miami after the Cabrera trade. OF Kevin Alcántara takes the mantle as the top organizational prospect, but already made his debut in 2025. That leaves RHP Jaxon Wiggins (No. 58) as the lone Chicago Top-100 MiLB prospect in the system. He's got upper-90s heat with a devastating slider and could be ticketed for a mid-season promotion. OF Ethan Conrad is a well-rounded bat and very athletic player, giving him the chance to rise quickly.

OUTLOOK

Manager Craig Counsell can expect more of the same in 2026: lots of scoring, lots of flash and lots of flying the W. The infield defense is elite, the lineup is long and the pitching staff feels even better than a year ago. If Crow-Armstrong makes swing decision adjustments from how the league exploited him in the second half, get your NL MVP tickets in on him before the season starts. Can the entire rotation hold up or will injuries curse them again? They've got all the talent in the world and an improved bullpen to go a long way. It'll be exactly a decade, celebrating their 2016 World Series title. Make reservations for a long October at the friendly confines.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: CADE HORTON BECOMES A LEGIT NL CY YOUNG CONTENDER AND THE CUBS MAKE IT TO AT LEAST THE NLDS



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 82.5

DIVISION: +370

PENNANT: 22-1

WORLD SERIES: 40-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Nick Lodolo gets traded during the summer for a hitter with a similar contract (FA after '27 season)

HITTING

Great American Ball Park is fourth in Statcast Park Factor over a three-year sample size and is second in HR park factor. And yet the Reds were 21st in HR overall last season and 16th in HR hit at home. Power either costs a lot of money to acquire or takes a certain level of development to achieve. Elly De La Cruz led the Reds with just 22 homers and they only had two players with 20+, as Spencer Steer was the other. Despite a favorable environment for power, the Reds haven't had a 30-homer guy since 2021. One of the things that makes other teams successful is how they tailor their lineup to the inherent advantages of their home ballpark. The Reds don't really do that.

The best hitter for the Reds with at least 200 plate appearances was TJ Friedl, who tied with De La Cruz with a 109 wRC+. Among 145 qualified hitters, a 109 wRC+ ranked tied for 79th. Those two were 67th and 69th, respectively in wOBA. Miguel Andujar had a 159 wRC+ in 110

PA, so not a big sample size, but he was productive. If we include him to be nice, the Reds have lost three of their eight highest guys by wRC+ from last season, as Austin Hays and Gavin Lux also both moved on. Suarez helps, but with little reinforcement coming from below, this looks like a poor offense again.

PITCHING

The pitching staff would sure love some run support. This group, especially the starting rotation, is quite solid. There were 47 pitchers with at least 100 innings and 2.5+ fWAR last season. The Reds had four of them. Andrew Abbott led the way with 3.9 and had a 2.87 ERA with a 3.55 xERA and a 3.66 FIP in 166.1 innings of work. Hunter Greene would have probably led the team, but he finished second with 2.9 fWAR over just 19 starts with a 2.76 ERA, 3.03 xERA, and 3.27 FIP. Brady Singer couldn't maintain his early success, but still posted a FIP under 4.00 and made 32 starts, which was huge for the team.

CINCINNATI REDS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Making the playoffs is never a bad thing, but as a diehard fan of a small-market team with a cheap owner about four hours up the road, it can lead to false hope. The Reds snuck into the playoffs at 83-79 and did pretty much nothing for most of the offseason until Eugenio Suarez fell into their laps as a good designated hitter candidate in a place where his power can play up and maybe get him a better deal or net Cincinnati a good prospect at the Trade Deadline. Having more wins than losses is always a positive, but, again, the Reds probably overleveraged internally on what their players are actually capable of achieving as a result.

The Reds were 19th in wOBA and 24th in wRC+ in 2025 on the heels of finishing 20th and 26th, respectively in

those two categories the year prior. The pitching staff was incrementally better as well, finishing 18th in ERA at 4.09 with a 4.25 FIP in 2024 and then 12th in ERA at 3.86 in 2025 with a 4.11 FIP. The net result was an increase of six wins and a playoff spot, but how much higher is the ceiling of the guys in-house? You could argue that baseball lifer and constant overachiever Terry Francona had something to do with it in his return to the dugout, but he's not really a magician.

Who takes a leap to allow the Reds to reach new heights? Who finds that extra gear offensively to give the pitching staff more help? When will ownership actually invest in helping this team take a step forward? All fair questions to ask.

As a starting staff, the Reds were ninth in ERA, third in xERA, and eighth in FIP. All of the main characters are back with the cast, as Nick Lodolo and Chase Burns round out the expected rotation. This will be a top-tier group again and the reason why you can't completely discard the Reds, even if the offense looks suspect at best. After finishing 14th in relief ERA and 25th in FIP, the Reds swapped out some middle relievers, but are still running the same high-leverage arms with a group that will probably be league average at best.

PROSPECT WATCH

Even though the Reds have a lot of good young arms, like Burns, Rhett Lowder, Chase Petty, and Jose Franco, the offense is what really needs help and that's why I'm looking at Hector Rodriguez. H-Rod slashed .283/.336/.450 across two levels with 19 HR and 15 SB. I think the more incredible thing is that he only had a 15% K% with a 56.1% Swing%. In his 53 games at AAA, Rodriguez swung at pitches outside the zone 46.2%

of the time. He profiles as the kind of guy MLB pitchers can carve up, but he has also found a way to get the bat to the ball and pull it, mostly on the ground. I'm not sure where his contact authority metrics end up, but for a team that was 28th in Hard Hit% and Barrel%, anybody with promising power is intriguing.

OUTLOOK

This is a team that probably has a limited range of outcomes. Their Pythagorean Win-Loss record was 85-77. Their actual record was 83-79. Their BaseRuns record was 81-81. This is a pretty average ballclub with an above average rotation, a below average offense, and an average at best bullpen. I would assume something similar for this season. Most of the upside prospects with a chance to debut or hang in The Show for a while are pitchers, which is helpful in case of injury, but it won't help this soft-hitting lineup.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: UNDER 82.5



CINCINNATI REDS

2025 RECORD: 83-79, 3RD IN NL CENTRAL

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: UNDER 82.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

83-81

-5.1 UNITS

•

TOTAL

61-93-9

•

RUN LINE

81-82

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

80-84

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

65-67-32

-11.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

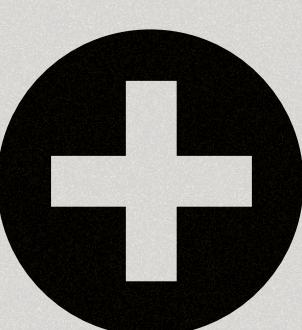
74-89

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

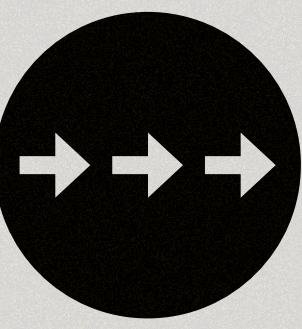
83-81

•



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Eugenio Suárez
OF JJ Bleday
OF Dane Myers
RP Brock Burke
RP Pierce Johnson
RP Caleb Ferguson



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP Nick Martinez
SP Zack Littell
OF Austin Hays
INF/OF Miguel Andujar
RP Scott Barlow
RP Brent Suter
SP Wade Miley
INF Santiago Espinal
INF Jeimer Candelario

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

A lot of ups and downs for the Reds lineup in 2025 and plenty of discussion surrounds the lineup continuity heading into 2026. Table-setters CF TJ Friedl and RF Noelvi Marte start in front of superstar SS Elly De La Cruz, who anchors the middle of the order with 1B Spencer Steer and C Tyler Stephenson. Old friend 3B Eugenio Suárez signs a one-year, \$15M deal for a second tour of duty and also provides some incredible power, while likely taking the DH role. Free agent signee LF JJ Bleday provides a little balance from the left side and will hope to lengthen a lineup that needs a big year from 2B Matt McLain. Gold Glove hot corner 3B Ke'Bryan Hayes finishes out the starting nine. For a team that plays in the cozy, hitter-friendly Great American Ballpark, the 2025 Cincinnati offense really struggled in the power department, finishing 21st in HR. There's not much speed to speak of, so the slugging and OPS numbers must improve for them to compete atop the NL Central.

PITCHING

If you want a rotation to dream on in 2026, you've arrived at it in the Queen City. Staff ace Hunter Greene looks to improve on a breakout 2025 campaign, followed by Andrew Abbott, Brady Singer, Nick Lodolo and young fireballer Chase Burns. It's an absolutely nasty rotation stuff-wise and you could flip a coin between Greene and Lodolo on who had the better season last year. All that said, the upside for the rest of the gang is sky high. Balancing the command of high-90s fastballs and wipeout off-speed will be the key to the Reds rotation success. They've got an improved bullpen to hand games over to, anchored by returning closer Emilio Pagán, with setup specialists Tony Santillan and

Graham Ashcraft. They were phenomenal in helping the Reds to a playoff berth in 2025 and get complimentary reinforcements from free agents Pierce Johnson, Caleb Ferguson and an under-the-radar trade acquisition in Brock Burke. Much better depth for this unit entering the marathon season than what they rolled out in 2025.

PROSPECT WATCH

Top-end pitching graduations in the last two years leave mostly position players to look at in 2026. There are, however, two notable arms that already made their big league debuts in RHP Rhett Lowder and RHP Chase Petty. They'll be excellent depth options for this season and beyond. The consensus No.1 Reds prospect, Sal Stewart, in all likelihood splits some time at first base and DH on the Opening Day big league roster. That leaves several younger, developmental types in C Alfredo Duno, SS Tyson Lewis and SS Steele Hall. Keep your eyes on 3B Cam Collier and OF Héctor Rodríguez as well, with both players ticketed for at least Double-A Chattanooga, if not Triple-A Louisville.

OUTLOOK

Surefire first-ballot Hall of Fame manager Terry Francona did wonders in year one with Cincinnati. A complete cultural shift and attention to detail produced one of the more memorable Reds seasons in recent memory. Now the challenge comes in improving on a club that will not sneak up on anybody this time around. The rotation is the clear foundation of the club and it's a group that still has trouble staying healthy for a full 6 months. Greene is a Cy Young darkhorse, if he makes at least 30 starts. Offensive output can't mirror its 2025 results or this team is destined for a .500 campaign trying to win a bunch of low-scoring games.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: CHASE BURNS FINISHES TOP 3 IN STRIKEOUTS AND SAL STEWART FINISHES TOP 3 IN NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR VOTING

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The Brewers just keep defying the odds. Per Cot's Contracts, Milwaukee hasn't had an Opening Day payroll in the top half of the league since 2012 and last season's starting 26-man payroll was 24th. All they did was win the NL Central for the third straight season and eclipsed 800 runs scored for the first time since 2007. The only losing season for this team since 2016 was in the 60-game COVID year when they went 29-31. Not only that, but they've won at least 86 games in every full-length season.

Unfortunately, the team has been built for 162 and not October baseball. Last season marked

the first time since 2018 that the Brewers won a playoff series. With their seven postseason appearances in eight seasons, the Brewers have two NLCS losses, one NLDS loss, and four NL Wild Card losses. It may take more spending or it may take more luck to secure the first NL Pennant in franchise history, as the Brewers were a member of the AL when they went to the 1982 World Series. But, this is a team that always gives themselves a chance.

Players come in and players go out, but they all seem to fit. Running it back this season with pretty much everybody but Freddy Peralta, Isaac Collins, and Caleb Durbin, Milwaukee should be solid again.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 84.5

DIVISION: +240

PENNANT: 15-1

WORLD SERIES: 28-1



HITTING

This was a top-10 offense by wOBA last season at .322 and a group that finished third in runs scored. Not only were the Brewers second in batting average and on-base percentage, but they were also second in stolen bases with 164. Using FanGraphs' all-encompassing BsR baserunning metric, this was the best team in the league on the basepaths. That's a good way to make up for being 22nd in home runs. Only the Yankees, Dodgers, and Braves drew more walks and it's not like the Brewers have the power bats to fear that those lineups do. Milwaukee had the lowest Chase Rate in baseball at 25.3% and was fourth in O-Contact% and third in Z-Contact%.

Factoring all of that in, the Brewers had the fifth-lowest K%, so when they got guys on, they did the little things to move them along by taking extra bases or putting balls in play. Only the Red Sox had a higher batting average on balls in play. The more telling thing about the Brewers is that only Andrew Vaughn's out-of-body experience was an outlier. He had a 142 wRC+ in 254 PA after being acquired from the White Sox. Twelve of the top 14 in plate appearances had a wRC+ between 142 and 109, with Brice Turang as the top everyday player at 123. Between offensive contributions, defense, and baserunning, the Brewers had seven players with at least 2.4 fWAR. Among qualified hitters, the Brewers had six of the league's top 85 position players by fWAR.

PITCHING

The by-committee approach to offense is also how the Brewers operate on the pitching side. They always find a way to construct a solid bullpen and have a bunch of league average-ish starters or better to rely on. The life cycle of a small-market team was on display this winter with the trade of Peralta to the Mets. It is hard to wrap your head around the No. 1 seed from the previous season trading away their ace from a pitching staff that was second in ERA and sixth in FIP, but Peralta is a free agent after the season and the Brewers got two very good prospects in Brandon Sproat and Jett Williams.

So, Milwaukee has to replace 176.2 innings of a 2.70 ERA and 3.64 FIP from Peralta. They turned Quinn Priester into a legitimate MLB starter last season after he was discarded by both the Red Sox and Pirates. Chad Patrick posted a 3.53 ERA with a 3.53 FIP in 119.2 innings. Brandon Woodruff is back after 12 solid starts last season. And then there are the kids. Jacob Misiorowski had a 4.36 ERA, but a 3.40 xERA and a 3.62 FIP in 66 innings. Logan Henderson debuted with five starts and some nice peripherals. Sproat will get starts. The top six in appearances are all back in the bullpen with ERAs ranging from 1.67 to 3.49. The Brewers have cracked the player development code and are reaping serious benefits.

PROSPECT WATCH

Remember the name Jésus Made. While the Brewers have plenty of notable names closer to the big leagues, Made got a non-roster invite to Major League camp this season. He won't turn 19 until May, but he finished last season at AA after torching A-ball and High-A pitching. Oh, and he stole 47 bases in 115 games. He's an unreal talent and he's coming fast. Remember, Jackson Chourio debuted at 20 and put up a 118 wRC+ in 148 games. The Brewers have no issues fast-tracking their prospects and Made may even get a shot of espresso at the MLB level later this season.

OUTLOOK

The Brewers are in great shape right now. They have Chourio locked down well below market value. Woodruff and Bauers are the only notable expiring contracts. They'll have six of the Top 100 prospects per FanGraphs entering the season. And the team seems to love Pat Murphy, especially with how Craig Counsell unceremoniously left town for the rival Cubs. There was nothing fluky about last season, playing .583 ball before the Break and .621 ball after it. They started 0-4 and were outscored 47-15, so they were +204 in run differential over the final 158 games. This is going to be a very good team again and the team to beat in the NL Central.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
PICK: OVER 84.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:

Ask your favorite sportsbook to put up a Logan Henderson NL Cy Young number.

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Perhaps the biggest shock of any team came in the Brewers offensive explosion in 2025. If anyone predicted the 2025 Opening Day roster would set the stage for a top-three scoring offense and top-two in OBP and stolen bases, present us the winning lottery numbers at some point. C William Contreras put together as complete a season by a catcher outside of Cal Raleigh and a resurgent season from DH Christian Yelich provided the foundation for the breakout campaign. Young superstar LF Jackson Chourio continued to position himself as one of the best players in the game and 2B Brice Turang turned heads with his best career season statistically. Trade acquisition 1B Andrew Vaughn absolutely blew away expectations, adding much needed thump to the middle of the order. Speedster RF Sal Frelick lengthens the lineup that will still be pretty well rounded, having CF Garrett Mitchell and SS Joey Ortiz to round it out. A bench composed of 1B/OF Jake Bauers and OF Blake Perkins complements

the starters well. Hard to ask for a duplicate offensive performance team-wide in 2026; however, doubt the Brew Crew at your own peril. They've defied expectations for the last handful of seasons and may be lurking yet again as a competent attack this year.

PITCHING

To achieve the top regular season record in MLB means you need a rotation stocked full of innings eaters. Milwaukee had it in spades last year, running out a staff that finished top three in rotation ERA. Gone are Freddy Peralta and Tobias Myers, who netted quite the return from the Mets. Back is sage veteran Brandon Woodruff, hoping to reprise his role as one of the more dominant starters on the Senior Circuit. He'll get plenty of help from young fireballers Jacob Misiorowski and Quinn Priester. "The Miz" punctuated a meteoric rise to fame with a controversial All-Star game nod, but the talent oozes from the tall right-hander, who will definitely factor into the NL Cy Young race. Milwaukee won

19 consecutive Priester starts from early June through mid-September and there's much to love about his improvement for 2026. One of the top organizational pitching prospects, Logan Henderson, is the odds-on favorite to win the No. 5 starting job. The rotation is backed up by an armada of velocity in the bullpen, headlined by the two-headed monster of Abner Uribe and Trevor Megill. Both ranked amongst the top 20 relievers in the sport last season and can shorten games with leverage arms Jared Koenig, Aaron Ashby and Angel Zerpa. It's one of the rare relief corps that likely employs more lefties than righties, but this unit continues to be one of the most consistent in the National League.

PROSPECT WATCH

Top Brewers farmhand and No. 3 overall prospect in baseball, SS/2B Jesús Made, leads a Milwaukee system complete with five members in the Top 100 in MiLB. Made is a highly advanced, switch-hitting 18-year-old, with room to grow in the power department. INF Luis

Peña (No. 26 in Top 100) is also a teenager looking to take a leap in 2026. The Freddy Peralta/Tobias Myers trade netted two wonderful players in INF/OF Jett Williams (No. 51) and RHP Brandon Sproat (No. 100). Sproat made his MLB debut with the Mets last season and Williams isn't far behind. Both will start at Triple-A, but are excellent call-up options in the near future.

OUTLOOK

Another Manager of the Year Award for Pat Murphy, earning the honor back-to-back years while leading the Brew Crew to consecutive NL Central titles. It feels every offseason, there are more questions than answers. Yet, this team finds itself squarely near or at the top of the division. The loss of Peralta is huge, but there are lots of young rotation arms ready to elevate their game. The bullpen is elite and the offense can use some extra power, but still exhibits depth and versatility. Regression is the biggest question: how much of 2025 can they duplicate in 2026?

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: MILWAUKEE FINISHES UNDER .500, MISSING THE POSTSEASON

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
100-71
+18.5 UNITS

TOTAL
80-85-6
•
RUN LINE
92-79
•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
82-55-34
+17.9 UNITS

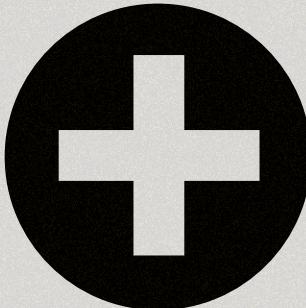
TOTAL 1ST 5
85-86
•
RUN LINE 1ST 5
99-72
•
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
79-92



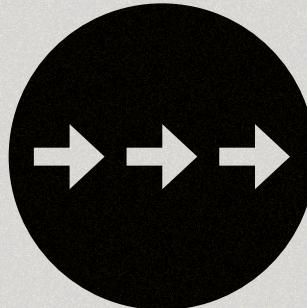
MILWAUKEE
BREWERS

2025 RECORD : 97-65
1ST IN NL CENTRAL

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN : UNDER 84.5



NOTABLE
ADDITIONS
C Reese McGuire
RP Angel Zerpa
SP Brandon Sproat
INF/OF Jett Williams
SP Kyle Harrison
INF Luis Rengifo



NOTABLE
DEPARTURES
SP Freddy Peralta
SP Tobias Myers
C Danny Jansen
INF Rhys Hoskins
SP Jose Quintana
RP Shelby Miller
C Eric Haase
SP Jordan Montgomery
INF Caleb Durbin
INF Andrew Monasterio

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Ryan O'Hearn has his first wRC+ under 100 since 2022 as a part-time player for the Royals

HITTING

I use the term hitting very loosely for this heading. The Pirates were dead last in the league with a .290 wOBA and had the lowest SLG at .350. Their 82 wRC+ was only better than the hopeless Rockies, who are graded on a steep curve thanks to Coors Field. Pittsburgh hit 31 fewer homers (117) than any other team and only two batters finished with a wRC+ above 100, which is the league average number. One was Spencer Horwitz (119) and the other was Joey Bart (101). The team's top five in plate appearances ranged from 75 to 99. Oneil Cruz posted a 56 wRC+ in the second half over 50 games. Woof.

Credit to the Buccos for spending a little bit of money this offseason, as they signed Ryan O'Hearn, Marcell Ozuna, and traded for Brandon Lowe. Those are now the third, fourth, and fifth-highest salaries on the team behind Mitch Keller and Bryan Reynolds. Oh, and the O'Hearn deal, which was two years at \$29.5 million, was the largest free agent deal in Pirates history. All things equal, he would have easily been the best hitter on the roster last season and Lowe would've been third behind Horwitz. Lowe also had a 17.1% SwStr%, another spike in Chase Rate, and was traded by the Rays, who rarely seem to lose trades.

PITCHING

It is a bummer to think about what comes next for the Pirates and Paul David Skenes. Skenes will be arbitration-eligible after the 2027 season for the first time and he has absolutely zero incentive to sign long-term in the Steel City. You want to stay in the moment and appreciate a guy who has a Rookie of the Year and a Cy Young in two seasons as a big leaguer, but it is really hard. But, as long as Skenes stays healthy, he'll be elite again and likely be in the conversation for the best pitcher award when all is said and done.

While there were a lot of useful arms on this staff, Skenes had 6.5 fWAR, Keller had 2.5, and then nobody else had more than 1.6. Certainly the hope is that

another electric arm in Bubba Chandler can make the leap after 31.1 innings worth of coffee at the MLB level last season with some excellent peripherals and a lot of bad sequencing luck with a 61.6% LOB% that led to a 4.02 ERA with a 3.60 xERA and a 2.66 FIP. Hopefully Jared Jones can stay on track with his rehab and pitch meaningful innings as the summer turns to fall. The top high-leverage relief arms are back, including closer Dennis Santana, but the other FA signing of note was Gregory Soto, who will be the left-handed complement to Isaac Mattson.

PROSPECT WATCH

More often than not, the MLB Draft isn't very cut and dry. Picking high is hardly a guarantee like it can be in other sports. But, the Pirates got it right with Skenes and it sure looks like they got it right with Konnor Griffin. On a team like this, Griffin isn't blocked, so it makes sense that he finished last season at AA and got an invite to MLB Spring Training. Griffin slashed .333/.415/.527 across three levels in his first season of pro ball after being taken ninth overall in 2024. Some consider him the best prospect in baseball. He'll turn 20 in April and maybe turn into a big leaguer not long after that.

OUTLOOK

Given my propensity for looking at numbers and metrics, I'm not really a "vibes guy". But, it is hard to ignore how much better the vibes seemed to be for the Pirates when Derek Shelton was canned. Pittsburgh was 12-26 when he was sent packing and they went 59-65 under Don Kelly, who had the interim tag stripped in the fall. This was actually a .500 ballclub (32-33) in the second half last season. They played 60 one-run games last season and went 25-35. They still need to find some offense, but Kelly seems like a good fit for this ballclub. Also, they need to win on the road, where they were just 27-54 compared to 44-37 at home.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 76.5**



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 76.5

DIVISION: +800

PENNANT: 50-1

WORLD SERIES: 100-1

PITTSBURGH PIRATES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The CBA negotiations are going to be rather interesting over the next several months and a team like the Pirates will be at the center of those talks. While everybody is jumping all over the Dodgers and their fat stacks of deferred dollars to some superstar players, the Pirates have Paul Skenes and don't seem terribly interested in improving the offense. Pittsburgh was seventh in ERA and third in FIP as a pitching staff last season. The team finished 20 games under .500. Every other team in the top 15 in FIP finished .500 or better, including nine of the 12 playoff teams.

So the Pirates were good at preventing runs, but they just couldn't score them. Pittsburgh allowed the fifth-fewest runs (645) and still finished -62 in run

differential. With 583 runs, it was their lowest output in a season with at least 160 games since 1985. That team went 57-104. The concept of a salary floor is going to be a hot-button issue while the MLBPA, the league, and the owners fight about a salary cap. Maybe if Bob Nutting was forced to spend money, the Pirates wouldn't be wasting all of this pitching. Pittsburgh hasn't been outside the bottom five in Opening Day payroll since 2017.

As a random aside, former Pirate Tommy Pham replied to a tweet on Feb. 3 about how the Pirates collectively faced the best set of defenses by Fielding Run Value by noting that the humidor was also broken all season in Pittsburgh. Make of that what you will as you read on.

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
71-91
-14.8 UNITS

TOTAL
61-92-9
•
RUN LINE
91-71
•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
59-61-42
-4.7 UNITS

TOTAL 1ST 5
74-86
•
RUN LINE 1ST 5
86-76
•
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
71-91



PITTSBURGH
PIRATES

2025 RECORD: 71-91
LAST IN NL CENTRAL

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 76.5

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

The league's worst scoring offense finally got some shots in the arm this offseason. Two left-handed power bats in 2B Brandon Lowe and DH/1B Ryan O'Hearn immediately slot into the meat of the Pirates order. A mid-February signing of thumper OF Marcell Ozuna bolsters the power department for a team that finished dead last in long balls last year. LF Jake Mangum can lengthen at the bottom of the lineup, also adding much-needed OBP that this offense will take wherever they can get it. 1B Spencer Horwitz can hit leadoff, setting the table for Lowe, RF Bryan Reynolds, O'Hearn and SS Oneil Cruz. What's that get you? On paper, it feels like a lot of feast or famine: high likelihood of fans in the right field stands needing to be on alert and high likelihood of strikeouts. You'd believe this team, who ranked dead last in OPS and 28th in average, can't do that all

over again with the players they've brought in.

PITCHING

Believe it when you read it: the Pirates can have one of the top rotations in baseball. RHP Paul Skenes, fresh off an NL Cy Young, is actually looking to improve on the first two years of a career that's already one for the record books. Behind him are a reliable veteran in Mitch Keller, as well as young phenoms Braxton Ashcraft and Bubba Chandler, who made his MLB debut in 2025. February signee José Urquidy rounds out the rotation and hopes to remain healthy for a full season in quite some time. Imagine this starting five if Jared Jones didn't sustain his elbow injury in May of 2025 too. Closer Dennis Santana anchors a stout back end of the bullpen, with setup men Isaac Mattson and Justin Lawrence, augmented further by Gregory Soto signing from the Mets. Mason Montgomery also can

factor into late-game situations, coming over in a trade with the Rays. The relief corps limits walks, keeps the ball in the ballpark and if they get a bump in their K/9 percentage, watch out.

PROSPECT WATCH

Pittsburgh graduated their pitching gems to the bigs in the last two years. Clear the deck for the No.1 prospect in baseball, SS/OF Konnor Griffin. Elite tools, dazzling skills and perhaps an early 2026 debut? At 6'4", 225 lbs, just 19 years old, he's the cornerstone of the future in their lineup. OF Jhostynxon Garcia is likely a member of the Opening Day roster and LHP Hunter Barco also made his MLB debut last year. Keep your eyes on Edward Florentino as the breakout candidate in the minors.

OUTLOOK

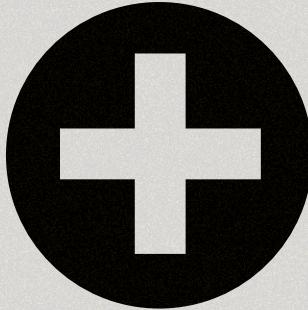
Don Kelly took over on May 8 for Derek Shelton, leading the Buccos to a respectable 59-65 mark

from that point. It earned him the permanent gig and a contract extension in September, indicating the faith and confidence in his leadership. For far too long, owner Bob Nutting has received criticism (and rightfully so) for being cheap and not going for high-end free agents or impact trades. They attempted an offer to Kyle Schwarber, which many in the industry believed to be "just for show." They actually did get some decent upgrades, signing O'Hearn and Ozuna, as well as on the trade front, acquiring Lowe and Mangum. Pirates fans are hoping urgency from the front office can entice Skenes to want a long-term extension. It's about as likely right now as any of you out there reading this article making contact against a Skenes heater. The rotation overall is good enough to put this team in competition for a Wild Card. Will they get near enough run support to make that dream a reality?

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: KONNOR GRIFFIN WINS NL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR AND THE PIRATES MAKE THE PLAYOFFS

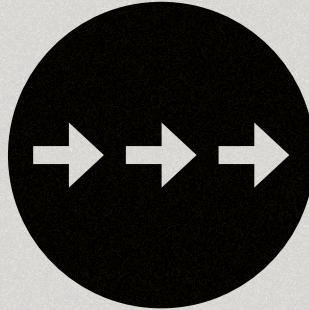
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

OF Marcell Ozuna
INF Brandon Lowe
DH Ryan O'Hearn
OF Jake Mangum
OF Jhostynxon Garcia
RP Gregory Soto
RP Mason Montgomery
SP José Urquidy



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

OF Tommy Pham
RP Dauri Moreta
OF Andrew McCutchen
RP Colin Holderman





ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

From 2000-15, the Cardinals made 12 playoff appearances and won two World Series. After a three-year hiatus, despite winning records in all three seasons, the Cardinals rattled off four more postseason trips, but lost in the NL Wild Card in the final three. With three straight seasons without a postseason berth, including two losing seasons in three years for the first time since 1997-99, the rebuild is on.

Five pitchers had at least 101 innings pitched for the Redbirds last season and three are gone. One pitcher had over 1.8 fWAR. He's gone, as the trade of Sonny Gray felt like the moment that reality set in about where the

Cardinals are currently going. St. Louis also jettisoned two of their top three position players in fWAR in Brendan Donovan (2.9) and Willson Contreras (2.8). He didn't seem to have much left in the tank, but Nolan Arenado is gone as well, with the Cardinals giving sink-or-swim plate appearances to some of their internal options. After all, the projected starting lineup has eight players drafted by the Cardinals and one international free agent who grew up in the organization.

As the rebuild reaches new phases, this season is about defining who should stay and who should go as the Cardinals look to fly back onto their perch as one of the league's most consistent teams.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 69.5

DIVISION: 30-1

PENNANT: 100-1

WORLD SERIES: 200-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Not that bold, but when the Cardinals finished last in their division in 2023, it was the first time since 1990. They're going to do it for just the third time since 1918

HITTING

Two of the six players with a wRC+ over 100 for the Cardinals only had 70 and 41 plate appearances, so it surely seems like this offense has a good chance to slide backwards. Contreras led the team with 20 HR and Donovan is just a solid all-around hitter who slashed .287/.353/.422. At least the trade of Donovan appears to have opened up a spot for 2024 first-round pick JJ Wetherholt, who would need to be added to the 40-man roster, but he pummeled minor league pitching across three levels last season and projection systems have him as an above average MLB bat. He also checks two boxes of need, as the Cardinals were 20th in stolen bases last season and 24th in BB%.

Wetherholt also played three different infield positions last season, so he is a flexible player that can allow returning manager Oliver Marmol to mix and match lineups based on handedness. Unfortunately, Wetherholt looks like one of just a few ceiling bats on this team. Ivan Herrera and Alec Burleson have high BABIPs to uphold (.315 and .312, respectively) to match last season's production, with Burleson a bigger question mark there than Herrera. This may very well be Jordan Walker's last hope, as he's slashed just .240/.302/.378 while also being a terrible defender.

PITCHING

Just like things on the offensive side, this is a season for the Cardinals about evaluating internal candidates. They scratched off a lottery ticket on Dustin May, but other than that, Matthew Liberatore, Andre Pallante, Michael McGreevy, and Kyle Leahy, all ranging from 25.6 to 28.7 years of age, are expected to eat the bulk of the innings. You're not going to find many strikeouts from that group, so this will be a high-FIP pitching staff and the ERA will be dependent on the defense and batted ball luck. That could make this a high-variance team from game to game.

Last season, the Cardinals were 29th in starting pitcher K% at 18.1%, better than only the Rockies at 15.2%. There's a

realistic chance that this season comes in even lower than that, as Gray had a 26.7% K% while the others ranged from 11.1% to 18.8%. The league average GB% for starting pitchers last season was 41.8%. Liberatore was below that, but the other three to make starts were at 59.1%, 50%, and 47.7%. May also has an above average GB% in his career. Those rotation guys should be highly-motivated because there are five very good starting pitcher prospects lurking in the minors and two at AAA in Tink Hence and Quinn Mathews.

PROSPECT WATCH

You'll see plenty of Wetherholt this season, so let's talk more about Mathews, a guy who would bring strikeout upside to this pitch-to-contact rotation. He only had a 41.5% F-Strike% in AAA last season, leading to a 17.5% BB%. That's the bad. The good is that even with all of those walks and 1-0 counts, he struck out over 25% of opposing batters and had just a 3.93 ERA thanks to ground balls and home run suppression. Mathews turned 25 last October, so he's already an older prospect by nature after being taken in the fourth round out of Stanford back in 2023. His arsenal is deep enough to keep trying him as a starter, despite the control problems, and he had an 8.6% BB% in 2024 over 143.1 innings, so maybe last season was an aberration.

OUTLOOK

If nothing else, Cardinals games should be exciting this season because the offense is going to make a ton of contact and so is the opposition. From a betting standpoint, it creates a very high-variance environment predicated on sequencing and batted ball luck, but this will still be the less-talented team in most games. The Cardinals tied for the league lead in Outs Above Average, and they'll be heavily reliant on the defense again. SS Masy Winn was one of the league's best defenders and Victor Scott had elite numbers in CF. The others will need to step it up.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 69.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

78-84

-11.7 UNITS

•

TOTAL

81-74-7

•

RUN LINE

81-81

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

61-77-24

-25.1 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

83-79

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

79-83

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

82-80

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

The writing was on the wall in 2025 of major changes afoot with an aging core of veteran bats. 1B Willson Contreras and 3B Nolan Arenado are now gone. Trade speculation swirled around 2B Brendan Donovan and he finally got shipped off to the Mariners in a three-team deal. Not a good omen for this offense that produced the second-worst HR total and didn't really threaten most opposing pitchers a year ago. The lack of star power is startling for this Redbirds storied franchise. Most of the returning cast is homegrown, led by DH Iván Herrera, 1B Alec Burleson, LF Lars Nootbaar and SS Masyn Winn. Will 3B Nolan Gorman finally break through? Can RF Jordan Walker live up to the top prospect hype from years ago? CF Victor Scott II can steal 30+ bases, but will need to improve his OBP to be an asset at the bottom of the lineup. Top prospect JJ Wetherholt may get the chance to win a job out of camp and is certainly a bright spot for the future. Outside of him, the immediate impact of upper-tier position players is really lacking. A lot is left to be desired from this entire lineup and it doesn't feel there's a lot

of optimism surrounding its potential.

PITCHING

Departed ace Sonny Gray leaves a gaping hole atop the Cardinals rotation. Matthew Liberatore ascends to the Opening Day spot, alongside newly-added Dustin May and holdovers Andre Pallante and top pitching prospect Michael McGreevy. If they don't improve on a K/9 rate that ranked 29th among starting rotations, get ready for a lot of traffic on the bases each and every game. Veteran bullpen arms JoJo Romero and Ryne Stanek may be auditioning for other teams as trade candidates, so there will be motivation for those two in getting off to great starts. Look for Riley O'Brien to get early looks in closing situations. The rest of the pen is littered with unproven and very youthful arms, trying to prove they belong at the big league level. Despite finishing top-10 in bullpen ERA last season, this unit might look a lot different by the All-Star Break.

PROSPECT WATCH

The future is bright for the Redbirds with Wetherholt likely getting to The Show in 2026 and

2025 No. 5 overall selection LHP Liam Doyle as their ace of the future. LHP Quinn Mathews is nearly big-league ready, as well as switch-hitting C Leonardo Bernal and C Jimmy Crooks. The Donovan trade bolsters the top end of the Cardinals system, acquiring switch-pitching phenom Jurrangelo Cijntje (No.91 overall MiLB prospect) OF Tai Peete and OF Colton Ledbetter. There's more upside in lower-level talents C Rainier Rodriguez, RHP Tink Hence and SS Yairo Padilla who are all a few years off from challenging to make the big league roster.

OUTLOOK

Manager Oliver Marmol will oversee what looks to be a full-scale rebuild and Cardinals fans need to plan ahead for those expectations. More trades are likely on the horizon, sending proven veteran talent out and acquiring more potential building blocks for the future. President of baseball operations Chaim Bloom fully admitted that "success will be looked at through a different lens in 2026" and that's never what fans in this baseball-crazed city want to hear. Being perfectly objective: if this team finishes at .500, it'll be an achievement.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: JJ WETHERHOLT BURSTS INTO A STARTING ROLE, HITTING 20+ HR AND STEALING 20+ BASES

NOTABLE ADDITIONS

SP Dustin May
RP Ryne Stanek
RP Justin Bruhl
RP Matt Pushard

NOTABLE DEPARTURES

INF Brendan Donovan
SP Sonny Gray
INF Willson Contreras
INF Nolan Arenado
SP Miles Mikolas
INF/OF Garrett Hampson
RP John King
RP Jorge Alcala

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

2025 RECORD: 78-84, 4TH IN NL CENTRAL
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: UNDER 69.5



NATIONAL LEAGUE WEST

VSIN

2026 SEASON

Whenever an upset occurs, somebody is going to say, "that's why they play the games!" Yes. Upsets and low-percentile outcomes happen. But, baseball's sheer sample size makes it very difficult for something crazy to take place. The postseason is a much different animal and is something of a tournament built on variance, although, there's not really been much variance in terms of the champion the last two seasons.

The Dodgers are good and have spent a lot of money to be good. More money than any other

team. And they'll still owe players money after that giant asteroid hits the Earth and the planet starts over. LA has made the playoffs every season since 2013. They've won the division in all but one of those seasons - the 2021 season when they went 106-56 and that somehow wasn't enough. The asterisk from the 2020 World Series is an afterthought after their back-to-back titles in 2024 and 2025.

Is everybody else just playing for second place? Not necessarily. The Rockies have basically assured themselves

of last place again and have been eliminated from playoff contention before playing a game. In the last two seasons, LA has only won the division by five games and three games, with last season's lead only 1.5 games going into the final week of the regular season. The Padres were the only consistent contender with the Dodgers last season and actually had a bit of a quiet offseason compared to another Andrew Friedman spending spree with Kyle Tucker and Edwin Diaz.

The Giants made more of a winter push in hopes of

separating themselves from the Diamondbacks and to close the gap with the Padres and Dodgers. Arizona's biggest move was a reunion with Merrill Kelly. So, we head into 2026 with the Dodgers heavily favored to win the division, likely to repeat as World Series champs, and the main reason why we're an underdog to have a full baseball season in 2027 in light of the impending CBA negotiations.

- Adam Burke



*Yoshinobu
Yamamoto*

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The inherent nature of the MLB Draft cheapens one of my longtime arguments just a little bit because picking high is never going to be a guarantee, but I've always said that the worst place to be in a sport is in the middle. Either be really good or really bad. If you are somewhere in the middle in a sport like baseball, there is a chance that you run really well from a variance and luck standpoint and that fortuitous set of circumstances pushes you into a playoff berth or something.

That's what it did for the Diamondbacks back in 2023 when they had a slightly better than average regular season at

84-78 and made it all the way to the World Series by getting hot at the right time. It was the longest playoff run for a team with a negative run differential in the regular season. But, that's also the only postseason appearance for the D-Backs since 2017 and the only one in which they've won more than one game since 2011. Ironically, a season after going 84-78 with an NL Pennant, the Snakes went 89-73 in 2024 and missed the playoffs altogether.

It looks like another season in the middle for Arizona and one that doesn't seem to have a wide range of outcomes one way or the other.

HITTING

The Diamondbacks finished 80-82, but should've been 82-80 based on Pythagorean Win-Loss and it was the offensive side of the ballclub that stood out. Arizona was actually fifth in wOBA and eighth in wRC+, slushing .251/.325/.433 with 214 homers. In fact, they were one of six teams with 200+ HR and 100+ SB. The Snakes and the Mets were the only ones in that group to not make the playoffs. Still, it was enough of a downgrade from the 2024 offense to have an impact, as the group was second in wOBA at .337 and third in wRC+ at 115. That 2024 team was +16 in xSLG-SLG and +9 in xBA-BA, so regression was expected and it did hit to a degree.

Based on how things look on paper, the Diamondbacks are going to need a lot more from their pitching staff this season to withstand some offensive declines. Eugenio Suarez was second on the team in wOBA and .375 and he's gone, along with Josh Naylor, who was sixth at .347. The team even tried to trade wOBA leader Ketel Marte

after another excellent year with the stick batting .283/.376/.517. Nolan Arenado and Carlos Santana aren't replacing that production. Even if Jordan Lawlar lives up to his prospect billing, it'll only go so far. This offense should slide down the rankings.

PITCHING

The margin for error playing in the NL West is so thin and the Diamondbacks fell victim to some really bad luck when they handed out a massive contract to Corbin Burnes and he had to undergo Tommy John surgery in June. He'll likely be back around the All-Star Break, and the Diamondbacks have enough depth to survive his absence, but he's the highest-ceiling guy in the rotation. The Merrill Kelly reunion is solid and he led the team in fWAR for a staff that finished 23rd in ERA and 23rd in FIP, but the reality is that Brandon Pfaadt and Eduardo Rodriguez need to be better.

Speaking of unfortunate circumstances, Rodriguez was very reliable for the Red Sox and Tigers, but over 39 starts with the



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 79.5

DIVISION: 22-1

PENNANT: 35-1

WORLD SERIES: 65-1

Diamondbacks, he has an ERA north of 5.00 with a 4.57 FIP and \$40 million left on his contract. Pfaadt's extension kicks in this season and he repaid Arizona's confidence in him with a 5.25 ERA and a 4.22 FIP last season over 33 starts. Ryne Nelson turning into an above average starter was a godsend two years ago, but this simply looks like a mediocre rotation with a mediocre to below average bullpen. Add in the offensive decline and I'm pretty low on this team, despite some very good star players.

PROSPECT WATCH

We've been hearing about 2021 sixth overall pick Jordan Lawlar for a long time, but this season he'll have to navigate a position change to the outfield along with adjusting better to MLB pitching. Those are big asks. But, the D-Backs need to find guys to put next to Corbin Carroll and the safer pick for this season might be Ryan Waldschmidt. The 31st overall pick in 2024 is a college bat coming off of 18 homers and 29 steals across two levels last season with a 142 wRC+ and some spectacular K% and BB% rates. The Diamondbacks

are big on drafting and developing athletic players (hence Lawlar's move to the OF) and unblocking guys like Waldschmidt and Tommy Troy will usher in the new position player core for this team.

OUTLOOK

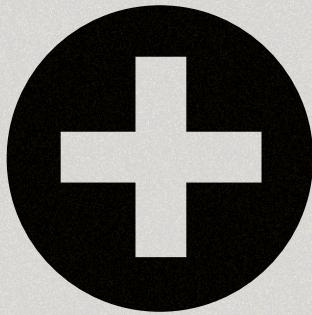
This feels like a transitional year for the Diamondbacks. They'll remain competitive while they rebuild one piece at a time. The team's bench is not good, so we could see youngsters move up the chain and possibly push established big leaguers into platoon players or bench depth. By season's end, I think this is a stronger position player roster than what we see now. The pitching staff will be average at best and there aren't the same kinds of high-upside prospects on the mound as there are around the diamond. Arizona used 65 different players and 42 pitches last season, both franchise records. Expect a lot of evaluation to take place this season, too.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 79.5



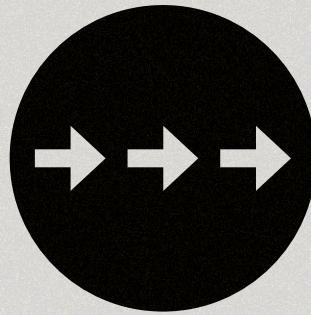
ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

2025 RECORD : 80-82, 4TH IN NL WEST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN : OVER 79.5



NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Nolan Arenado
SP Merrill Kelly
SP Michael Soroka
RP Taylor Clarke
RP Jonathan Loáisiga
INF Carlos Santana
RP Paul Sewald



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

RP Jalen Beeks
RP Kendall Graveman
OF Jake McCarthy

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
80-82

-17.2 UNITS

•

TOTAL
78-73-11

•

RUN LINE
83-79

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5
79-64-19
+8.3 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5
93-69

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5
86-76

•

YES RUN
FIRST INNING
93-69

HITTING

Few lineups possess the dynamic trio atop the D-Backs lineup with SS Geraldo Perdomo, 2B Ketel Marte and RF Corbin Carroll. For an offense that finished top six in runs scored and OPS last year, those three will need to shoulder much of the load yet again for any hope of an outstanding campaign. Veteran 3B Nolan Arenado joins the fold after being acquired from the Cardinals and will team with C Gabriel Moreno, DH Pavin Smith and freshly signed 1B Carlos Santana in the middle of the order. Young talents LF Jordan Lawler and CF Alek Thomas round out the Arizona attack that's got more top-heavy pop than what meets the eye. The challenge lies in turning this lineup over game in and game out. Consistent bottom of the lineup production will be at a premium and outside of Perdomo and Carroll, this team lacks a lot of speed one through nine. With Lourdes Gurriel Jr. recovering from ACL surgery, manager Torey Lovullo will utilize his platoon matchups based on that day's opposing starting pitcher.

PITCHING

Not that long ago, the Arizona duo of Zac Gallen and Merrill Kelly

helped lead these D-Backs to a World Series berth. It feels like forever ago, but both Gallen and Kelly signed back in Arizona and will anchor the rotation filled with some promising arms and some reclamation projects. Ryne Nelson is fresh off a stellar 2025 season and can slot in the No. 2 spot. Eduardo Rodriguez seeks a bounce-back season along with Brandon Pfaadt. Can Michael Soroka stay healthy long enough to be a meaningful addition to the rotation? Staff ace Corbin Burns continues rehab from Tommy John surgery and a midseason return could be the boost this staff needs. The bullpen can use all the help it can get too, without their true two-headed monster of closing options in Justin Martinez and A.J. Puk, still recovering from their own TJ surgeries. Andrew Saalfrank will begin the season as stopper, but good luck finding a leverage arm to trust in late game spots. Last year's group left a lot to be desired and plenty of wins on the table after blown leads. Ryan Thompson and Kevin Ginkel will get reinforcements in the setup positions with newly-added righties Taylor Clarke and Jonathan Loáisiga. They'll need to help a group that posted bottom-five rankings in ERA, H/9 and K/9 in 2025.

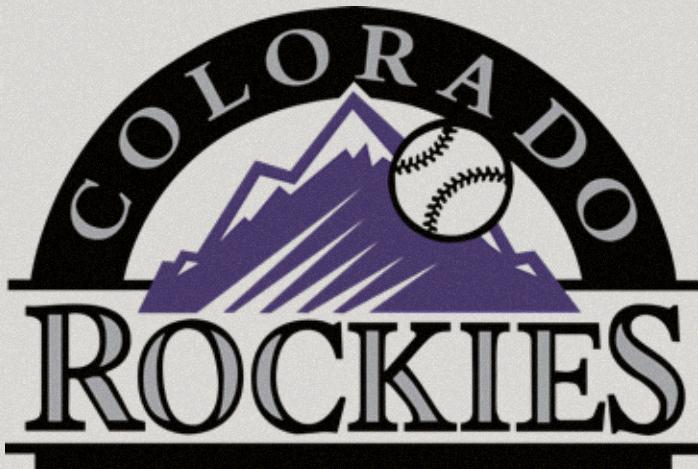
PROSPECT WATCH

It looked like Jordan Lawler may find a spot on the 2026 Opening Day roster in the infield, but the emergence of Geraldo Perdomo and trade for Nolan Arenado will likely force him into the outfield. The position player crop has two other standouts in LF Ryan Waldschmidt and 2B Tommy Troy. Both can push for major league time this year if things break their way. Young arms in Yilber Díaz and Cristian Mena made their debuts last year, with Mena being an immediate depth option if rotation injuries happen early.

OUTLOOK

Manager Torey Lovullo continues to get the very best from a group ravaged by injuries to key players over the last two seasons. He'll need to continue the balancing act and hope for a little luck on that front as well. The organization decided not to trade Ketel Marte this offseason and that reinforces a belief they've got the chance to tread water early and get their big internal arms back off the injured list. If they hang around long enough, perhaps the wild card race remains viable deep into September.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: CORBIN CARROLL HITS 35+ HR AND STEALS 45+ BASES, FINISHING TOP 3 IN NL MVP VOTING



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 52.5

DIVISION: 300-1

PENNANT: 300-1

WORLD SERIES: 500-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Freeland needs 170 innings for his 2027 option to vest; not only does he fall short, but he's also traded as a deadline rental

HITTING

Many around the league laughed at the Rockies for having the smallest data department in Major League Baseball. It is wild to think about not leaning into finding out how to make residing in Denver a competitive advantage given the environmental conditions. Now, that might cost some money and Monfort is still the one signing off on the paychecks, but this team has become such an embarrassment over the last three seasons that we may see some growth in payroll moving forward. We'll probably at least see the Rockies try to make some strides in key areas.

First, they have to make more contact. The Rockies were 29th with a 25.9% K% and paired that with a league-worst 6.7% BB%. The handicap of playing 81 games at 5,280 feet in elevation and then never doing that on the road is so incredibly hard to overcome, but the team has to find a way to whiff less and walk more. Even the two best contributors from last season, Hunter Goodman and Mickey Moniak, had 26.3% and

23.9% K% to go with 5.7% and 4.8% BB% marks. They combined to hit 55 homers and high BABIPs helped the cause, but they were the only two regulars with a wRC+ over 100 and had OBP of .323 and .306. For Moniak, there were 177 players with at least 450 PA, and his .306 OBP ranked 133th and as Colorado's second-best hitter.

PITCHING

Colorado's 5.99 team ERA was the worst in baseball in the 2000s. You have to go back to the 1999 Rockies at 6.03 and the 1996 Tigers at 6.38 to find worse numbers and those two years were in the heart of the steroid era. This team was also 26th in Outs Above Average per Statcast while playing in the most spacious ballpark in the league, so it's not like the defenders helped the pitching staff out at all. Colorado hurlers allowed a .331 BABIP, which was the highest in the league by 18 points. Of course, their 14.5% HR/FB% was also the highest in the league and that had nothing to do with the defense.

COLORADO ROCKIES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

The Rockies have officially hit rock bottom. Their first 100-loss season in franchise history didn't really come as a huge shock in 2023, but they've now had three of them in a row, including 119 losses this past season. They gave up more than 1,000 runs and scored fewer than 600. The 682 runs that they scored in 2024 was a franchise low and they obliterated that number this past season. FanGraphs data goes all the way back to 1871, which is just outrageous. In that time, there have been 3,450 individual team seasons and only 33 times has a team given up more than 1,000 runs. The 2025 Rockies are the only team to do it in the 2000s and were the last team to do it back in 1999.

Colorado was -424 in run differential. The other 11 teams with a negative run differential combined to be -993. So, yes, that would be rock bottom.

The Athletics were 29th in pitcher fWAR at 5.9. The Rockies were 30th at 1.5 and the rotation posted a collective 6.65 ERA. The White Sox were 29th in position player fWAR at 6.1. The Rockies were 30th at -3.7. Because WAR is adjusted for the run environment, park factors, and other things to normalize the formula, we can use WAR to compare across other eras. Dating back to 1980, only the 2024 White Sox and 1998 Twins have a lower position player fWAR than last season's Rockies.

Fortunately, Walker Monfort seems to have taken over daily dealings with the ballclub in place of his father and hired Paul DePodesta as the president of baseball operations, who subsequently hired Josh Byrnes and other smart minds to revolutionize the front office and go all-in on data-driven decisions. I can't wait to see how it turns out.

When a new front office takes over with fresh ideas and a lot of Ivy League minds, the pitching usually improves quicker than the hitting. In that respect, there's some hope for the Rockies to be better, but a rotation anchored by Kyle Freeland in his last guaranteed season and Michael Lorenzen on a one-year deal doesn't have much upside. Lorenzen's 14% HR/FB% last season was his highest since 2017. Every pitcher projected in the Opening Day rotation has an ERA over 5.00 per ZiPS and the bullpen has very few reliable arms.

PROSPECT WATCH

The Rockies have made things worse as an organization by having an awful minor league system over the years. There is another Holliday coming, as Ethan will probably debut next season, but there are very few guys of note with a chance to crack the roster this season. The biggest name beyond Holliday is easily Charlie Condon, the slugger from Georgia who has obscene raw power to go with some holes in his swing and his

defensive projection is murky, especially playing the big outfield at Coors. He'll debut this season with nobody stopping him, but I'm not sure how much production we'll see from a guy who can be manipulated by breaking stuff, especially at the highest level.

OUTLOOK

Generally speaking, the vibes around this team have to be better. There might be some direction now with a new front office and with a second season for Warren Schaeffer as the manager. This team is still talent-deficient and a lot of players will likely be thrust into situations and spots that they are not ready for or not good enough to be in. It will be another long season in that respect, but as the new regime gathers data, finds players who can stick and those who can't, and creates a plan for the future, this is a big year in that process.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 52.5



COLORADO ROCKIES

2025 RECORD: 43-119, LAST IN NL WEST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL PLAY: OVER 52.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

43-119
-43.8 UNITS

•

TOTAL

71-86-5
•

RUN LINE

66-96

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

89-73

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

41-100-21
-32.8 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

84-77
•

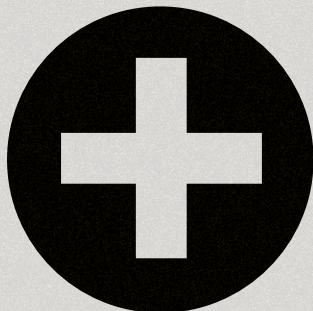
RUN LINE 1ST 5

72-90

•

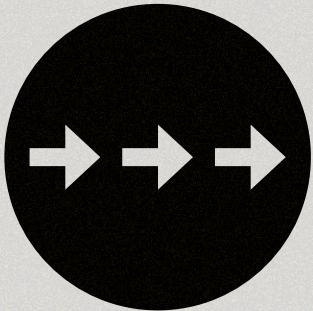
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

SP Michael Lorenzen
RP Brennan Bernardino
RP RJ Petit
RP Keegan Thompson
SP Tomoyuki Sugano
SP Jose Quintana



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP German Marquez
INF Thairo Estrada
SP Austin Gomber
INF Kyle Farmer
INF Orlando Arcia
C Jacob Stallings



JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

Despite being arguably the best hitting environment in MLB, this offense ranked dead-last in OBP, second-to-last in runs scored and doesn't have much in the way of offensive offseason additions to write home about. SS Ezequiel Tovar and C Hunter Goodman headline the foundation for the future. Tovar can easily get to double-digits in HR and might be worth a sprinkle to hit 20 or more. Goodman has enormous power and can certainly attain 25+ HR again with 81 home games at Coors Field. The buy-low candidates include CF Brenton Doyle and LF Jordan Beck, for both the power and speed combinations they possess. Another year and another IL stint to start the season for 1B/OF Kris Bryant, likely unavailable in any capacity before the calendar turns June. The corner infield spots leave a lot to be desired, but help may be on the way in No. 2 prospect 1B/OF Charlie Condon. Avoid backing the youth and inexperience in the rest of the projected starting nine.

Victor Vodnik and despite the rarity of win opportunities, he still amassed 10 saves in 31 games finished. Setup men Jimmy Herget and Juan Mejia provide the bridge to Vodnik, as well as Brennan Bernardino, coming over in a trade with the Red Sox. The entire staff will try to improve on the league's worst starting pitching ERA, WHIP, K/9, H/9 and HR/9. Don't hold your breath.

PROSPECT WATCH

The immediate future is bright with slugging 1B Charlie Condon. His position versatility is great, but the immediate big league need at first base is his best path. It's a matter of time before he's a regular in the lineup - does he arrive in Denver some time in 2026 is the only question mark. SS Ethan Holliday is the top overall organizational prospect, but the 18-year-old probably doesn't knock on the big league door until around 2029. OF Cole Carrigg is a name to track, as well as RHP Brody Brecht, labeled as the most electric pitching prospect in the system.

PITCHING

If you achieve a home ERA at Coors Field under 5.00, you deserve a spot in the Hall of Fame. The staff ranks third-worst in projected WAR, led by Kyle Freeland and young fireballer Chase Dollander. It's hard to back season-long strikeout props with the elevation conditions, but if you're looking to dream, Dollander is in a great bounce-back spot after his tough rookie campaign. Free agents Michael Lorenzen and Tomoyuki Sugano signed in January and February respectively, adding more experience alongside Ryan Feltner to round out the rotation with another late veteran signing in Jose Quintana. The bullpen is headlined by flamethrower

OUTLOOK

Warren Schaeffer took over as interim manager on May 11 after a 7-33 start under former skipper Bud Black, where the Rockies hit an abysmal .218 as a team and pitched to a 5.77 staff ERA. He finished 36-86 and got the permanent job on November 24 this offseason, with the offense showing the most signs of growth. Changes to the front office (new head of baseball operations Paul DePodesta) signal a sharper focus on player development, but don't expect any short-term fixes that merit optimism for a significant improvement in wins. Colorado seems destined for another 100+ loss season.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: HUNTER GOODMAN HITS 35+ HR AND ASCENDS TO A TOP-5 CATCHER IN MLB

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

Based on what they've built, the Dodgers have put themselves in a position to basically coast through the regular season and employ a baseball form of load management. By the time the postseason rolled around, all of their high-priced pitchers were able to contribute in some capacity, whether they were starting or relieving. Yoshinobu Yamamoto led the team with 173.2 innings. Clayton Kershaw was second with 112.2. Dustin May was third with 104. Nobody else threw more than 90.1, but Tyler Glasnow, Blake Snell, Shohei Ohtani, Emmet Sheehan, and others were right there when it mattered most.

Pitching is devastatingly difficult on the arm and the Dodgers haven't shied away from guys with thick

medical histories. But, you can afford to do that and pay a high price in search of a championship with this kind of payroll. If a \$32.5 million arm like Glasnow or a \$28 million arm like Snell goes down for another team, they're screwed. For the Dodgers, they got a total of 151.2 regular season innings from those two guys and didn't even give it a second glance because they pitched in October and were instrumental in winning a second straight title.

Everything remains pretty much the same this season, except for the Dodgers buying arguably the top position player free agent in Kyle Tucker and top reliever in Edwin Diaz, who immediately slots in as the closer. Not bad for a team looking to three-peat.

HITTING

In the midst of ruining baseball with deferred contracts and unlimited funds, at least in the minds of some, it should be pointed out that the Dodgers have spent wisely. Yes, they've spent enough to cover any slip-ups, but it's not like they've been saddled with an Anthony Rendon or Chris Davis type contract. They aren't sitting there wishing a guy's deal would end. Andrew Friedman and his staff have still been able to identify the right talent to piece together this juggernaut. They've done it via free agency, trade, international free agent markets, and have either drafted and developed well enough to get guys to The Show or use them as trade currency in blockbuster deals.

Bullpen usage wasn't quite as spread out, though. Four guys appeared in at least 60 games, as Dave Roberts went to his horses regularly, even if Tanner Scott had a down year by his standards. Twelve different Dodgers pitchers recorded at least one save, but enter Diaz, who now sets the roles and the bullpen hierarchy by coming in as the closer. The bullpen was one source of worry in last year's playoffs and we even saw Sasaki being used as the closer. That shouldn't be a worry this season.

PROSPECT WATCH

One thing more frustrating than the way that the Dodgers spend money and defer salaries and all these things is that they can just go out and buy a solution to fix a problem. Dalton Rushing, Josue De Paula, or any of the other LA prospects would have been great to get for Steven Kwan from my Guardians. Instead, the Dodgers made other decisions and then just went out and signed Tucker after winning the World Series anyway. But, this is what they can do and they have a glut of good outfield prospects, including the 20-year-old De Paula, who has a power/speed combo worth salivating over. He's also drawn a ton of walks and had just an 8.1% SwStr% last season. Whether he plays for the Dodgers or is used in a trade, he's a very exciting youngster.

OUTLOOK

No offense to Dodgers fans, but it's so boring writing about a team like this. They're going to be extremely good, are capable of withstanding injuries, and will post whatever record they want in the regular season based on their level of care. It'll probably be good enough to win the NL West and then they'll look to avoid the banana peels that the MLB postseason can drop on the ground at times. With so much depth in all of the key areas, it's just hard to bet against the Dodgers.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 102.5

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:

No Dodgers starter throws over 150 innings this season



JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

What can you say, other than: how do you beat these guys? The most intimidating offense in the big leagues, dare we say, got better this offseason? Enter prized free agent RF Kyle Tucker, agreeing to a gargantuan four-year, \$240M deal, making this lineup even more ridiculous than it already was. DH Shohei Ohtani, SS Mookie Betts will slot in front of Tucker and he'll have 1B Freddie Freeman C Will Smith, 3B Max Muncy and LF Teoscar Hernández behind him. CF Andy Pages rounds out the outfield and new second baseman Hyeseong Kim, purchased from the KBO, completes the middle infield. The bench is perfectly balanced with INF Andy Ibáñez and World Series hero INF Miguel Rojas back, alongside C Dalton Rushing and OF Alex Call. The main detraction against this batting order is only the aging of current superstars Betts and Freeman. Neither look to be slowing down, but both

went through their own individual injuries the last couple seasons. Barring significant injuries all at once, this offense reprises its role as the best in baseball once the 2026 season gets underway.

PITCHING

The embarrassment of riches rolls on. World Series MVP Yoshinobu Yamamoto leads as ridiculous a starting staff anywhere in MLB. Blake Snell will be slow-played through the beginning of the season, but he won't be needed for length before the All-Star Break. A big break came when Shohei Ohtani announced he won't pitch for Team Japan in the WBC and that will allow him time to hit the ground fully healthy and stretched out as much as possible. Tyler Glasnow, Emmet Sheehan and Roki Sasaki fill out the rest of the best six-man rotation in baseball. The best free agent reliever on the market also found a new home in Southern California, with closer

Edwin Díaz inking a deal to be the Dodgers new stopper. Top setup men in former closer Tanner Scott and Alex Vesia are back, along with Blake Treinen and Brusdar Graterol. It wasn't the cleanest of seasons for the LA bullpen in 2025, so the hope is for Díaz to anchor what projects to be as dominant a group of leverage relievers anywhere in the game.

PROSPECT WATCH

With the limitless funds able to purchase the best free agents, the Dodgers farm system is actually quite stocked, especially in the outfield. They possess five of the Top 100 MiLB prospects, including top organizational phenom OF Josue De Paula (No. 15 in Top 100). Comparisons for De Paula are similar to a younger Yordan Alvarez and that bodes well for native Dominican who may be a year away from his callup to the Show. Behind him are OF Zyhír Hope (No. 27)

OF Eduardo Quintero (No. 30) and OF Mike Sirota (No. 60). All three are projected for knocking on the big league door in 2027-2028 at the earliest.

OUTLOOK

The Dodgers are the envy of the entire baseball landscape in every facet. Manager Dave Roberts has them feeling invincible and it's hard to poke holes anywhere on their roster. Health issues posed a potential threat to defending their World Series title last year, but they overcame and found their way back to the promised land, finishing off one of the most memorable Game 7s ever in Fall Classic history. The last teams to win three consecutive World Series titles are the 1998-2000 New York Yankees, as well as the 1972-74 Oakland Athletics. Los Angeles will aim to join them, as the third team in over the last half century to complete the three-peat.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: THE DODGERS MAKE HISTORY AS THE FIRST NL TEAM TO WIN THREE CONSECUTIVE WORLD SERIES TITLES

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
106-73
-19.1 UNITS

TOTAL
82-88-9
•
RUN LINE
80-99
•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5
80-66-33
-30.9 UNITS

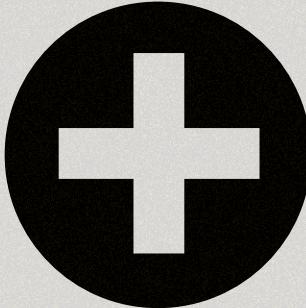
TOTAL 1ST 5
87-91
•
RUN LINE 1ST 5
78-101
•
YES RUN
FIRST INNING
91-88



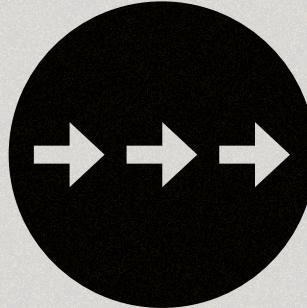
LOS ANGELES
DODGERS

2025 RECORD: 93-69
1ST NL WEST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
PLAY: UNDER 102.5



NOTABLE
ADDITIONS
OF Kyle Tucker
INF Andy Ibáñez
RP Edwin Díaz



NOTABLE
DEPARTURES
RP Evan Phillips
RP Michael Kopech
RP Kirby Yates
SP Tony Gonsolin
INF/OF Kike Hernandez
C Austin Barnes
OF Michael Conforto
RP Anthony Banda

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE:

Jackson Merrill will flirt with, and maybe even obtain, his first 30-HR season

HITTING

Petco Park remains an unkind venue for hitters, but that's not entirely why the Padres fell off the pace in 2025 compared to what they achieved in 2024. San Diego was sixth in wOBA and fifth in wRC+ in 2024, but dropped to 16th in wOBA and 13th in wRC+. The team hit just 152 home runs, which ranked 28th in the league, a huge departure from 11th the season prior. So, it wasn't just Petco. A main factor is that Jurickson Profar's production was not replaced, as he slashed .280/.380/.459 with 24 HR in 2024 while leading the team in plate appearances, wOBA, and wRC+. Ramon Laureano was on a toned-down version of that pace after being acquired via trade and he'll have a full season with the Friars now.

Jackson Merrill missed some time and saw his production sink a little bit, while the Padres also had to answer some offensive issues with those deadline acquisitions like Laureano and Ryan O'Hearn. The only newcomers to this year's lineup are platoon player Miguel Andujar and KBO import Sung-mun Song, who slashed .315/.387/.530 with 26 HR for Kiwoom last season. Preller being unable to strike and improve the offense with the team's status up in the air is a tough pill to swallow, especially with the 2024 to 2025 drop-off that took place.

PITCHING

The pitching staff did improve year over year in enough ways to offset the drop in offensive production and push the Padres into the postseason, despite finishing with three fewer wins. But the task at hand gets tougher now because Dylan Cease signed with the Blue Jays. While Cease wasn't always perfect, and did have a 4.55 ERA last season with some immense bad luck based on his 3.45 xERA and 3.56 FIP, he made 65 starts and ate up over 350 innings for the Padres in his two seasons with the team, accumulating 8.1 fWAR. I don't think people realize how hard that is to replace in this day and age.

When you think about Joe Musgrove coming back from another major procedure and lost season due to injury, Michael King with just 15 starts in his second full season as a starter, no Yu Darvish, and having to rely on a huge ball of regression in Randy Vasquez and an unknown in JP Sears, things look dicey. Vasquez had a 3.84 ERA with a 5.37 xERA and a 4.85 FIP with one of the worst K% among starters in the league. I wonder if Preller expected more resources this offseason, otherwise maybe he doesn't make the Freddy Fermin for Stephen Kolek and Ryan Bergert deal. If healthy, this remains an elite bullpen, but this rotation has real downside risk.

PROSPECT WATCH

If Preller is indeed gone, the first step for the new regime will be rebuilding the minor league system. Preller's trade-happy trigger finger has zapped the organization of a lot of talented youngsters. Ethan Salas is the only notable name left and he's dropping down prospect lists after a wasted season last year due to injury and a bad 2024 season with the bat. San Diego won't be able to patch holes in the boat this season by trading away prospects because there aren't many good ones and they have a lot of guys that are old for the leagues that they are playing in. We might be looking at a total teardown soon.

OUTLOOK

I really do hope that the Padres are fully engaged this season because things are on the verge of changing. The projected Opening Day lineup has six players on the plus side of 30, plus four more in the rotation. There are a lot of players still guaranteed money for a long time and some heavily inflated contracts relative to production. Overall, I like the talent on the team, but there's no organizational depth in case of injury and I wonder if the ownership issues and front office tension will be leaking into the clubhouse.

**BURKE'S WIN TOTAL
LEAN: OVER 85.5**



2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 85.5

DIVISION: +800

PENNANT: 15-1

WORLD SERIES: 28-1

SAN DIEGO PADRES

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

We shouldn't be surprised that the Padres had a quiet offseason, as they finished just three games behind the stacked Dodgers and made the playoffs for the fourth time in six seasons. Of course, they've only made it past the NLDS once and that will be a question that needs to be answered in due time, but the state of the team's ownership has been in flux since Peter Seidler passed away in November 2023. Court battles and lawsuits have ensued and it was even reported this past November that the team might be put up for sale.

To add to the drama, president of baseball operations and GM A.J. Preller had one season left on his deal until he signed an extension

on Feb. 16. The Padres wound up signing quite a few players late in the offseason, including German Marquez, Nick Castellanos, and Miguel Andujar in hopes that one of those supplemental players is what makes the difference. This team is very good and has been on the cusp for a bit now, but can't seem to make that last push.

The 2026 version looks similar to past versions. Very high floor. Questions about what the ceiling actually is. There has been minimal turnover, despite the losses of some expiring contracts, but the Padres look a lot like what we've come to expect and that should make them pretty projectable.

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE
91-74
-1.0 UNITS

TOTAL 69-92-4	TOTAL 1ST 5 87-78
•	•
RUN LINE 88-77	RUN LINE 1ST 5 82-83
•	•
MONEYLINE 1ST 5 70-76-19 -21.1 UNITS	YES RUN FIRST INNING 80-85



SAN DIEGO
PADRES

2025 RECORD: 90-72,
2ND IN NL WEST

LEWIS' WIN TOTAL
LEAN: UNDER 85.5

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

The Padres enter 2026 with a top-heavy, star-powered offense. RF Fernando Tatis Jr., CF Jackson Merrill and 3B Manny Machado headline the attack, but that's where the certainties stop. LF Ramón Laureano, DH Gavin Sheets, SS Xander Bogaerts and 1B Jake Cronenworth will be heavily counted upon to find a surge in slugging, as the 2025 lineup finished 28th in the league in HR. C Freddy Fermin mans the dish and newly signed KBO 2B Sung-Mun Song is ticketed for the starting second base job. It's a much leaner one through nine than years past, especially losing Luis Arraez to the rival Giants and Ryan O'Hearn to the Pirates. Any injury to Tatis Jr. and/or Machado and this season could go sideways in a hurry. Payroll issues abound and may force the hand of president of baseball operations A.J. Preller

if this offense struggles out of the gates.

PITCHING

Staff ace Dylan Cease left via free agency, signing with the Blue Jays, but the Friars got a huge boost when Michael King decided to come back on a three-year, \$75M deal. Flanked in the rotation by veterans Nick Pivetta and Randy Vásquez, San Diego gets native son Joe Musgrove back healthy and hopeful for a big 2026. JP Sears fills out the rest of the rotation that has work to do on improving their overall performance in 2025 while sage veteran Yu Darvish makes his way back from elbow surgery. At one point last season, the Padres amassed four All-Star relievers and once again will lean on their massive weapons in the back end to close out games. Stopper Mason Miller leads a contingent of high-90s/low-

100mph arsenals, complemented by setup men Adrian Morejon and RHP Jeremiah Estrada. Jason Adam is on the mend from quad surgery, so there's a few roles to sift through during spring training between David Morgan, Wandy Peralta and a couple other candidates. Make no mistake: this entire unit can once again achieve the lowest bullpen ERA in the sport.

PROSPECT WATCH

Oof. From all the massive trades and deals the last couple seasons, to say the Padres farm system is bare might be an understatement. Selling at the trade deadline year after year leaves them with currently C Ethan Salas as the closest big-league capable prospect in the system. Farther down the development ladder are LHP Kash Mayfield and LHP Kruz Schoolcraft, who figure to be at least a few years from knocking

on the proverbial big league door. One arm that you might see with the Padres this season is RHP Miguel Mendez, with scouting reports saying he's got the best two pitches in the entire San Diego system, in his fastball and slider.

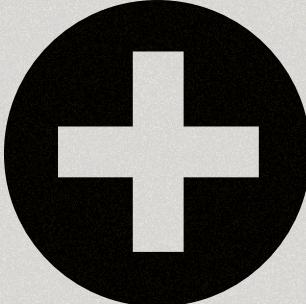
OUTLOOK

Newly-hired manager Craig Stammen takes over as the lead man in the dugout in 2026. Widely respected around the league, he'll be tasked with squeezing as much potential out of the offense and hoping the pitching staff avoids major injuries in both the rotation and bullpen. The clock is ticking on the current roster construction, with the backdrop of revenue issues and aging arms. They got within three games of the Dodgers last September, but couldn't close the deal. It's an even more herculean task this time around.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: BIG TIME INJURIES FORCE THE PADRES TO SELL HUGE ASSETS AT THE DEADLINE & THEY MISS THE PLAYOFFS

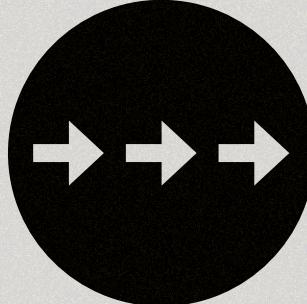
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Sung-Mun Song
OF Nick Castellano
DH Miguel Andujar
OF Nick Castellanos
SP German Marquez
SP Griffin Canning



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP Dylan Cease
INF/OF Ryan O'Hearn
RP Robert Suarez
INF Luis Arraez
C Elias Diaz
INF Jose Iglesias
OF Tyler Wade
INF Yuli Gurriel
OF Jason Heyward
SP Nestor Cortes





SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

ADAM BURKE'S NERDY TAKE

There is some measure of solace in going 81-81 instead of having a losing season, as the Giants won their final four games in 2025 to avoid that fate. But, this is a team that has gone 81-81, 80-82, 79-83, and 81-81 over the last four seasons since the enormous outlier back in 2021 with a 107-55 mark. That is also the only season in which the Giants have made it to the postseason since 2016 and their only winning season in that time. While the Giants haven't really bottomed out like others around the league of late, as they reserved that for 2017-18, they still haven't been good enough.

Fans, players, ownership, front office personnel, coaches, everybody is at a point where

they are demanding more from this Giants team and who can blame them? Things could have swung more in one direction or the other last season, as the Giants played 58 one-run games. The only team to play more was the Pirates with 60. San Francisco was 28-30 in those games and the team was even 12 games over .500 on June 13. They fell below .500 on July 30 for the first time. The 162-game grind is just so hard.

There are a lot of solid big leaguers on this team and that means another competitive ballclub. This is a high-floor, low-ceiling roster where a lot of overachievement will have to take place to exceed expectations.

2026 ODDS

WIN TOTAL: 80.5

DIVISION: 20-1

PENNANT: 35-1

WORLD SERIES: 65-1

BURKE'S BOLD TAKE: Bryce Eldridge, who had a 62.7% Hard Hit% in AAA last season, is worth a look at +1600 for NL Rookie of the Year

HITTING

As we know, Oracle Park makes a difficult task even harder, since the ball doesn't carry well with San Francisco's climate and the marine layer right on the water. The high wall in right field also helps to suppress power production, though it can make the venue very good for doubles and triples. The Giants only hit .235 as a team, which ranked 25th and they were 29th in stolen bases, so they were a station-to-station team when they did get aboard and this is not a team that will hit a lot of home runs given the park factor. At home, the Giants were 23rd in wOBA. On the road, they were 18th.

To replace Justin Verlander and a turnstile of fifth starters, the Giants signed Tyler Mahle and Adrian Houser. I've always been intrigued by Mahle, whose command early in his career was suspect and he had to work a lot to eliminate a large platoon split. He hasn't been healthy since 2021 and Houser has thrown over 125 MLB innings once in his career. The durability of ace Logan Webb allows the Giants to go this route and take damaged goods to see what they can become. From a home run suppression standpoint, Mahle and Houser do fit the rest of the team well.

PROSPECT WATCH

This one is easy as Bryce Eldridge is the biggest name to watch. Eldridge was taken 16th overall in 2023 and made his MLB debut last season, but his cup of coffee was terribly bitter with just three hits in 37 plate appearances. He did have offseason surgery to remove a bone spur and maybe that was what cratered his numbers after slashing .260/.333/.510 in the minors. Eldridge has a lot of swing and miss in his profile, but may offer a power threat that the Giants are lacking right now. He's a large being at 6-foot-7 and has room to add weight. He's not much of a defender, but with the universal DH and his bat, the Giants will find a place to put him.

OUTLOOK

Nobody expects the NL West teams to spend like the Dodgers. But, mostly maintaining status quo isn't going to help close the gap. Even after the acquisition of Devers, the Giants were just 40-50 with him on the roster. A couple mid-rotation arms and a couple of complementary offensive pieces might raise the ceiling a little bit and help the Giants over the 81-81 hump, but this team isn't obviously better or worse than any of the last four versions we've seen. It'll likely be a repeat of what we've recently seen and the Giants are going to have to decide who stays and who goes in an effort to get closer to the top teams in the division.

BURKE'S WIN TOTAL LEAN: OVER 80.5

2025 BETTING RECORDS

MONEYLINE

81-81

-18.4 UNITS

•

TOTAL

74-80-7

•

RUN LINE

75-86

•

MONEYLINE 1ST 5

63-63-36

-13.0 UNITS

•

TOTAL 1ST 5

84-77

•

RUN LINE 1ST 5

75-87

•

YES RUN FIRST INNING

86-76

JENSEN LEWIS' PLAYER TAKE

HITTING

On paper, the Giants desperately needed an “aircraft carrier” in the middle of their lineup to step up in weight class with the NL contenders. Trading for 1B Rafael Devers last June answered that need, but took a bit to see results directly affect the San Francisco offense positively. Teamed with SS Willy Adames and 3B Matt Chapman, it’s now a vaunted group of sluggers to power the Giants attack. LF Heliot Ramos is developing into a fabulous all-around talent. All-world bat-to-ball specialist 2B Luis Arraez teams with Ramos as a primary table-setter. RF Jung Hoo Lee finally stayed relatively healthy and put together a solid campaign. Newly-signed CF Harrison Bader joins the fold, lengthening an order that will most likely see everyday at bats from highly touted prospect DH Bryce Eldridge starting Opening Day. C Patrick Bailey rounds out the starting nine as one of the best defensive catchers in the big leagues. Oracle Park isn’t the greatest hitting environment in MLB, but there’s no reason why this current 2026 batting order can’t be amongst the better units on the Senior Circuit.

PITCHING

Cy Young candidate Logan Webb leads a vaunted 1-2 punch with

Robbie Ray atop the Giants rotation. Tyler Mahle and Adrian Houser signed as free agents to fortify the starting five and Landen Roupp will get the chance to solidify that No. 5 spot. It’s a stout group and they’ll hope to build on a 2025 year that, outside of Webb and Ray, very much underperformed. You’d never guess it by looking at the statistics without the team name next to them, but the Giants bullpen actually had the fourth-lowest bullpen ERA in 2025. Closer Ryan Walker will reassume the role that he abdicated last season for Camilo Doval, now a member of the Yankees after being traded to New York at the 2025 deadline. Getting to Walker is the main concern in 2026, knowing their best setup man, Randy Rodriguez, is all but lost for this year with Tommy John surgery last September. Erik Miller, Joel Perguero, José Buttó represent the top leverage relievers tasked with building the bridge between the starters and the ninth inning.

PROSPECT WATCH

A host of graduations from Eldridge, OF Drew Gilbert, SPs Carson Whisenhunt, Blade Tidwell, Trevor McDonald and Hayden Birdsong leave the top end of the Giants farm system with

a fair amount of early big league experience. What’s left is a lot of developmental, yet high ceiling youngsters in Single-A. Circle SS Jhonny Level and SS/2B Gavin Kilen (No.13 overall selection in 2025 draft) for the potential fast-risers on the position player front. There’s some sneaky upside to a handful of these prospects.

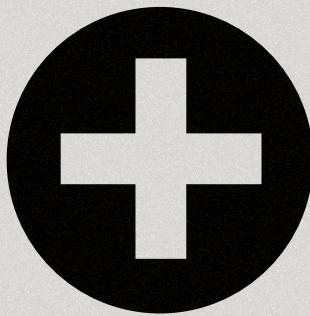
OUTLOOK

Perhaps the most widely controversial manager hire happened in the Bay Area with the hiring of Tony Vitello, former head coach at the University of Tennessee. He becomes the first manager to go straight from college to the big leagues, with no prior professional coaching experience. What that transition will look like and how the players receive him will give an early indication on how president of baseball operations Buster Posey’s gamble pays off. It’s a big swing for a highly accomplished college coach, but it’s an entirely different world within the six-month marathon of a major league season. The triad of Devers-Adames-Chapman needs to be a wrecking ball from the get-go and the bullpen will need immediate leverage inning answers to be in contention for a Wild Card.

LEWIS' BOLD TAKE: LOGAN WEBB FINISHES TOP 3 IN NL CY YOUNG VOTING, GIANTS WIN 87-89 GAMES

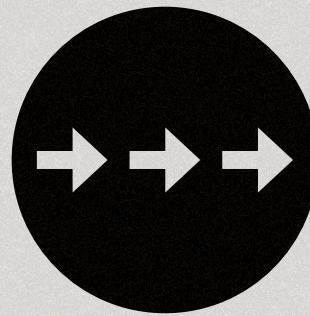
NOTABLE ADDITIONS

INF Luis Arraez
OF Harrison Bader
SP Tyler Mahle
SP Adrian Houser
RP Sam Hentges



NOTABLE DEPARTURES

SP Justin Verlander
INF Dominic Smith
C Andrew Knizner
RP Joey Lucchesi
INF Wilmer Flores
RP Scott Alexander
C Tom Murphy



SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

2025 RECORD: 81-81, 3RD IN NL WEST
LEWIS' WIN TOTAL LEAN: OVER 80.5



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