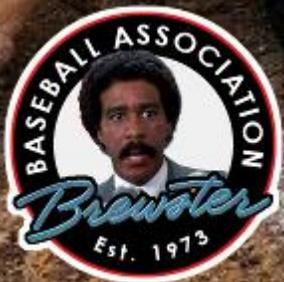


2027 MBWBA

- MEDIA GUIDE -

IS THE FRICK LEAGUE DONE FOR?

*The JL Defends
the Landis ... Again*



MONTY BREWSTER WORLD BASEBALL ASSOCIATION

EST. 1973 – 2027. WE VOTE NONE OF THE ABOVE

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Commissioner: Matt “Recte” Rectenwald
Vice Commissioner: Aaron “aaronweiner” Weiner
League Director: Adam “chey” Dee
League Director & Chief Muckraker: Kyle “agrudez” Stever*

LEAGUE AFFILIATES

North America
Monty Brewster Baseball Association

Europe
European Baseball Association

CONTACT INFORMATION

Primary Website: <http://mbwba.whsites.net/>
Forums: <http://baseballretrospective.com/MBBA/phpBB3/index.php>
Commissioner Email: mrectenwald@gmail.com

OOTP Forum Entry:
<http://www.ootpdevelopments.com/board/ootp-16-online-leagues/254905-monty-brewster-world-baseball-association-now-ootp16.html>



The MBWBA is a fake baseball universe resting on the shoulders of Out of the Park Baseball. At the time of this writing, we’re barnstorming with (or following the masses to, depending on what the media outlet you love the most tells you) version 17. Anything about us, our forums, the existence of the Drew Zodcast, or even this document is purely accidental and almost certainly doesn’t really exist. Please report any discovery of intellectualism or other form of maturity to the commissioner, as such events are punishable by PP demerits and being assigned to the 16-part, 28 hour “Why Lefties Rock” rehabilitation course taught by Kyle.

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PUBLISHER & CONTRIBUTOR

Ron Collins



CONTRIBUTORS

Kevin Dickson
Matt Rectenwald
Ted Schmidt
Tyler Simmons
Aaron Weiner





A BLAST FROM THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

by Matt Rectenwald, MBWBA Commissioner

54 seasons in the books for the MBWBA. It seems just like yesterday when businessman Monty Brewster set out to "defeat the baseball system" when he formed the league in 1973. Not many gave the league much of a chance to succeed, yet here we are, one of the most successful baseball leagues of its kind. It's a testament to the great people who make this league what it is that we've achieved this level of success and can expect to see more of it in the future.

On to the 2027 season. Things have changed. The Greenville Moonshiners are no more, having moved on to a brighter future in Jacksonville as the Hurricane. While we always hate leaving established cities, in this case it was necessary and we couldn't be happier that we've returned to an original MBBA city and the great fans of Jacksonville who have been without a team for too long since they lost their beloved Monarchs (now the Brooklyn Robins). Welcome back, Jacksonville.

There will be new teams emerging, seemingly out of nowhere, just like last season when the unheralded Robins and their rookie GM Alan Ehlers made a shocking run to the Landis Memorial Series title. Who will the surprise team be this year? There are a lot of candidates, but I'll name two to watch: the Vancouver Mounties in the Johnson League, and the Montreal Blazers in the Frick League. Both have been stockpiling some interesting talent and seem poised to break through.

Who will be the players to watch in 2027? There are so many, but here's a few:

- Can Las Vegas' Alfredo Martinez stay healthy for a whole season and put it all together? BNN ranks him as the #1 player in the game, so a full season could be historic.
- Will Madison's Alfredo Salazar, with that huge contract, bounce back from a horrific 2026 campaign?
 - Montreal's electrifying sophomore, shortstop Jared Gillstrom, is quickly climbing up the Top 20 Players list. Just how good will he be?
 - Can Calgary's Hector Cano keep pushing off Father Time and get closer to breaking through the Top 10 All-Time in Homers?



- Will Havana's uber-talented yet much maligned ace Ignacio Rodriguez finally emerge with a breakout year?
 - A 22 year old in Yellow Springs had the league buzzing last year during his rookie season, but can Lawrence Columbus LaLoosh become one of the league's best starters this year?

Speaking of Cano's pursuit of the Top 10 Homers list, let's look at some Milestones that players are reaching for this year:

- Martin Felix is the active leader with 2563 hits, can he reach 3000 before hanging it up to become the 14th member of that elite club?
 - Even higher than Cano on the homer leaderboard is Bo Jordan. With 517 career homers, he's just 21 away from breaking into the Top 10, and only 203 from Bopper Kengos' All-Time Mark of 720. He's only 35 years old, so it's not beyond the realm of possibility that he could challenge this record. Amazingly, this never gets talked about.
 - Who's the most realistic candidate to reach 200 career wins? It's 38 year old Steve Hoffman, who is 20 wins away. He signed with Havana and if he can stay healthy, he could hit that mark next year.

The MBWBA is rich with history, flush with activity, and blessed with wonderful GM's who make this league what it is. This group evolves over time, but the goal is always the same: to bring these players to life. We have done that and then some and we'll keep doing that as long as we can.

If you are looking for an online league community that really gives you the realistic experience of being the General Manager of a baseball franchise, and you love to be creative with your writing and participation, look no further. The Monty Brewster World Baseball Association has everything you are looking for. We have openings right now in our independent league, the European Baseball Alliance. Many of our current MBBA GM's have started out there, and they have all complimented the experience as a great way to begin to immerse yourself into this massive universe without being completely overwhelmed at first.

Want to join us? We'd love to have you. Apply today:

<http://montybrewster.net/application-2/>



2026: BROOKLYN LOWERS T'BOOM

FINAL STANDINGS 2026 MBBA

JOHNSON LEAGUE

ATLANTIC

Brooklyn 84-78
Louisville 76-86
Halifax 75-87
Greenville 71-91

MID-WESTERN

Huntsville 97-65
Omaha 96-66
Yellow Springs 86-76
Madison 75-87

PACIFIC

Hawaii 94-68
California 83-79
Vancouver 79-83
Valencia 74-88

FRICK LEAGUE

ATLANTIC

Carolina 85-75
Montreal 78-84
Atlantic City 76-86
Havana 74-88

MID-WESTERN

Indy 90-72
New Orleans 82-80
Birmingham 76-86
Des Moines 71-91

PACIFIC

Las Vegas 100-62
Calgary 82-80
Seattle 74-84
Tucson 66-96

Victor Talboom was feeling the heat. It was early June and the Brooklyn Robins were in dead last. Worse, he was making truckloads of money on one of the more legendary contracts in all of baseball, all while working his way to what was going to end up as a massively silly -21 ZR season in centerfield. “It got so bad,” he said one time, “that I decided to just stand there and let the other guys flag down anything that wasn’t hit right at me.” That he finished the season with a .206/.252/.362 slash should have just completed the misery.

Strangely, though, that’s not how it turned out.

GM Nigel Laverick took a bit of a sabbatical, and in his place came Alan Ehlers—who took one look at the roster, nearly fell out of his chair, and then went to work.

In came starter Kelly Hill (8-4, 3.50). In came Enrique Salazar (28 HR, .297/.375/.618). In came Michael Starr (14 HR, .290/.336/.473). A trade with California sent closer Skip Glendenning and outfielder Brian Whitten away, but served to resurface the team.

Next thing you know, the Robins were winning. Not just winning, but winning like Charlie Sheen could barely ever dream of winning. I mean, *winning*. Strange, how things change when you’re winning. Along the way, Talboom’s boo-boos changed from upsetting to annoying to merely fanciful little episodes that made the national news every now and again.

The club finished the season 84-78, atop the (admittedly) somewhat hapless JL Atlantic division, and Talboom’s ticket was punched for the post season. “It’s like Cirque Du Soleil in October,” one journalist said.

Yet still Brooklyn won.

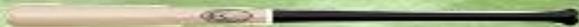
They dropped Hawaii 4 games to 2.

They destroyed the behemoth Huntsville Phantoms in 4-straight, one on a magnificent walk-off grand slam by oft maligned little Albert Shoemaker from Logansport, Indiana, thereby finding themselves pitted against another Cinderella in the form of the Frick League’s surprise champion, the New Orleans Crawdads, who had themselves risen from the ashes of an 82-win season.

We all know how the story ends.

Brooklyn 4 games to 3.

Victor Talboom, yes, that Victor Taboom, hits a pair of homers and drives in the lead run in a critical game 5. He walks several times. He is even, get this, *intentionally walked!* Yes, a guy who hits less than a pitcher was given an intentional pass in the biggest series on the face of the planet.



You could almost see Talboom on first base afterward, soaking up the ambiance as if trying to remember every detail. This, one expects, will one of those stories he tells his grandkids as he explains where their inheritance came from.

The Robins' success didn't come without its detractors.

Weak team, the pundits said.

Proof of the watering down of the playoffs.

"I don't really care," said Ehlers in the locker room with the players. "The guys know who they are. And the front office knows what we had. We know what we did, and we know that if we made those changes back on April 1st, Brooklyn would have won 95 games and nobody would be talking about a weak Champion.

"But who cares, right?"

"We're Landis champions, baby! We're Landis champions!"



2026 EBA: LONDON CALLING

London? Seriously?

Only in Europe can sub-.500 team slip into the playoff (after what must surely have been some kind of James Bondian shady dealing), manage to put it all together at the right time and run to a championship. Or did they? Umpires can be bought, you know? And the Euro isn't what it used to be.

Anyway. We got your London Bishops right here, led by 22-year-old first baseman Dale Jones and his 28 HRs and his .376 batting average. We've got your glove offensive star at second base in Dave Rodriguez, who's 23 and dropped 4.7 WAR on the season. Both of those guys will probably make a few mill in the Full Monty sometime soonish. We got 33-year-old Germán "Free Pass" Lanfranco, who walked 113 times to go with his .239 batting average.

On the hill, 23-year-old Lloyd Bastiaanse had a winning record, and as such was by default the team's best hope on the hill.

Yes, friends, it was that kind of year in Europe.

The team finished third in the division behind Madrid and Paris, but made it into the playoff by some freak miracle when, apparently, Paris just decided to do the whole no-show thing. Our understanding is that there was a fashion show at the Eifel Tower, and the squad couldn't be bothered to brush it off. (It was scheduled months in advance, you know? The team's secretary tweeted just before she was fired). Next thing you know, the Bishops were playoff bound, and beating Amsterdam 4-3 in what may have been the first recorded hidden team trick ever recorded in baseball history.

Rome beat Madrid for the honor of facing the no-names from London.

Confidence was so high in Vatican City that the Pope decided not to ask for divine support because "that would be piling on."

The numbers don't lie, though.

London: 5 games, Rome: 3.

Hooligans went wild.

Horns were blown and several "hup, hup, and Cheerios!" were heard. The Royal family actually asked what this game "baseball" was, and wondered if it could be bet on or used for something of real interest.

Much tea was drank.

Yes, indeed, folks.

Only in Europe.

Right?

FINAL STANDINGS 2026 EBA

Eastern Alliance

Rome 95-67
Amsterdam 87-75
Brussels 83-79
Munche 95-67

Western Alliance

Madrid 88-74
Paris 83-79
London 80-82
Belfast 61-101



Huntsville, California, Hawaii, and now Brooklyn ...

IS THIS THE END OF THE FRICK?

Go on ahead and ask your granddaddy, if you want to. We'll wait. Sure you can ... go on

...

So, did you ask him?

And he said it happened, right? He said there was a time when the Frick League and the Landis trophy were as connected up as Forrest Gump and a ping pong paddle, right? See? I told you so.

Of course, it's getting to the point that it's almost as hard to remember when the Frick

League ran roughshod over the MBBA as it is to remember that beafalo once covered the great plains of the US's golden blankets of the wild west prairie. But they did, Little Fan. They did run roughshod. Roughshod to the tune of 10 Landis Titles in the dozen years between 2011-2022 (four of them to New Orleans). And Roughshod to the tune of six titles in eight years between 2001-2009. That's 16 titles in 22 years if you're counting. That's how you spell DOMINANCE in our books.

But all good things come to an end, right?

Or, what goes around comes around.

The past four seasons have seen the Johnson League flex its muscles, and four different teams rise up to wrest the highly coveted trophy away.

Of course it was the upstart Huntsville Phantoms who turned the trick first. Way back in '23 it was. Took out the Indy Grasshoppers 4-1 in a series that wasn't even that close when you look at it.

That was a fluke, they said.

And the Frick rose up the next year and sent the behemoth Gamblers from Atlantic City to face the poor, defenseless Crusaders of California. It was over before it began, everyone said. The Cali kids didn't have a chance. David and Goliath. Blah, blah, blah.

Well, you know how that one turned out.



While Fricksters have been left behind to dig around in the dirt of what used to be.



JLers like Hawaii's Sawyer Silk Winner "Sugar" Backstrom are dominating the headlines.



4-3.

Crusaders.

JL, repeat.

FL, downbeat.

When Hawaii rolled over Brimingham 4-2 the following year, it wasn't even controversial.

And, sure, Brooklyn had to go 7 games to take down New Orleans, by holey cows, man The Robins represented an 84-win team—barely .500.

And, sure, the Crawdads had only won 82 games themselves, but still everyone was voting New Orleans before the match, and we don't think it had anything to do with the idea that people wanted to see how the Mardi Gras reacted to the idea of having a Landis Cup champ in town.

Quality, Quality, Quality ...

Johnson League pitchers' ERA was 10 points better than the Frick's (3.97 vs. 4.07). They walked 480—some fewer batters. Gave up 178 fewer homers.

And yet, the JL batters hit three points higher (.262 vs. .259). They blasted 104 more doubles, and 37 more triples. Given their pitcher's superiority, it's not surprising their HR's were down (the Frick hit 150 more), but compare that to the 178 fewer pitching homers and that tells a tale. Johnson League hitters stole more bases, and struck out a whopping 414 less times.

Want a head-to-head comparison beyond the Landis?

In interleague games, the Johnson league pulled a 36-game advantage.

So, yeah.

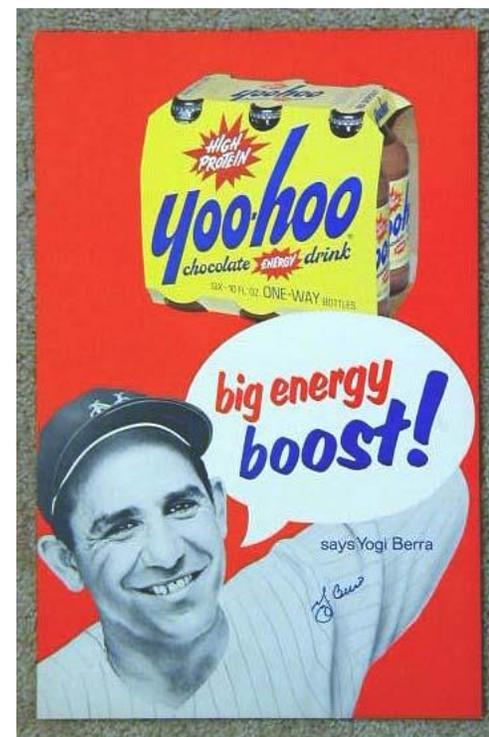
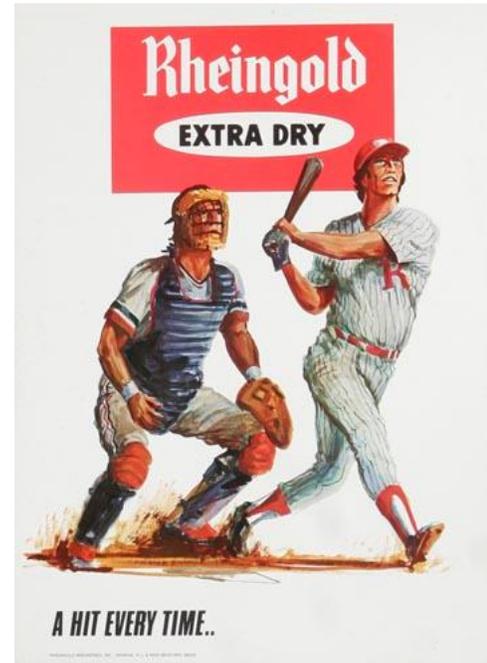
It's a Johnson era all over.

Will it Last?

What's that, kid?

You want to know if it will last? Hmmm...ya got me there. Things go in circles, yeah, sure they do. Before you know it you're going to be an old man like me. But it's hard to say what's happening is gonna change much.

Not when you've got the defending Landis champ adding quality every day, and when you've got the Phantoms still able to bludgeon any team into smithereens, and then there's Hawaii and with those young hitters and a rotation that all throws under 3.30 ERAs, and the Crusaders still looking for the magic, and the upstart kids in Yellow Springs getting into their sweet



spot, and Omaha working to reload maybe rather than rebuild, and the Genius, and Halifax figuring it out, and Greenville putting the parts together.

Then there's Madison growing dangerous now that the Savage pill's been swallowed, and Vancouver and Valencia biting at the bit.

There's a buzz over here, eh?

You can feel it, can't ya?

And you can cast a glance over Frick way and see the steely eyed gaze of the Vegas crew, always so close, but so far—their record bloated by beating the Frick, but still not able to pull down the big one. And ... well ... that's what you see there, right, Little Fan?

That's about all you see.

And, no, I ain't baised a bit. Nope. Not at all.



THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE FUN ...



Right?



MBWBA 2027 The PREVIEW

GATHER 'ROUND AS AARON WEINER PEERS INTO THE FUTURE



*The Media Guide staff is totally stoked to reveal that we've entered into a special merger in order to acquire rights to publish the previews of the most highly esteemed MBBA pundit on the face of the earth. No, not Huntsville's Kyle Stever. Nor is it Adam Dee—the other half of the Great Drew Zodcast. Not Genius, either. We're talking huge. We're talking the one, the only, the man with the crystalest of balls, the indefatigable prognosticator himself, the man who's opinion sways a million deals ... you got it in one ... **Carolina Kraken GM Aaron Weiner.***

Yes, indeed. Bazinga that, baby.

The Media Guide goes high-profile. Nothing but the best for our readers.



2027 JOHNSON LEAGUE OUTLOOK

Cheatsheet:

Projected finishes:

JLA: Brooklyn, Jacksonville, Halifax, Louisville

JLM: Huntsville, Yellow Springs, Omaha, Madison

JLP: Hawaii, California, Vancouver, Valencia

Wild card winners: Yellow Springs, California

Two years ago I wrote that the Hawaii Tropics were perhaps the least likely team to win a MBWBA title. The amusing thing about the second MBWBA title in Brooklyn's trophy case is that Brooklyn might have been a more likely champion, but an improbable winner. If you're wrapping your head around that paradox, let me be more clear: Brooklyn was projected to win the JL Atlantic, something made more certain by Halifax dismantling their team and Louisville being, well, Louisville. So Brooklyn had a very likely playoff berth to start the year. However, they played so poorly, with a run differential of -25 for the whole season, that they were considered to be the underdogs going into the playoffs. Then, something magical happened. The Robins took down the 94-win Tropics and the 97-win Phantoms, then took down, New Orleans a team that hadn't lost a Landis since pitchers hit and Champ Kind (now 58 years old) was a Crawdad.

So are the Robins going to repeat as champions? Um, you tell me! It doesn't hurt that they're walking with Sunshine this season. Omaha's clearly out, but Huntsville is still definitely in, and they're ready and raring to go. Hawaii won a title all the back in '25; I'd say they're still in the conversation.

And then it gets murky. Yellow Springs dealt off Dieter Hartinger, but that's still a pretty good ballclub they have there. Vancouver is making a push, and California is still dangerous. Halifax is always dangerous with maybe the best middle of the order in the game, and Greenville is making a hard charge upward; do they have what it takes to knock off the champs?

One more thing: we officially retired the Frick League dominance meme after last season, when the Johnson League took their third straight title. I'm not sure it's time to start a Johnson League one, but the strangeness of two of their champions, 84-win teams like underwater Baltimore and California, would be



banished with a fifth title. If they win their fifth straight title this year – and they very well could – the JL is obviously the better league right now.

Note 1: All Gained/Lost players are through free agency unless otherwise indicated.

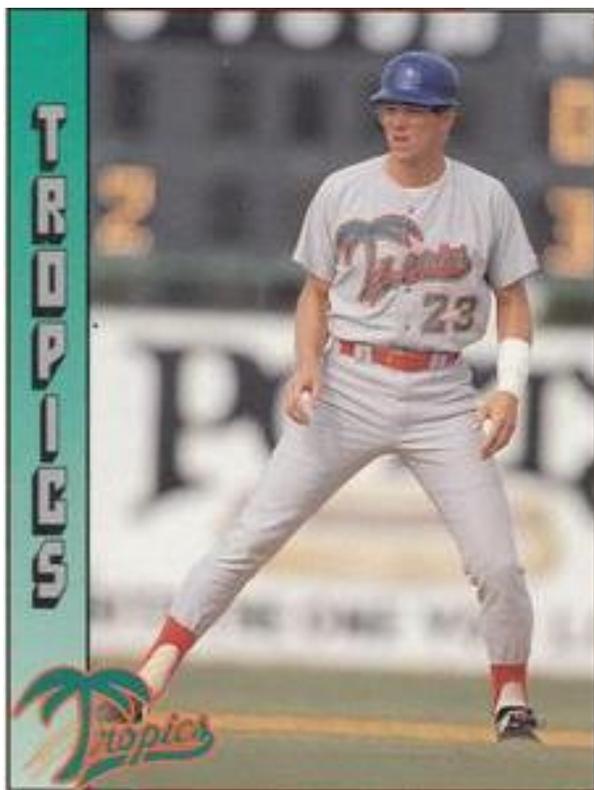
Note 2: Adding to the potential for a JL dominance meme, the JL went 990-954 for its first winning season against the Frick since I've been tracking this. Another year of that, too, and it's going to be clearer.



2027: JOHNSON PACIFIC

PROJECTED FINAL STANDINGS		W	L	PCT	GB	2026	RS	RA
	Hawaii	90	72	.556	-	94-68	708	617
	California	85	77	.524	5	83-79	628	594
	Vancouver	81	81	.500	9	79-83	590	611
	Valencia	71	91	.438	19	74-88	624	746

TEAM	GAINED	LOST
HAWAII	1B Edgardo Jaso (trade) RP Joost Breakwell	1B Rob Childers
CALIFORNIA	SP Julian Martinez P Li Beggs	RF Mark Stuart 1B Bob Garner RP Zach Bauer
VANCOUVER	SP Tully Crow (trade) SP Alfredo Granados (trade) SS Vincent Lancaster RP Santiago Galvez OF Frank Thomas Stelio Kontos (rookie)	SP Javier Trujillo (trade) RP Pedro Chaves (trade)
VALENCIA	SP Carlos Villalobas P Vicente Acevado P Luis Valenzuela 3B Manny Silva	SP Jorge Pereira RP Santiago Galvez OF Frank Thomas 1B Luis Navarro

**Editor's Notes:**

Both Valencia and Vancouver made moves to get better. Will this be the season they step up? Hawaii looks to stand tall, with the Crusaders giving chase again.





HAWAII TROPICS

GM: Mike Bieschke

“What he more resembled was the glue in the clubhouse. He was the joker, the guy for advice, the guy to lean on if you got yourself in trouble. The team obviously didn't pick up the option.”(about Matthew Stuart)

2026/1 No Leader?

OUTLOOK:

So, um, if you traded John Galt for Paul Backstrom, you might have expected a bit of a dropoff at shortstop. Instead, Galt has lumped after a major injury in Huntsville, and Backstrom is...well, let's just say that Backstrom just had one of the top seasons ever by a shortstop. In fact, it sent me to the record books, where I found out that Hall of Famer Bopper Kengos topped Backstrom's 43 homers just once, and Donnie Rotten and Jack Hanski matched it once, and Rafael Rodriguez never got close. His 6.3 WAR at shortstop is approximately the 30th best mark ever.

Why did I spend so much on the historic nature of Backstrom's season? Because it helps me to lead in to my main point: Hawaii is one of the teams most likely to drop off this season. Oh, don't get me wrong: I still think they're frontrunners for the division. But if you look closer, you see Floyd Carter and Manny Bautista aging, a gaping hole at catcher, a bit of a guess with Edgardo Jaso, and, yes, the obvious huge dropoff from Backstrom.

There are capable arguments against a major Hawaii dropoff; first and foremost, one Jody Nunez, who has a chance to be one of the best second round picks ever. Nunez already showed big flashes of talent in his rookie year and despite being a flyballer looks awfully good. Reynaldo Limon also looks like a healthy part of the youth movement. Jaso could be pretty good. And the pitching staff still looks solid. Which is why it's a snap to predict them for 90 wins and the division title. That's just less than last year.





CALIFORNIA CRUSADERS

GM: Ted Schmidt

"He told me the focus was 'rebuild', so I rebuilt the offense and the pen. That's what that means, right?" quipped GM Ted Schmidt about the deals."

California 2026.12 - Owner shifts focus to "rebuild"

OUTLOOK:

Here are California's last three win-loss records: 83-79, 84-78, and 84-78. The fact that two of those years the Crusaders made the playoffs – and one year won the title – hardly seems like their fault. So the fact that they missed the postseason in 2026 with a steadily improving Johnson League is unsurprising, even if they missed it by just three games. With Omaha high cliff diving this year, there's likely a wild card spot open; is California the team that will take it?

Some of the problems weren't their fault. For example, if you trade a top pitching prospect like Cisco Morales for a guy like Brian Whitten, you'd expect a guy with a career .850 OPS to put up at least league average numbers in your park; Whitten instead posted a .660 OPS in half a year with California. Slapmaster Juan Fernandez put up nearly the same numbers as he had for the last two years, but his impact was smaller with an improving league. Cris Vazquez fell off a cliff. If any one of those guys plays as well as they did in the past, they might have made the playoffs. The team is admittedly counting on 40 year old Maxwell Weiss, who continues to play amazing baseball, and 3B Alard Homan, who had a league average OPS at third base in a tough hitter's park while playing good defense. They will likely feel the loss of Mark Stuart, but Stuart's defense and production had been slipping. Daniel Labrie, Jr., is having some of the same problems as Stuart, but he still hit .303 last year for Cali.

We haven't even gotten to the meat of the California team yet, the pitching staff. Intelligent adults can argue whether Ricardo Diaz should have won the Steve Nebraska Award last year (I voted for Gomez) but he's clearly one of the league's top five pitchers. You're not going to do much better in the #2 and #3 starter spots than 2024 Steve Nebraska winner Jesus Tonche and star arm Gow Cho. The team is still searching for a great #5 starter, but #4 starter Nathaniel Snow had a 4 WAR last year and he's a very fine pitcher. The Crusaders have maybe the best closer in the game (and maybe one of the top five relievers ever) in Skip Glendenning, and they better, because their middle relief is just mediocre at best. They're giving Li Beggs a chance in the pen, though I'd probably start him over current #5 Gerardo Castillo.

California might suffer from mediocre or even poor defense this year, and in a park like California's, defense is very important with runs hard to come by. There are several places for improvement, but they could also get worse, potentially. Their run differential was already that of an 85-win team, and I don't see the problem putting them on that number again...for a change.



*“All we can do is pray that
we pound the crap out of
Omaha. God I hate
Omaha.”*

2026 #1 Sim 1

VANCOUVER MOUNTIES

GM: Brett Schroeder

OUTLOOK:

Gotta give Vancouver credit: the team has a strategy and they’re sticking to it. The Mounties keep blowing by my predicted records for them because, well, they’re right and I’m not. See, I can admit it. Their pitching staff has gotten some huge boosts this offseason, and at this point I have to accept the fact that Vancouver is definitely in play for the second wild card.

Vancouver’s pitching staff is one that flies directly in the face of the commonly accepted norms. Just about everyone there is homer-prone with good control and good stuff; they’ve accepted this particular passage because their ballpark is NOT homer-prone; as a result, a player like Angel Calderon can put up a 2.72 ERA and players like Javier Trujillo, Corey Edwards, Carlos Cortez, and Juan Hernandez can look like stars. In other words, it’s working. It also makes them vulnerable on the road, especially because their lineup...

Actually, before I start knocking their lineup, I should note that as a team, Vancouver had a better WAR for batters than MBWBA champion Brooklyn...but they also had a team .652 OPS, bad even for the no-hit Johnson League. As a result, Vancouver was again the only team to score less than 600 runs last year, and they were 40 points worse in OPS and 34 runs worse than 11th place Valencia. Stelio Kontos isn’t going to change all of that himself, though he will damn sure try.

Vancouver has what looks like a team that’s awfully close to contending, but just isn’t quite there yet. Which means they’ll probably win 88 games (my top number for them) just to spite me. They need some hitters. Fortunately for them, they have the second rated farm in the game and ten of the top 100 prospects, so they’re climbing back. Next year, when they get \$33 million in cap space, is a more likely target.





VALENCIA STARS

GM: Lee Honigsfeld

“The Stars have finished the first month and to everyone's surprise they ended up with a winning record, going 14-11 in April...”

Valencia Stars:14-11 (.560) # 2

OUTLOOK:

If I were looking for the poster for what I thought a mediocre team looked like, I'd probably point directly to Valencia. The problem with this notion is that a team full of mediocrities is extremely difficult to forecast. It's been said that a team full of truly average players would probably play better than average, and this is probably true, but average players are sometimes slightly above and slightly below.

Take their rotation, for example. I think that despite their numbers, we could take a hard look at pitchers like Ezechiele Marrioto, Andre Jacobs, and Carlos Villalobas and say, with few reservations, that those guys are pretty average. Problem is that Villalobas has been godawful for a couple years, and Jacobs was just pasted last year. We might look at Luis Valenzuela and Juan Martinez and say, geez, those guys look like #4 and #5 starters, but they're not gonna be good. Their pen is slightly below average, I think, but still hovering around that middle ground.

Then we look at their lineup. Nearly completely devoid of star quality players, the Stars nonetheless have a huge collection of mediocrities. Christian Scott is considered the 18th best first baseman, but I'd put him more in the middle. Terry Collins is going to be held back by his OBP. Jason Dunn is writing jealous letters to Maxwell Weiss. Manny Silva looks like an interesting add, and might be pretty good for a third baseman, and, okay, Felipe Gonzalez is legitimately good, but this is a fairly marginal team throughout.

Valencia has managed 90 wins while underwater in run differential, so it's difficult for me to sit here and count them out before the season starts. They were a lot better than their run differential last year, too, winning 74 games instead of their expected 68 games. Someone's gotta finish in last place, and it's gonna be Valencia, but if you're looking for the lunchpail team in the JL, it's the Stars.



2027 JOHNSON MID-WESTERN

PROJECTED FINAL STANDINGS		<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>PCT</u>	<u>GB</u>	<u>2026</u>	<u>RS</u>	<u>RA</u>
		Huntsville	96	66	.593	-	97-65	848
Yellow Springs	88	74	.543	8	86-76	739	669	
Omaha	78	84	.483	18	96-66	724	599	
Madison	76	86	.469	20	75-87	682	744	

TEAM	GAINED	LOST
HUNTSVILLE	C Paul Scholes (trade) SP Cesar Sandoval (trade) Several top prospects, including last year's #1 overall Jesse Howard 1B Ed Curry (rookie) 2B Gerardo Guzman (rookie)	2B Chris Workman (trade) DH Cesar Valencia (trade) C Lewis Stephens SP Peter Bryant
YELLOW SPRINGS	SP Domingo Castillo SS Edward Allen (trade) 1B Jose Morin 2B Lucas McNeill (rookie)	SP Dieter Hartinger (trade) 2B Bryan Vogel (trade)
OMAHA	P Terrence Miller OF Victor Talboom (or is he a subtraction?) DH Eddie Macy Gobs of prospects	OF Emilio Rodriguez (trade) OF Iran Brito SS Jonathan Archer (trade) 1B Jorge Caballero RP Kazuhiro Kichida
MADISON	P Zach Bauer	OF Dusty Light, Jr.

**Editor's Notes:**

Madison keeps working to become their Savage best, Yellow Springs seems to have turned a corner, and Omaha's maybe struggling to find a new identity. None of that will probably matter, though ...

Because, in the end, no one can deny the vision of the Phantoms standing tall at the end of the season (least of all, GM Kyle Stever). That's just how the Phantoms roll, you know?



HUNTSVILLE PHANTOMS

GM: Kyle Stevers



“It's weird to be pessimistic heading into the playoffs in Huntsville's situation. And, still, seemingly completely justified.”

26.2. Limping Down the Stretch

OUTLOOK:

Holy gutpunch, Batman. Zowie! The Huntsville Phantoms took down the Omaha Barnstormers in the presumed “real” JL Cartwright series in the first round, and instead of completing their coronation as JL winners in the ACTUAL Cartwright series, the Phantoms were swept out of the playoffs in ignominious fashion by a Brooklyn team that finished underwater in run differential. Ouch.

In steady fashion, however, Huntsville peeled off a few bills from its successful team and bought themselves some top prospects. They downgraded in the process, but definitely nowhere near enough to cost themselves a playoff spot, and their farm system is now absolutely overflowing with talent to the point where they should have a very bright future.

Their present isn't so terrible. The Phantoms also went out and got All-Star catcher Paul Scholes, who will help against other teams' running games and hit well for a catcher. Hunter Eisenhower and Fernando Moreno are a dynamic duo in the lineup, and while John Galt's descent has been as rapid as his rise, he's still a good shortstop. The team is solid if unspectacular defensively and has a lot of lineup depth; we haven't even mentioned Kal El or intriguing rookie Ed Curry yet.

Speaking of depth, it used to be that nobody had more rotation depth than the Phantoms, and that is still true on the surface, as all five of their starters are at least average, with most of them above-average. However, their current sixth starter might be AA prospect Felipe Baez, and their bullpen right now, led by Bob Sanderson, is kind of a skeleton crew. We'll see what they do with this; maybe they're waiting on waiver claims.

It's difficult to envision a team with this much talent missing out on the playoffs, and so I won't. Huntsville should be in control of this division even with a potential challenger in Yellow Springs looming behind them, and with their outstanding farm they could own this thing for a while. The hits to the quality on the field should knock them back a few games, but Omaha's complete abdication changes that calculus somewhat.



YELLOW SPRINGS NINE

GM: Ron Collins



OUTLOOK:

The addition of Domingo Castillo is the sort of move that changes pretenders into contenders, but we shouldn't move too fast to stamp that on the Yellow Springs Nine right away. Let's examine the evidence: Castillo is replacing Dieter Hartinger in the rotation, and the two pitchers have somewhat similar pasts. Their second biggest add, Edward Allen, isn't really a gamechanger, just a nice shortstop. And while Lucas McNeill ought to be an upgrade over Bryan Vogel at this point in their respective careers (and will eventually be a huge upgrade) Vogel was still playing good baseball at age 34 last year, and word is that we won't see McNeill on Opening Day. So we shouldn't rush too quickly to judgment.

For example, who is Luis Baca anyway? Is he the .975 OPS monster he was in his rookie year? Is he the scary .750 OPS average player he was in 2025? Or is he somewhere in the middle, like the 4.1 WAR he put up last year with a .843 OPS? And should they be letting a guy with his injury history play the field anymore? Fortunately, the team has decent lineup depth at this point. Players like Luke Jordan, Salvador Gonzalez, and Carlos Medina have become solid regulars, and the team has a nice bench.

The rotation also has questions, but they also have some answers to those questions. Jose Chavez is clearly a frontline rotation starter. Lawrence Columbus LaLoosh was fantastic for the team in his rookie year, and has a real chance to be a #1 starter type in the next couple years. Add in the aforementioned Castillo and this is not a team you want to play in a short series. Alberto Sanchez and Jose Lopez both look above average for back-end rotation starters, too. Their bullpen could use a little work, but maybe some of those problems will work themselves out this year.

They're a team that might need a trade or two to fully realize their potential. They could use relief pitching and have extra infielders; they could use a little better outfield and have a couple extra prospects; there are inefficiencies in this team, and they have \$16 million in cap space to try to address them. However, their rotation is so good that it probably overwhelms the questions with the other parts of their team. There's some sculpting to be done here, but if you're looking for the frontrunner for the first wild card, it's Yellow Springs.

"I think hard about suing. They owe me, right? Kidnapping me? Dumping me in the deep freeze? Making me miss the entire season 17 of Game of Thrones? Joking about me at the local bar while they watch the Nine whack their way to another win? Calling me the GMcicle?"

That ain't right, eh? I mean. Seriously. Someone in this fan group owes me, right?

On the other hand, the club was in the playoffs. So I guess all is forgiven."

Nine Lives 26.02 – Outta da Deep Freeze



OMAHA BARNSTORMERS

GM: Fred Holmes



OUTLOOK:

Welcome to Omaha, home of everyone's favorite childhood book, "What To Do If Your Baseball Team Is Projected To Drop 20 Games In The Standings." Title in progress. I've been writing these a long time, and I don't think I've ever seen such a significant drop in WAR as the -19.6 the Barnstormers had this offseason. So, here's the question: is Omaha still a contender for anything?

Well, yes. It helped that they started from a high perch. Losing Iran Brito and Emilio Rodriguez would hurt anyone's team, and their lineup really is kind of a mess at this point, but the team philosophy stays in place: consistent contact hitting, speed on the basepaths, and strong defense. They never drew too many walks to begin with; just as few now. Sure, just about nobody is going to have a league-average slugging percentage, but this team could finish in the top half in batting average, and in a league where the average OBP last year was .316, that might be enough to keep them near average in that category. Still, if your #5 hitter is Ralph Fleming, most recently seen with a -1.4 WAR in Valencia and awful on defense, you might not have a good lineup. And Omaha doesn't.

Their pitching staff is still intact, as they didn't trade away a single starting pitcher this offseason or lose one. Enrique Gomez was last seen winning the 2026 Steve Nebraska Award, and the rest of the rotation is completely solid. Nobody expects 20-5, 2.37 from Atsumori Maeda again, but he should be good enough. Their bullpen is seemingly by committee, but there's a lot of strength there.

Did all of that wheeling and dealing get them a farm? Nope. But it did get them one significant chip: starting pitching prospect Cisco Morales. However, Omaha season ticket holders have to feel a little bit betrayed at this point. They might be turning to Page 5 in their policies (hyperlink <https://www.libertymutual.com/commercials>, go to the first commercial) to try to get a refund. I mean, Sunshine and Brito cost \$30 million combined and Omaha has \$40 million in cap space. They're not going to fall way down because their pitching staff is still better than most, unless, of course, they start dealing that too.

"The Barnstormers are expected to make another move or two before the deadline to shore up their bullpen, which has been one of the worst in the JL in the first half."

2026.2: Soto loses closer spot, demoted to AAA



MADISON WOLVES

GM: Chris Wilson



OUTLOOK:

Fans of the Madison Wolves will be pleased to know that they are no longer spending \$60+ million on Alfredo Salazar. This year, they are spending \$50 million for Salazar. Isn't that better? To say that this is crowding out all other Madison spending is obviously self-evident, but it's also worth noting that the Wolves are going to probably turn a profit for the first time since they signed him, enough, in fact, to temporarily get out of the red.

Addressing the team on the field isn't a pointless exercise. As Madison waits for some of their prospects to develop, most of their lineup is actually quite good, as I noted last year. Salazar will have to bounce back from a poor season, but even a poor season for Salazar is 4 WAR. He'll have 2026 batting champion Dusty Rhodes and speed demon Steve Dempsey to drive home this year. He'll have some protection, probably, too: Rupert Grant developed in a big hurry, and Ron Jimenez, the 2026 Joe Gillstrom runner-up, hit 36 homers in his rookie season. The rest of the lineup is a work in progress, but the core is good, young, and other than Salazar, cheap. (Of course, that's like saying that most of the stars look small except for that big Sun thing.)

The core of the rotation was also quite decent last year, which was the primary reason why they finished better than 90 losses. Jose Cisneros, Brooks McHall, and Germao Real might all be 3rd or 4th starter types, but they all pitched perfectly fine last year. The team is hoping that Marcos Villegas becomes the potential top of the rotation guy he looks like he could be, and flamethrowing Emilio Sanchez could have some promise as a starter. As it stands right now, the bullpen actually looks pretty good; Bart Ender has been a top reliever and the rest of the group isn't too poor, if inexperienced. The Wolves pitching staff finished last year in a virtual four-way tie for 11th place in pitching, which isn't particularly impressive, but as with the lineup, it's a work in progress.

Madison isn't going to win the division this year, but with some really significant jumps from key players, there's no reason why they can't finish at least where they were last year. Not that anyone should be surprised that Chris Wilson is pulling the team out of the disaster zone. The league is better when its premier teams are out of the doldrums, and Madison is one of the elite franchises in the league, once having won 13 consecutive division titles and one of the few still in their original location, home of two of the biggest stars to have ever played the game. I wouldn't be floored to see them take the second wild card as early as this year, though it'll probably be next.

"Don't look now, but somehow the Madison Wolves managed to pull-off consecutive months with a winning record."

That's What Cheesehead: 26.07
- Pleasant Surprise



2027 JOHNSON ATLANTIC

		W	L	PCT	GB	2026 W-L	RS	RA
PROJECTED FINAL STANDINGS	Brooklyn	85	77	.525	-	84-78	724	748
	Jacksonville	80	82	.494	5	71-81	733	822
	Halifax	78	84	.482	7	75-87	691	739
	Louisville	58	104	.358	Lots	76-86	684	688

TEAM	GAINED	LOST
BROOKLYN	OF Emilio Rodriguez (trade) 1B Rob Childers LF Thomas Phillips	OF Victor Talboom (trade)
JACKSONVILLE	SS Jonathan Archer 2B Chris Workman DH Cesar Valencia OF Emory Sharp RP Pedro Chaves P Jose Amaro RP Jesus Angel (Rule 5)	The city of Greenville Half the farm SP Alfredo Granados (trade) SP Roberto Ramos RP Joost Breakwell
HALIFAX	RP Julian Anderson SP Javier Trujillo (trade) RP Mark Burns	Nothing notable
LOUISVILLE	SP Liam Pringle (trade) 1B Mike McPherson (trade)	C Paul Scholes (trade) SP Domingo Castillo SP Gabriel Campos (2028 HoF Cl)

**Editor's Notes:**

Defending Landis champion is a true Beast in the East now, but Greenville moved to Jacksonville, and Halifax took a step back in 2026. Is this the time of the Sluggers? Will the Genius rise to the post season for the first time in six seasons? Uh. Probably not.





"I'm not going to lie. I never liked Brooklyn."

Martín Félix (Players Tribune: Milestone)

BROOKLYN ROBINS

GM: Alan Ehlers

OUTLOOK:

There's a trophy in the case and Victor Talboom is in Omaha. Did anyone have a better six month postseason/offseason than the Brooklyn Robins? I'm not sure it's possible. Considered maybe the biggest underdog in the playoffs with a run differential of -24, playing against the odds favorites Huntsville, Brooklyn not only beat Huntsville in the JL Cartwright, they SWEPT the Phantoms. I couldn't think of an upset anywhere near those proportions that also featured a sweep, and I tried to look back through the annals to find one. It turns out there are a VERY small number of sweeps in ANY round of the playoffs, much less that are big upsets:

Unexpected Sweeps In League History

Carolina (97 wins) over New Orleans (109 wins), 2020 FL Doubleday

Valencia (94 wins) over California (98 wins), JLCartwright 2014

Seattle (97 wins) over New Orleans (107 wins), FL Cartwright 2013

Baltimore (89 wins, now Brooklyn) over Chicago (93 wins), JL Cartwright 2013

Long Beach (89 wins, now Tucson) over Montreal (98 wins), FL Doubleday 2005

Seattle (92 wins, +70 run differential) over Las Vegas (93 wins and +140), FL Cartwright 2002

Vancouver (102 wins) over Madison (103 wins), JL Cartwright 1999

The only one I think compares is 2013, when Seattle took down New Orleans to deny them a possible three-peat, but even then, Seattle had outscored the Crawdads that season. I don't think we've ever seen a more unlikely sweep.

The Robins celebrated their win by dealing Talboom, the worst CF in the MBWBA, and three big prospects to Omaha for Emilio Rodriguez, only one of the best CF in the history of the league. The difference between Talboom's -2.4 WAR and Rodriguez' 5.4 WAR is 7.8, which is about as far as you could possibly upgrade at any position, period. The move accounts for all of the Robins' league leading 6 WAR upgrade this offseason. The move addresses and solves the biggest problem the Robins had: offensive continuity.

For a MBWBA title winner to be acquiring their #3 and #4 hitters is just obscenely strange; the Robins offense, however, was terrible during the regular season. A 11 team offensive WAR isn't nearly enough to impress anyone; before Rodriguez, the position player with the highest 2026 numbers was platoon hitter Enrique Salazar, who posted an outstanding .993 OPS last year in 300 AB. Rob Childers is also not a small get either, as the first baseman could bounce back now that he's back with the franchise he started with. The lineup still isn't all that great, however, and the Robins' defense is absolutely lousy, even with Rodriguez.

Fortunately, any offensive upgrades will only help a truly outstanding starting rotation. Rick Ward was maybe the best \$8 million anyone spent for anything, as the former minor league free agent is now the ace of the Robins' staff. With Salvador Barron and Joey Budding in addition to Ward, the Robins might have the most playoff-ready starting three in the game. Mario Mendez and Jose Garcia round out maybe the highest-rated rotation in the MBWA. They have a fine late-inning guy in Jose Castro as well, though their bullpen is shaky in a number of spots.

There are two schools of thought if you play in a hitter's park, as the Robins do. The first school is that you get the best pitchers you can and let the hitters take care of themselves, because they'll hit anyway. The second is that you get the best hitters you can because the pitchers will hypothetically always be problematic. The Robins have taken the first idea to the extreme, at least in the rotation. While the results weren't great (11th place in runs allowed), this sort of elite unit should make for some interesting times in Brooklyn. They should make sure they carry some late-inning defensive replacements in the outfield and hope their middle relief isn't as bad as it looks, but Brooklyn should be right in the mix at the end for the division title again, and depending on the strength of their division opponents I would expect them to take it again.





JACKSONVILLE HURRICANES

GM: Tyler Simmons

“In order to protect the Moonshiners' franchise value and ability to contribute to the community, the team must now pursue other stadium options and work expeditiously towards concluding its relationship with the district in an orderly manner,” concluded Simmons.”

T100 Proof 26.02 -
Moonshiners on Move?

OUTLOOK:

It's always interesting to see an owner grab the team and take over the reins in a dramatic way. Greenville has become Jacksonville, and there's a lot of new hope for the team, as they've made huge move after huge move this offseason. In a steadily weakening division and an expected record of 73-89 last year, there was some logic to trying to take a step forward.

The new-look Jacksonville offense features quite a few talented players, including former Huntsville star second baseman Chris Workman and slugging DH Cesar Valencia, Jonathan Archer, Emory Sharp, and last year's breakout star, Elmer Mould. Dave Robertson has quite a bit of promise behind the plate, and the team is very good defensively at nearly every position. A lot of their aging players are injury prone, but if they stay healthy this should be a pretty fair lineup.

The rotation is not quite so remade, and as a result, the team may struggle somewhat to keep the score down. Yes, Harry Considine is a solid 1A starter, with excellent stuff and solid peripherals. However, #2 starter Juan Lucero's internals were already a problem before his movement started to decline this offseason, and Bertolomeu Bolota didn't take particularly well to his new franchise, though he could improve. Jose Amaro is a shot in the dark, though he might actually be okay. Ye Kung doesn't seem ready and Andy Martin seems washed up, so there are some really big questions in the Panhandle in the rotation. The bullpen, however, looks at least average and might be better than that, which is a nice touch from a last-place team last year.

Time will tell whether Jacksonville's Tyler Simmons is more of Mark Cuban or Dan Snyder. He brought in some big names, but it remains to be seen whether the big names are only reputation or whether they can still actually play. Jacksonville still has bullets in the gun and \$30 million in cap space, but it would be nice if they'd actually show some success before trying to create a Superfriends team. For now, a five game improvement doesn't seem too far out of bounds and puts them in striking distance of Brooklyn.



HALIFAX HAWKS

GM: Tim Meseck

OUTLOOK:

Chicks dig the long ball. Before last year, the Halifax Hawks, who hadn't finished below fourth in home runs since 2019, finished in a tie for eighth place in homers, which is in part what sunk them to just their second losing record since 2015.

If a .265/.355/.490 slashline with 65 extra base hits and a 3 WAR sounds good to you, you don't know Bo – Bo Jordan, that is. Finally in decline after a straight decade of Hank Aaron-like dominance, Jordan's 30 homers last year were his lowest total since 2015, his second year in the bigs. Now 35 years old, Jordan is starting to lose some his trademark power and is now just merely very good, not great. Fortunately, Jordan is supported somewhat by lineup members Cisco Guerrero and Elroy Hinson; Guerrero had a tough 2026 season but the 23 year old should bounce back, and Hinson continued his superstar numbers by leading the JL in OBP last year. Characteristic of a Halifax lineup, the rest of the lineup is fairly poor, with Pancho Torres and an aging Gilberto Pacheco the best of a bad lot.

The rotation also has a fair amount of star power in it. The duo of Sancho Delgado, the pitching cornerstone of the franchise, and veteran Martin Lewis is one of the better top twos in the game. Daniel Jordan is a serviceable 3, but the dropoff is fierce after those three, and there aren't any particularly good fourth or fifth starter candidates. There aren't any particularly good relievers in the pen, because while Wally Lopez is closest nobody is really great, while nobody's terribly bad. That sort of pen can go either way.

With a lot of players flying out of town last season, either this year is going to be their third losing season in the last 13, or the players they held over from last year are good enough to rise back up and take the division. My money's on the former.

“For anyone who cares, the Hawks won 17, lost 11 during the spring, best record in the Johnson League save for Huntsville who went 18-10. Of course, that means absolutely nothing.”

2026 #3 The Trade (Continued)





LOUISVILLE SLUGGERS

GM: Stu Hopkins

OUTLOOK:

Louisville tried move forward in the 2026 season, but once they realized it wasn't working, they threw in the towel, trading away Harry Considine and Boone Carlyle. They've done this before; Sunshine Rodriguez is, after all, a Brooklyn Robin after being a Omaha Barnstormer. But something stinks in Louisville, and, yes, that's the team you're smelling.

I wrote basically the same thing about Tucson, but it's possible that the Sluggers are actually worse than the Cactus this year. Brian Clough is still with the team, and he'll produce enough offensively at 33 years old to overcome his late-career defensive deficiencies, but he's really it offensively, and he's making \$23 million Also, while Anastasio Quintana is a fairly good starting pitcher, he's basically all they have in the rotation unless you're a big Liam Pringle fan.

The bullpen is still pretty good, but that seems like mismanagement more than anything – they shouldn't still have a bullpen if they're this terrible. I suspect that will correct itself during the year as the Sluggers continue to tear it down. The Sluggers do have the 5th rated farm system in the game and eleven of the top 100 prospects, so they are well on their way back to respectability, but the team is so pasted that it looks like a kindergarten project. If they don't lose 100 games it will be surprising to everyone. If they lose 110 it will not be surprising to ME.

"We are perfectly positioned to capture the JLA flag at the end of 2026,"boasted Louisville GM Genius Hopkins today. "Everybody else in the division sucks just as much as we do."

2016.7 Sluggers rudderless as usual



2027 FRICK LEAGUE OUTLOOK

Cheatsheet:

Projected finishes:

FLA: Carolina, Atlantic City, Montreal, Havana

FLM: New Orleans, Indy, Birmingham, Des Moines

FLP: Las Vegas, Calgary, Seattle, Tucson

Wild card winners: Atlantic City, Calgary/Indy

We all thought that four-time MBWBA champion New Orleans would return to the Landis Memorial Series at some point or another, but nobody would have expected them to follow the blueprint they had in 2026. Returning to the title round for the first time since 2019, the Crawdads fell to the Brooklyn Robins to lose their first Landis since 2004. However, just making a Landis has to be an accomplishment for this year's Crawdads: New Orleans made the Landis with just a +12 run differential and an 82-80 record in 2026, and had to win three rounds to even get their shot at Brooklyn. New Orleans' 82-80 playoff spot was the worst record for a Frick League playoff team since 2008, when Atlantic City won their division with the same record, and would have showed the power of a second wild card position if Calgary, their Geoghegan opponent, had not had precisely the same record.

A pennant from an 82-80 team, combined with the fact that the Johnson League has now won four straight Landises, brings up a lot of questions. Is the Johnson League now a better league? *[ED: See our feature on this question]* The Frick League hasn't had a repeat winner since 2009, but are the Crawdads now the least likely team to pull off the feat? Will this Las Vegas team ever win a pennant, or are they perpetually cursed to flame out in the playoffs? Indy and Carolina are both repeat playoff teams: is one of these teams ready to take the next step?

Four out of the five Frick League teams that made the playoffs last year had 90 wins or less, a very attainable figure, and the FL put two 82-80 teams into the playoffs last year. There's a surprise challenger somewhere in the league; who is it? How about Calgary, who just keeps winning against all odds? Does Birmingham have another deep run left in them? How about Atlantic City, who always seems dangerous and may have improved again this offseason. Is it Havana, who spent big this offseason, or Montreal, whose young players are starting to come of age?



It's going to be a very exciting season in the Frick League, and the stakes are high. The FL's presumed frontrunner, Las Vegas, hasn't won a pennant since 2009. If the Crawdads can rise up from barelyover .500 and win a pennant, there's no obviously dominant team. It's literally anyone's ballgame in the Frick League.

Note 1: All Gained/Lost players are through free agency unless otherwise indicated.

Note 2: The Johnson League went 990-954 last year, which was the first time they've had more wins than the Frick League since I started tracking it in the previews. I have the Frick marginally ahead this year, (978-966) but I'm not married to the idea the way I've been in the past.



2027 FRICK PACIFIC

PROJECTED FINAL STANDINGS		W	L	PCT	GB	2026	RS	RA
		Las Vegas	95	67	.586	-	100-62	779
	Calgary	83	79	.512	12	82-80	710	725
	Seattle	79	83	.488	16	74-88	733	775
	Tucson	61	101	.377	#NA	66-96	659	775

TEAM	GAINED	LOST
LAS VEGAS	OF Mark Stuart OF Emory Sharp (trade)	RP Jesus Angel RP Barrett Woods
CALGARY	2B Brian Vogel (trade) SP Dieter Hartinger (trade)	RP Antonio Rodriguez
SEATTLE	OF JJ Abrams SP Roberto Ramos RP Felix Gonzalez P Lorenzo Pena (trade)	IF Doug Glover (2028 HoF Class) P Terrence Miller RP Wayne Williams
TUCSON	SS Brieuc Becker (Rule 6) SP Donald Foster (trade) RP Eric Trujillo (trade)	SP Tully Crow (trade) 2B Andre Wellington SP Cesar Sandoval (trade) 1B Edgardo Jaso (trade) DH Eddie Macy SS Edward Allen (trade) DH Fulton Reed RP Felix Gonzalez

Editor's Notes:

Everything about the Frick Pacific seems to be in a strange state of static transition.

With Tucson in full deconstruction and rebuild mode (again?), Vegas maybe "retooling" with solid kids, and Calgary making a push, can Seattle climb out of the lower division in the Frick Pacific?



LAS VEGAS HUSTLERS

GM: Matt Rectenwald



OUTLOOK:

My projections were naturally conservative for the Las Vegas Hustlers last year; they blew right past them. Naturally I didn't expect them to finish #1 in offense and #1 in pitching; it wasn't a great year for offense, but Vegas did take first place with 4.8 runs per game, well ahead of a pack between second and fourth. A lot of the improvement comes from four of the scariest words in the league: Las Vegas youth movement; this may mean they've got a while to run yet.

The three leaders of the offense are all under 26, but Gervasio Ridder and Alfredo Martinez are both 22 or younger; Jack Gulliver is 26 right now and looks to be in his prime. Ridder is out until June with a broken elbow suffered before the playoffs last year; it hasn't seemed to hurt him physically yet. Tony Banuelos is a speed demon on the basepaths, having stolen 70 bases in each of the past two seasons, and on the other corner is new signing Mark Stuart, late of California, who is one of the best righthanded hitters in the game.

The rotation needs very little introduction. Gary Estes has been the sheriff here for a while. Phillip Morris has been with the team since 2019 and Mario Gonzalez since 2021. Mike Bailey is entering his third year with the Hustlers, and he's been nothing but solid since arriving; Mario Lopez should be a serviceable fifth starter. It's probably not as good as some of the rotations they were throwing five years ago, but it's still a top group.

The Hustlers should be able to weather the storm without Ridder, especially in their weak sauce division. There isn't a serious contender for the division title other than Vegas, as Seattle appears to be playing roulette, Calgary appears to be outperforming their underwater run differential every year, and Tucson has been blowing up the team since last season. So welcome back to the playoffs, Recte. The question is whether or not your guys can actually get it done there this year, since the Hustlers haven't won a pennant since 2009.

"Why does this always happen to me right before the playoffs?"

2026, Sim #18 Chatter



CALGARY PIONEERS

GM: Kevin Dickson



OUTLOOK:

For the last two years, I've written that Calgary finished above .500 despite not being particularly good. In 2026, same thing. Their run differential was not the worst of any team with a winning record last year; that credit goes to MBWBA Champion Brooklyn. With Brooklyn and New Orleans winning pennants last year while barely finishing above .500, I no longer think that Calgary, who made the playoffs at 82-80, is extremely unlucky.

A lot of the credit for the winning record has to go to Hector Cano, whose Hall of Fame credentials continued to boost. Cano posted his highest OPS since 2019 last year, though he didn't repeat the 55 homers he hit last year, knocking "only" 39 with a .307 average and getting his 2000th MBWBA hit. At 34 years old, Cano now has 485 homers; I'll be voting for him.

Of course, the team has other players. Tony Franco came back to earth last year with a solid 3.4 WAR at second base, but not like the MVP-like 7.7 WAR he put up in 2025. He's still a superior defender with good bat control. The big surprises last year were 1B Bernardo Perez, who had just 276 at bats – and 33 homers and a preposterous 1.005 OPS, and catcher Carlos Garcia, who had a .862 OPS and a 5.3 WAR. Calgary is a hitter's park, so it amplifies normal players quite a bit; still, one wouldn't expect either to repeat quite as well. Dan Leonard continues to underachieve and at this point should probably be traded. Deion Jordan was just awful; one wonders whether he'll get another shot.

I've also seen a lot worse rotations than Calgary's group. The pitching staff is improved with the return of Jorge Jimenez from the DL; last year he started the season injured. The offseason acquisition of Dieter Hartinger from Yellow Springs gives the team a #2 starter, though by all accounts he currently wants to test free agency. Hartinger's numbers have been fairly mediocre for a while, but he does have plenty of talent. Fernando Alaniz looks like a #3 starter to me, though he was considerably better than that last year, and Lambert Snabel had a total revival last year in Calgary. Rob Miller is a good closer, and Sake Kevit was a good EBA import last year, but the bullpen is mostly marginal.

The Marauders aren't in the same class as the Hustlers, but there's zero reason they can't capture a wild card again. Their offense is highly suspect; many of the performers above might not be quite so good in another park; their middle relief is also quite marginal, and their rotation might have significantly overachieved last year. However, they keep proving me wrong, so maybe this time they'll do the same thing and prove me right.

"When asked about rumors of an "Ultimatum Meeting" with several players Dickson declined comment."

Trail Droppings 2026-4 Calgary
Going For It?



SEATTLE STORM

GM: Nathan Egan



OUTLOOK:

Seattle stumbled badly in 2026, falling to a 74-88 record and tying for the most runs allowed in the league with 775 on the season. The interesting thing, though, is that their offense kind of held up fine; in a down year for offense, Seattle's 733 runs scored was second in the league, even if that's only a meager 4.5 runs per game. So, sort of fine. It's the same storyline for Seattle every year, and it is this year too: can their hitting outscore their poor pitching staff?

The team concept is almost like a roto strategy; pitchers are unpredictable, so why not concentrate everything on hitting? That said, the Storm did finally spend some money on pitching, so it's a start. Key free agent signing SP Roberto Ramos has taken his lumps the last couple years, but his internal numbers look good: 3.3/1 K/BB ratio, 7 strikeouts per nine innings. He's had a propensity to give up homers in Halifax, which is easy to do. I like the signing; he's only a year off of being a 3.5 WAR starter. And, then, well, not a lot. It looks like they're giving a shot to Lorenzo Pena, who could be an interesting player. Then it's the same Edward Davis/Kyle Moore/Esteban Rivera group they've been running out there for the last few years. The bullpen is full of holes, even moreso than in recent years.

As usual, of course, you'll get no complaints about the offense. Juan Escobar and Jorge Rodriguez are as good a tandem as it gets, and if you drew up a pair of top of the order hitters in a laboratory you might get something that looks like Ralph Benson and Hector Valentin. Alejandro Dominguez has been outstanding for several years now. JJ Abrams might be an interesting add, but he shouldn't be an everyday player; his body probably won't hold up. Pete King might have another good year or two left in him. Kirk Burkett is still a solid two-way catcher.

In other words, the Storm still have a very good offense with a very marginal pitching staff. It's going to be interesting to see how long they can maintain the current group; like last year, they have no money issues and nothing disappearing this year they can't live without. We'll see if they roll sevens and elevens or boxcars and snake eyes.

"After a terrible 2-8 sim to start the season had Seattle fans searching for the nearest ledge to jump off of, Seattle rebounded with a 7-2 sim to get to 9-10 on the season."

Chasing The Storm 2026-1 Sim
2 Review



TUCSON CACTUS

GM: Stephan Lane



OUTLOOK:

The first thought I had looking at Tucson's roster was this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stdi-1tIUhM>

If you were a Tucson Cactus fan, you might not be one now. I defy any reasonable person to tell me how this team is a contender this year, and if you found something, I'm sure that as soon as you've identified it, the team has already traded it, or will damn sure trade it to you. It's so bad they're giving away tickets on the street they can't sell for \$7.50 – I think that's what a meal at Wendy's costs now.

There are exactly two players I'm willing to spend copy on this year: Brieuc Becker, who is a defensively-minded infielder who's already 28, and DH Thomas Hollis, about whom I can calmly say that he's not the worst DH in the league. Becker will probably be gone by July. Hollis is probably immovable, even at his meager price, unless some team is desperate.

The team has a payroll of \$29 million, which isn't the lowest we've ever seen but really does fit the situation they're in. This year might get them out of a world of debt and pain caused by the previous owner chasing division titles or .500 records, neither of which ever happened. It ain't happening this year either. This team is a nightmare. I'm putting them on 101 losses, but this team could be far, far worse.

"Asked to give his thoughts on the 2026 season overall, Lane was evasive. "Have you guys heard of the MBBA's Fall League?"

2026.7 - The Tucson Sun - 2026
Wrap Up



2027 FRICK MID-WESTERN

		W	L	PCT	GB	2026	RS	RA
PROJECTED FINAL STANDINGS	New Orleans	90	72	.556	-	82-80	686	674
	Indy	83	79	.512	7	90-72	724	660
	Birmingham	74	84	.457	16	76-86	706	712
	Des Moines	72	90	.444	18	71-91	643	761

TEAM	GAINED	LOST
NEW ORLEANS	RP Ed Phillips RP Hani Tinsley (trade)	OF JJ Abrams 1B Julio Morin
INDY	Nobody notable	SS Vincent Lancaster RP/SP Julian Martinez RP Vicente Acevado RP Miguel Lara LF Thomas Phillips
BIRMINGHAM	IF Ron Holmes RP Fernando Lopez	3B Maxim Knight 1B Wilson Acevado RP Jose Marroquin OF Tommy McKinley
DES MOINES	2B Rien van de Wijngaard (Rule 6)	OF Berend Velthorst RP Fernando Lopez

**Editor's Notes:**

It's interesting times in the Frick Midwestern

The Grasshoppers underwent a historic change in the front office, and hope to keep rolling. Des Moines is working on a 19-season slump, and Birmingham took a 21-game dive in the standings last season.

Amid this turmoil, New Orleans hopes to catch lightning in a bottle two years in a row.

Hold onto your seats, gents. The FLM is going to be a wild and crazy ride.



NEW ORLEANS CRAWDAD

GM: Jim Crawford



“This wasn’t supposed to be their year.”

“Then a miracle happened.”

Crawdads Chronicles 26.02 -
Crawdads Surprise in
Postseason

OUTLOOK:

The Crawdads went 81-81 in 2025 and 82-80 in 2026. Normally, I’d suggest that shows some consistency, but the second number was good enough for a playoff spot that the Crawdads parlayed into a pennant and a Landis berth, even if they were unable to beat a suspect Brooklyn team. It was a remarkable feat, especially considering that the Crawdads had just a \$71 million payroll, one of the lowest in the league; in fact, it is the lowest payroll for a pennant winner ever. New Orleans appears to not have improved this offseason; are they secretly better than we think?

There are some interesting quirks about this team. For example, this might be the most right-handed lineup in the MBWBA. You basically have to go to reserve outfielder Tomas Fuentes to find a lefthanded hitter they can use; there’s barely another one on the roster. As a result, the numbers for this offense should be wildly inconsistent. They might struggle quite a bit against tough righties, despite the fact that their top guys, Pedro Canales, Mark Dempsey, and Maximo Cuevas, are all equally good contact hitters against lefties and righties. The lineup doesn’t look bad, even if it is dramatically righthanded, and they could improve on their seventh-place finish in offense last year.

If they do, they could easily win 90 games, because the New Orleans pitching staff is still rock solid. Led by Manuel Ramirez and Miguel Datz, the Crawdads are the only team in the league that can compete with the top two of Birmingham, which is great if you ever get into a playoff series. The rest of their rotation is also not bad: Michael Leroy is the best #3 starter in the business, Luis Espinoza went 14-9 with a 2.92 ERA last year, and Jorge Ortiz has some promise in the fifth starter spot. The bullpen is fine, but highly unimpressive in most spots and will be wildly inconsistent.

New Orleans might have the highest beta in the game, but I think their floor is where they’ve been the last couple years. This team looks like a 90-win team to me and so far and away better than Indy that I’m putting my money where my mouth is: I’m gonna say Indy gets knocked out of first place for the first time in half a decade. You can put that in the books and mock me for it later if I’m wrong.





INDY GRASSHOPPERS

GM: Fletcher Conner

OUTLOOK:

The Indy Grasshoppers have one of the strangest rosters I've ever seen. If you looked at another team paying Francisco Medina, Chad Lawrence, Kevin Lee, and Sergio Ramos a combined \$46 million, you might think that team had lost its bleeping mind. And then you look at what those players have actually done, and you just stare, and say, "Oh. Now I get it." Except for Lee, that is: he's just overpaid.

Here's what all that spending has done though: it's choked out the second half of the lineup. Valeri Kharlamov and Mariano Soriano are still both wonderful players, a good basis for any lineup. Newman Watson has been very solid. Lawrence and Ramos have been consistent 30-homer guys. And then, um, the rest of the guys can play pretty good defense. Jesus Mora is the best of a bad bunch offensively. Somehow this group finished 3rd in offense last year, though it was a down year for offense in the Frick League; most of the time 4.5 runs per game is fifth or sixth (which relatively speaking is more like it).

Also, it's time to retire the old trope that Indy's defense causes their pitching prowess. It was a mixed bag on that last year, enough so that I'm willing to put it to bed. Indy's FIP last year was 3.98 and their team ERA was 3.85, not a significant difference. Medina and Lee both had higher numbers than their FIP, and staff ace Eduardo Lopez's span wasn't enough to be statistically important. Lopez was every bit as overwhelming as you'd expect, and Medina has been surprisingly good for the last five seasons; you wouldn't expect quite such outstanding numbers from a righty control specialist. Chester Kipling has been a nice addition to the staff, which considering he was dealt for Mike Love is a big deal. Lee could bounce back, though he's just a good #3 starter at this point in his career. Worth noting: other than star closer Jeffrey Waller, the bullpen is a tire fire, no doubt in part because of all the high salaries at the top.

Indy is good enough to contend for the division title again, but this group isn't even the team that's been mystifying me for years. Last year's 90 win total was their lowest since 2021, the first of their six consecutive division titles. Their rotation is still good, but their bullpen is just awful and their lineup isn't nearly as good as it's been in recent years. I would be remiss if I didn't predict a significant fall for the Grasshoppers, who will probably laugh at me, say "screw you," and win 95 games.

"The ghosts of the past and present are haunting the Indy Grasshoppers as they limp out of April with an 11-16."

The Hopper 2026.1: Indy on Paranormal Lockdown



BIRMINGHAM BANDITS

GM: Mike Calvaruso



“With the Bandits season off to it’s usual slow start, Manager Mike Calvaruso was looking for some kind of spark that might wake the team up.”

The Outlaw Chronicles 2026-5
No-No for Rodriguez

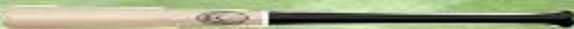
OUTLOOK:

I predicted a significant fall for the Bandits last year, and, yea, verily, it came to pass. It wasn’t the toughest call ever: I wrote that: “They’re pegged to drop back at least ten games this year just from attrition; the question is whether or not they fall further.” Well, they fell further. The question for the Bandits is whether they have the horses to take advantage of a suddenly seemingly vulnerable Indy team and a New Orleans team that won just 82 games last year.

Nobody has to question whether or not they have the necessary pitching. Juan Jose Ornelas and Nelson Ramirez are two of the best pitchers in the MBWBA on any team. Juan Rodriguez could play a lot better this year, and he’s on a bargain contract for the next four years after this one. You could do a lot worse than Emilio Nabo and an aging Dave Wren at the #4 and #5 starter spots, and their bullpen is extremely strong in the late innings with Jonathan Bowen and Cesar Martinez.

However, their offense is highly suspect after the trio of Diego Moreno, Juan Cruz, and Pedro Burgos. Even if you’re buying Vincent Kompany, who has been a consistent 2.5-3 WAR player for several years at second base, he’s really just about it other than Ulbert Spitsbaard, who hasn’t ever recaptured the success of his rookie year – unless you’re buying on Vicente Marin. The Bandits have virtually no room to maneuver under the cap and virtually nothing at all on the farm. It’s worth noting, also, that none of the first members of the trio is a superstar or even more than an above-average regular, so it’s not like they’re carrying the lineup.

The good news is that the team has improved defensively, and along with their pitching they definitely won’t bottom out this year. They’ll have some maneuverability next year as the team can shed 25 million in salary, so maybe next year they’ll be able to put together an offense.





“Cap is not the best on the bump for the Kernels, but everyone loves him at the bar.”

Uncle Adam's Radio Roundup
26.05: Worst Pitchers in
Baseball

DES MOINES KERNELS

GM: Edward Murphy

OUTLOOK:

All of a sudden, you don't have to squint to see the Des Moines Kernels coming together as a ballclub. They're likely profitable, they're flush with prospects, they have a low payroll and a reasonable rotation, and Dani Lopez looks like a solid young star. Contenders, right? Um, no. While there's no question that Des Moines is arriving, their train is still out on the tracks. They know it, too – good for them.

For example, their lineup is basically Dani Lopez and, er, nothing much. They could call up William Moreland to play DH, but they're wisely giving him time in AAA first to avoid triggering his arbitration years. Moreland is ready to come up and just plain rake, but he's got another two years in the minors if they want. Cisco Arreola is already in the majors, and while he's done nothing for two years he's got All-Pro promise. Jorge Martinez is a nice piece, but they might let him walk for draft picks or trade him if he keeps asking for eight figures. Jeremy Carter should be traded somewhere. Rule 6 draftee Rien van de Wijngaard should be a helpful player in the infield, though he's more supersub than starter.

The team also has an underrated rotation. Mike Davis isn't as good as we thought he might be, but he's a consistent 1A type. Tavio Ciccolella might be one of the best Rule 6 draft picks ever. Rio Underhill has been solid for them, and Ramon Hernandez is an interesting #4. Their bullpen is even improving, though they need a leader in there and some better arms; it's not a good pen, just not toxic. All in good time.

If they decided to use everyone, they could probably finish near or even at .500 this year. As it stands now, this guy still likes the direction the team is taking. They have a bunch of prospects I like in the pipe, some good pieces and they're profitable. At some point they should consider trading off lesser prospects for cash if they can; they could use the funds. If I'm projecting, I'd say their arrival point is 2029, when their payroll could go all the way down to \$35 million, and at that point they can make their push. Until then, they should do exactly what they've been doing.

2027 FRICK ATLANTIC

PROJECTED FINAL STANDINGS		W	L	PCT	GB	2026	RS	RA
	Carolina	90	72	.556	-	85-77	719	654
	Atlantic City	84	78	.519	6	76-86	665	680
	Montreal	82	80	.506	8	78-84	660	700
	Havana	81	81	.500	9	74-88	626	694

TEAM	GAINED	LOST
CAROLINA	SP Gustavo De La Torre IF Matheus Simeo (trade) 3B Jose Rodriguez (rookie)	SP Al Hall 1B Stu Baker SP Pennington Leftwich RP Julian Anderson
ATLANTIC CITY	SP Peter Bryant DH Raul Gonzalez (Rule 5) P Hiroyuki Rin (rookie)	CL Hani Tinsley (trade) SP Liam Pringle (trade)
MONTREAL	C Lewis Stephens SP Arend Glas (Rule 6) Leon Flores (rookie)	SP Carlos Villalobas
HAVANA	OF Iran Brito RF Berend Velthorst 1B Jorge Valencia RP Pascal Escobar	SP Gustavo De La Torre RP Jose Marroquin OF Francois Fremont



Editor's Notes:

Can Atlantic City circle the wagons and regain their mo-jo? Montreal's surging youth, Havana's big buck spending, and Carolina's historic dominance will do their best to keep it from happening.



CAROLINA KRAKEN

GM: Aaron Weiner



OUTLOOK:

Carolina flamed out in their first playoff series again. Despite winning the division, they were unable to score in the first round against the Indy Grasshoppers. The question thus remains: is this as good as the Kraken get? Are they perennial playoff contenders, only to fall immediately to playoff teams?

The good news for the Kraken is that they seem to have the first part of the equation sewn up. Adding Gustavo de la Torre to the team (in a very reasonable FA deal) immediately gives them one of the highest rated rotations in the MBWBA; they're still led by Billy Chapel, Jr., but they now have Angel Ramirez and Juan Lopez in addition to de la Torre and a host of fifth starter options. De La Torre replaces SP Pennington Leftwich, who had a career year and promptly lumped (and is still unsigned). Their bullpen has taken some hits lately, but the late inning group still looks solid.

Their lineup probably still needs a jolt somewhere, but it appears that they have enough players in it to finish in the top half of the FL. Ron Whitney appears to be just what the doctor ordered, especially if he hits for a better average in Year 2. Players like Miguel Carlson and Jorge Vargas look like perennial 2-3 WAR players. The team is trying out defensive stud 3B Jose Rodriguez at the hot corner and moving Eugene Russell across the diamond to fill Stu Baker's shoes; this will give them one of the more solid infield alignments in the game if Russell continues to develop at 1B.

Good defensively, good pitching staff, good offense; the Kraken finished second in runs allowed last year and had the highest OPS in the Frick League. The identity of the team has changed; instead of poor defensive players trying to outscore everyone, they have a solid defense trying to outpitch everyone and a pared-down offense that's much more power based than in the past. They're still not going to steal many bases, but they might win 95 games this year if everything goes right. The team might need to trade for a solid first baseman during the year, but, right now, the frontrunner for the very competitive FLA.

"The fact is that I went from a team with zero defense to a team with a great defense, and that made all the difference."

(Pennington Leftwich)

WK 7: Leftwich Wins First Nine



ATLANTIC CITY GAMBLERS

GM: Ryan Scott



“Unfortunately for the Gamblers, management was marooned on a desert island for much of the offseason.”

Boardwalk Empire #2 2026:
Absent Winter

OUTLOOK:

Atlantic City suffered a bigger stumble than I thought last year, dropping all the way to a 76-86 record and well out of contention much of the year. They’ve made a lot of bold moves this year to try to recapture their former playoff glory, though, and it’s possible to look at this franchise as a possible contender for the division crown this year.

Antonio Sanchez and Rafael Bido are still probably the best 1-2 lineup punch in the Frick, if not the MBWBA, and Boone Carlyle is a monster add for the Gamblers. With players like Manuel Garcia, Francois Fremont and Timmy Moulin getting on base for them, it should be a more productive lineup than last year. Admittedly, Sanchez hasn’t been the same player since a modest loss in bat speed two years ago; last year he hit just .265 for the season and at 29, the bat speed isn’t coming back. He’s still a premier on base threat, but his 2025 numbers are probably his new max. The rest of the lineup isn’t bad either: Jay de Coster is looking to bounce back from a serious sophomore slump, and Rule 5 pick Raul Gonzalez is a solid power threat.

The rotation is also led by the ageless Mingo Boone, who actually posted a career high in WAR last year at 34 years old (though not shockingly so). Jesus Paez has proven to be the solid top of the rotation member he looks like, and he’s provided a huge boost in the wake of former Gambler Gabriel Campos’ decline and departure. However, players like Peter Bryant and Cord McNally look like they’re on the downside of their careers. We might see Hiroyuki Rin join the rotation this year; he’s a very interesting pitcher. The bullpen isn’t a particularly strong unit, stemming in part from the departure of long time Gamblers closer Hani Tinsley. Jerry Johnson has been ready to take over for the perennial All-Star for years, and Jesus Feliciano also looks like a stud, but there are questions at nearly every other bullpen spot.

The team has some warts, but the lineup looks solid and the top two starters are among the better ones in the Frick League. There’s no reason that with a little luck or good play the Gamblers couldn’t come out on top in the FL Atlantic for the fourth time in six years.



MONTREAL BLAZERS

GM: John Callahan



“...if only there was some upside with him...”

(Regarding Jared Gillstrom)

Blazers Rookie Watch Part 1 -
2026

OUTLOOK:

Montreal let Jared Gillstrom take his hacks last year at the major league level, which will no doubt lead to a fun trivia question in fifteen years when he's giving his Hall of Fame speech: what Hall of Famer led the league in strikeouts in his rookie season? It also led to Gillstrom winning the award named for his father, the Joe Gillstrom Award for best rookie, posting a 3.5 WAR in his rookie year. Gillstrom is central to the argument about Montreal either way, because their team is built almost entirely around youth.

We don't know whether Gillstrom will play 3B or SS, but either place, he's a superstar waiting to happen this year. Gilberto Keating, who has promise but has yet to find his stroke at the plate, will take the other one, and Anastasio Santana will take second base. This is one of the better defensive alignments in the game, and they could easily combine for a 15 WAR this year – with Gillstrom providing much of that punch. LF Jorge Rodriguez had a nice second season and has probably established a level of productivity, and free agent signing Lewis Stephens should provide solid work behind the plate. Esteban Contreras had 35 homers, but needs to hit the ball. Francisco Liriano might be in decline, though he's still a fine baseball player. Francisco Chacon needs to show he's more than a role player offensively. A lot of these are good questions to have.

There's actually cause for a lot of concern on the pitching staff, however, and the Blazers will have a lot of issues there. Leon Flores should be a good addition to the team and an early Joe Gillstrom candidate, but Christian Brown hasn't been much more than replacement level since 2024 and Jorge Stanza posted a career best in ERA last year with no justifiable reason; he's a star but maybe not that much of one. Arend Glas is the very model of a #4 starter; his highest EBA WAR was 3.5, which doesn't translate well. The bullpen looks really good, however, with few holes and a lot of depth; it might be the best bullpen in the division.

The Blazers still have a top farm system but not a lot of new players coming out of the pipeline any time soon, it seems. The question is whether they're good enough to contend this year, and there is a simple answer and a complex one. The simple answer is that they look too young, too uncertain, and too scattered to be legitimate contenders. The complex one is that they clearly have the talent to finish above .500 this season, if they can manage it. They've already pushed their finances to the point where they're taking a loss this year, so they're clearly trying to make their push now. They'll need some luck and some skill, but there's no reason they couldn't finish above .500 at least.





2027 EUROPEAN BASEBALL ASSOCIATION

EASTERN ALLIANCE



Amsterdam Projection 94-68

The Neptunes go under new Italian management this year, and they've got some pretty solid direction. This is the most balanced club in the division, able to put a solid players on the field and on the mound. Perhaps the most intriguing of these is young catcher Dan Logan (20), who looks like a mega MBBA bonus baby in the making. Left fielder Ned Breur (23) isn't far behind.

On the hill Ernest Shaffer and Martin Ssempe may be the best 1-2 combo in the division, and 37 year old Bob Latrobe makes a solid #3.

Bottom line here is that the Neptunes look to be in great shape.



Rome: Projection - 88-74

Last year the Euro Cup was Rome's to loose, and they lost it. This year it looks like the set-up, at least, is the same...except now Amsterdam is actually pretty good The offense will just good. Catcher Jackie Voorneveldt and second baseman Dale Stephens may well be playing in the MBBA in another season, as could be corner outfielder Francisco Diaz. Centerfielder Matt Cruz's glove would be elite in the MBBA, but his bat is probably limiting. And that's before we get to the merely good European hitters.

The hill isn't quite so rosy.

But, we did say the Euro cup was Rome's to lose, didn't we?



Munchen: Projection: 85 77

Munch is the anti-Rome. They're led by three starters in Frederic Bronnin, Juan Suarez, and Yan Heinjnen the Brauers have three guys who could play in the bigger leagues (Heinjnen came over from the Madison franchise. Unfortunately, beyond outfielder Brian Southerland (who once played with Tucson), and catchers Allan McHugh and Shoin Tanaka, the bats are pretty pedestrian.



We consider the division race to be the next chapter in the question of whether good hitting beats good pitching, and for our money we think this time it'll be Rome's hitting that's a touch better.

Brussels Projection: 60-102

Poor Brussel's fans. They're only two seasons out from being at the top of the EBA heap, but it might as well be a two thousand light years away.

No.

Just no.



WESTERN ALLIANCE



Madrid Projection: 89-73

This is almost certainly starting pitchers Bailey Attoehow's last season with the Matadors, and second baseman Jeffrey Verkade is probably a season behind him. These are two of the league's better players, and one suggests they are going to be looking to make their mark now.

That said, the best news for Matador fans is that the team has a lot of "almost-but-not-quite" MBBA talent. Guys like closer Marcel Mirwald, and outfielders Cristo Olivera and Armando Ramirez. This is a team that should be at least "good" for awhile. The question that matters is whether they'll be good enough now to take down both London and Paris. We're betting "yes," but it's going to be close.



London Projection: 88-74

There's a reason this team won it all last year despite a losing record, and that reason is an influx of talent in mid-year. These guys are proof that the "best" team is not always identified by their record.

First baseman Dale Jones is a star to be, and second baseman Dave Rodriguez became a star last season. Outfielder Diego Colon can't take a walk for his life, but that doesn't matter in the WA. The Bishops have good European talent on the hill and in the bullpen (some say Tommaso Jovine should be making MBBA cash. London fans can look forward to a smashing good season, and a splendid chasing of the pennant.



Paris: 85-77

Proof that the Western is where it's at in Europe. Paris is a fine little team, and year we expect them to finish 3rd. We admit that it's hard to put any team with Domingo Ayala on the mound every fifth day in 3rd, but we're doing it. Ayala will make some MBBA team pay two seasons from now. The team also has a probable MBBAer in the bullpen in Carlino Omobon and closer Hikaru Sakurai. Unfortunately, the pitching is a little thin after that.

The offense is good news, bad news. The bad news is that there's nothing beyond Euro-talent in the infield, but the offense should be fine carried by three superlative hitters in Arnaldo Scalia, Rachis Texier, and Jean-Luc Lacaze.

Can peak talent beat depth? Paris will run this test in 2027.



Belfast: 52-110

If there's a team that can beat Brussels for the label "worst in Europe," it's the crew from Belfast. They won 61 games last year, but we figure that means sportsmanship runs high around the league. We're guessing they won't get that kind of charity this year, and in the WA that means pain.



THE PERFECT GAME



THREE CANVAS BASES
PERFECTLY PLACED.
HOME PLATE AND THE MOUND
PERFECTLY SPACED.

THE CHALK LAID DOWN
IN A PERFECT LINE.
THE INFIELT DIRT
RAKED PERFECTLY FINE.

THEN THE TEAMS TAKE THE FIELD --
AND WE'RE REMINDED AGAIN.
IT'S A PERFECT GAME
PLAYED BY IMPERFECT MEN.

BIGGEST SCREWBALLS OF THE MBBA

“Screwballs!”

“Get yer screwballs here!”

Okay, maybe you can’t buy a screwball from a ballpark vendor, but sometimes it just feels like you should oughta.

*Since we can’t get ’em any other way, we asked Calgary Pioneers GM **Kevin Dickson** to take his best shot at searching out and finding the most interesting tossers of this strange little pitch.*

We suggest you garb yourself a baseball brat, and dig in.



Definition #1 of Screwball: A crazy or eccentric person. See Fiscus.

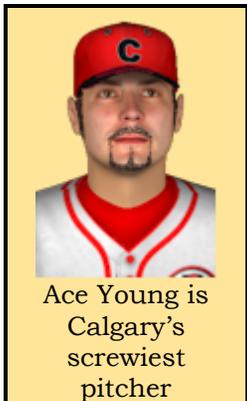
Definition #2 of a Screwball: A pitched ball that moves in a direction opposite to that of a curveball.

Definition of a Screwballer: A pitcher that contorts his arm into an inhuman position to throw one of the most unique pitches in the game.

There are only a handful of pitchers in the MBWBA that throw the screwball. There is a reason for that. It hurts. It has been described as tightening a pickle jar while simultaneously thrusting the wrist forward with extreme velocity. It can leave you with an arm that faces the wrong direction. Take a look at Ace Young of the Calgary Pioneers. When he stands for a photo notice how his right palm faces outward?

The Screwball.





Ace Young is Calgary's screwiest pitcher

Young has managed to put together 12 seasons and 130 wins as the dean of the screwball. He has never won a Landis, never been an all-star, but he has earned a paycheck and started 363 games.

“That’s my pitch,” Young said of the screwball. “If it wasn’t for that I’d have been done years ago. Funny I heard a couple of the GMs were arguing a couple months ago about what it takes to be an Ace. Simple, take it from a real ACE you just need to throw the screwball!”

The most successful screwballer in the game right now is Juan Jose Ornelas of the Birmingham Bandits. While he has only been in the league 6 years, he is 82-56 with a pair of all-star appearances and a salary 5 times that of Young’s. Also unlike Young, Ornelas has played in a Landis although on the losing side.

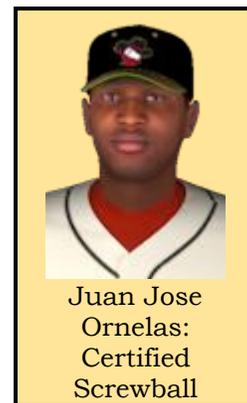
“La excéntrica hace que mi brazo se siente divertido, pero me sale rico y me puede comprar un montón de burritos,” said the Guatemalan born Cuban.

[editor’s note: Google translates this as: “The eccentric makes my arm feels funny, but I get rich, I can buy a lot of burritos” which we admit we love as much as just about anything else in this Media Guide]

Another high priced screwballer is Carolina’s Juan Lopez. While he has consistently put up solid numbers he has played for teams that didn’t give him the run support he needed and this has resulted in no trophies and a losing 69-80 record. Last year he was a dismal 8-17 and when asked for comment he threw a batting helmet at this reporter. The helmet broke, but not in the way a screwball does.

Our other featured screwballer is Lorenzo Pena, who has been plying his craft for the past 5 seasons in Yellow Springs. The lefty has posted a 33-47 record for the Nine, but apparently they have given up on the once highly touted prospect as they sent him packing this Spring to Seattle. I caught up with him at the airport and he had a few choice words for Yellow Springs GM Ron Collins.

“You think the screwball puts your arm in an inhuman position? You let me at Collins, I’ll show you what an inhuman position looks like,” Pena said to this reporter who successfully dodged his spittle. “Seattle! Seattle!!! That’s where pitchers go to die!!”



Juan Jose Ornelas: Certified Screwball

“Relax... take it easy”

THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES



Caught in a Rundown ...

**Listen in as
Jacksonville Hurricanes
GM Tyler Simmons
Does a Deep Dive
on the MBBA's**

TOP 25 UNDER 25

They say that the Hall of Famers come up when they've still got fuzz on their chins, and they make an impact pretty much from the moment they arrive until the moment they leave. Given this, we asked a resident expert to take some time and give us a view of who the top twenty-five MBBA players are that are all under 25 years old (key on the under ... at the time of this writing any player 24 years, 365.24 days old or less qualified.

We're sticklers for detail that way.

*Anyhow, there's the set-up. Now let's listen in as **Tyler Simmons** gives us his view on the most impactful young players in the game today—yes, fans, it's a “rundown” from #25 all the way to #1.*



25. Ron Clulow, RP, Hawaii, 24 – Sometimes I wonder if even he knows where the pitch is going. While that unpredictability is difficult for hitters to pin down, but it also results in far more walks than you'd like out of a closer. Still, he just keeps outpitching his high walk total on his way to 56 saves the last 2 years. I'm kinda torn on Clulow. On one hand, he could become a solid closer but on the other, he will need that 101 mph fastball to be on point to be able to get himself out of many jams he is likely to leave himself in.

24. Gerardo Fajardo, SP, Huntsville, 24 – His stuff is still developing and he gave up a few more HR than you'd like over the course of the season, but his control is impressive (1.8 BB/9) and it looks like he could become a solid #2 pitcher down the road.

23. Paul Holden, RF, Havana, 24 – Another guy who doesn't look like much until you check his production, .284/.328/.454, 116 OPS+, 20+ HR pace, and a comfortable defender in right. He may not become a superstar, but he is a quality MBBA hitter who should have a number of solid seasons left in him.

22. Chris Adkins, RP, Montreal, 24 – An interesting reliever, Adkins' K/9, BB/9, and HR/9 have seen huge fluctuations in his 3 years, but his ERA has been relatively steady and he's at 2.82 for his career. If he can keep his pitches down, he will be a closer at some point in the future.

21. Juan Hernandez, SP, Vancouver, 23 – The 6'4" righty had a solid rookie campaign last year going 14-11 with a 3.88 ERA, but I think he would be the first to admit he has the ability to be better than 7.1 K/9 and 3.1 BB/9. He has three plus pitches with plenty of stamina. His one weakness, HR allowed, will be hidden by him playing in Vancouver, but again he needs to lower that total going forward. He is just 23 and has plenty of time to figure it out, and I do think he will become at the very least a top #2 pitcher.

20. Dusty Rhodes, 1B, Madison, 23 – Of course the 2026 JL batting champ would find a spot on this list somewhere. He had a crazy good 5.3% K-rate and just simply makes contact with nearly everything. If he could play any position in the field other than first, he would be one of the more coveted players in the league, instead he's basically the MBBA version of Mark Grace. A nice player and a definite starter, just not a super star.



19. Jared Gillstrom, SS, Montreal, 22 – Gillstrom’s 2026 season was one of the most anticipated MBBA debuts of the past few seasons and though it was an up and down year, I think it was an overall success. He did strikeout a ton, which the team was afraid of, but he also offered a league average OPS with 20 HR, 55 XBH, 21 steals, and a +6.6 ZR and 1.022 EFF at short. The future is very bright for the 22 year old and I expect him to take a HUGE step forward this year. He may push up around 30 HR while hitting .275 and pushing his OBP solidly above .300. This guy is going to be great for a long time and will have Des Moines fans sobbing into their Natural Lights for years to come.

18. Dan Leonard, UTL, Calgary, 24 – Leonard is the most tenured player on the list with 870 total games played and over 6 years of MBBA service time. He made his MBBA debut in 2020 as an 18 year old and played his first full season at 19 and he’s been a model of consistency since then. You can just about bank on a .300 average and OPS between .750-.780 with 20+ steals. He isn’t a Zimmer level defender at anything but first base, but he can play both corner outfield spots competently. He isn’t a prototypical corner OF/1B, but he just keeps knocking out useful seasons at a reasonable salary.



AND THE LORD GAVE MOSES A
BASEBALL SAYING, "THOU SHALT
NOT SWING ON A 3-0 PITCH."

17. Maximo Cuevas, RF/DH, New Orleans – Maximo is a DH only, but he is an intriguing DH. First, he’s right handed, which is uncommon enough for a DH, and secondly, he has taken a unique career path. Signed off the now defunct Ocala Bolts as a 14 year old in 2016, Cuevas wasn’t viewed as much of a prospect. Four years later, he was a top 25 prospect and then two years later he made his MBBA debut at 19. As a 21 year old in 2024 he hit 31 HR with a 113 OPS+. The next year he battled inconsistency and injuries, and was eventually demoted to AAA. The move refocused Cuevas and GM Jim Roberts never gave up on him. He made the Opening Day roster last year and found his power stroke once again with 35 HR, 75 XBH, and a 143 OPS+. Being a righty, he will always battle inconsistency, but I think he can be an impact bat for a number of years.

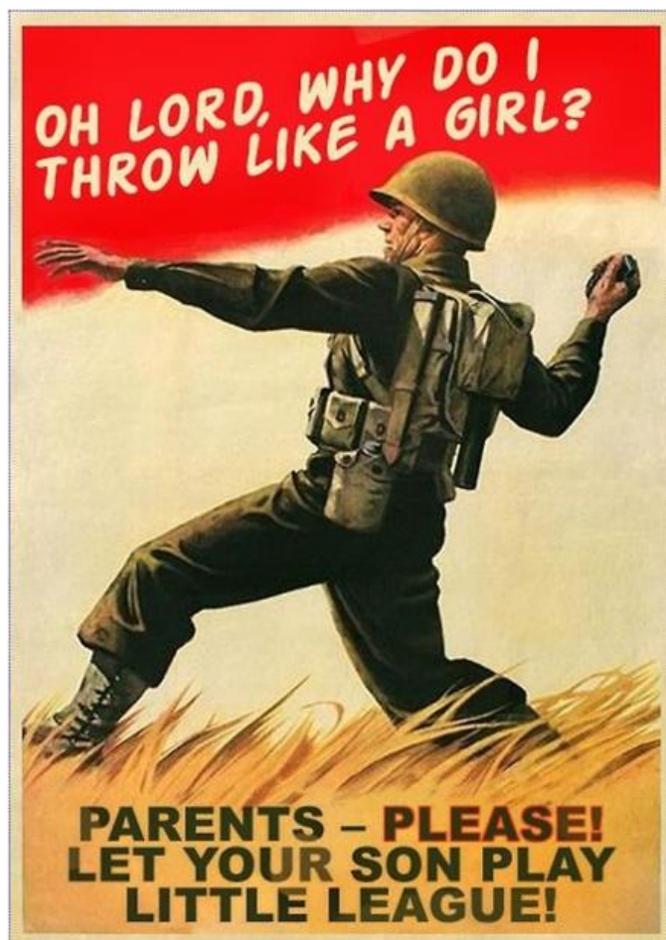
16. Jorge Vargas, CF, Carolina, 23 – The 23 year old Vargas looks very much like Flores with a better glove and no OBP but because of Miguel Carlson, he has been patrolling left field. He is a phenomenal defender and I’m amazed he hasn’t won a Zimmer in his first two seasons. When he eventually moves over

to center (where he will still be one of the better defenders at that position), his fringe-average bat will play even more, and I think he can still be a 3 WAR player at CF, which is pretty darn good. I'm a huge fan of Vargas and I look forward to watching him patrol a MBBA outfield for many years.

15. Francisco Flores, CF, Hawaii, 24 – I really don't know what to say about Flores. He looks completely unassuming and scouts don't get overly excited about him, but he's just gone out and produced when given the opportunity. He broke into the league in 2024 at 21, hitting .276/.373/.534 in 46 games; then struggled through injuries in 2025 hitting a respectable (for a CF) .257/.333/.431 in 82 games, winning the Landis Series MVP. This past year, he played his first full season and hit a very strong .274/.366/.495 with 23 HR, 50 XHB, and 21 SB. I would say he doesn't look like anything but a slightly above average center fielder, but it's hard to argue with results and Flores has already accrued 8.2 WAR in his young career.

14. Dave Wilfer, 2B, Havana, 24 – Like Salazar, Wilfer is the rare rookie on this list. He was a 2025 1st round pick and has exceeded expectations by not only making the 2026 Opening Day but then going on to hit .280/.347/.429 with 51 XBH, a 113 OPS+, and 3.4 WAR. I really think the numbers are legitimate and about what you could expect 'Dave Wilfer' to accumulate in an average season. He's already arguably one of the 5 best second basemen in the league and he still has room to grow. Can't wait to see if he is able to take a step forward into superstardom or if he settles in as 'merely' a very good second baseman.

13. Enrique Salazar, RF, Brooklyn, 23 – It's pretty impressive for a player with barely half a season of experience to find himself on the list at all, let alone this high. That shows you just what I think of Enrique Salazar. In 2025 he crushed AA and probably deserved more of a look in AAA but Brooklyn was taking a slow burn mentality with his development and had there been no mid-season GM change this past year, Salazar likely would have been stuck in AAA and Brooklyn wouldn't have been sparked by his (and Starr's) call-up and the offensive push he provided. I understand that we shouldn't be expecting a .300 average and a .900+ OPS, but 35 HR and a .270 average isn't out of the question. Should be interesting to see if I'm too high on this guy or not going forward.



12. Rafael Mata, RP, Carolina, 24 – The 24 year old Dominican has been nothing short of dominant since coming up as a 22 year old late in 2024. For his career, he has a 2.49 ERA, 1.07 WHIP, 2.90 FIP, and 3.9 K/BB rate. He has impressive stuff, solid control, and hitters really struggle to get any consistent lift on his pitches. Once again, it looks like he will be starting the year as the top set-up man, but after a 4.11 ERA in 2026, how much rope will Juliano Fallardo be given? If he struggles, Mata could easily find himself working the 9th inning.

11. Gervasio Ridder, 1B, Las Vegas, 22 – The 2021 \$2.5 million bonus baby earned a cup of coffee in 2024 as a 19 year old, played just over half the season in 2025, and exploded last year in his first full season. We'll have to see if the elbow injury has any long-lasting effect on his swing, but if not he could easily be a .300/.370/.520 hitter and be one of the better first basemen in the league. Won't ever challenge for HR titles or many batting titles, but he's a very well rounded power lefty who can crush right-handed pitching.

10. Rick Ward, SP, Brooklyn, 24 – One of the key reasons the Robins were able to go on to win the division title and Landis Cup in 2026, Ward is finally realizing the potential he showed in AAA back in 2024. He has a 100 mph fastball and one of the best fastball/curveball combos in baseball today. He doesn't strikeout as many as you'd expect for a guy with his power fastball (7.9 K/9 last year) but he still has very good stuff and just doesn't allow home runs (28 HR allowed in over 350 innings). Ward looks like a potential #1 and Brooklyn will be riding him hard to try and defend their league title.

9. Cisco Guerrero, 1B, Halifax, 24 – Guerrero isn't quite the 'Nightmare' to JL Atlantic pitchers that he was back when he won the Gillstrom in 2024 at the age of 21. That year he hit .314 with 28 HR, a 132 OPS+ and 5.1 WAR. Each of the past two seasons, his power has trended down to the point that he hit just 20 HR and saw nearly an 80 point drop in slugging percentage from his Gillstrom season. The scouts think he is still one of the better right handed hitters in the league. Will 2024 be a high water mark, or are the past two seasons merely a bump in the road for a future multiple time all-star?



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8. Bob Sanderson, CL, Huntsville, (soon to be) 25 – Turtle Sanderson is not yet 25 and he ranks 58th in all-time saves and he's currently 6th on the active list with 196 saves. Sanderson made his debut in 2022 and was the closer the entire season as a 19 year old! He already has 3 all-star appearances, an MBBA championship ring, an Eagan Award, and a Comeback PotY Award to his credit with no signs of slowing up. He is the prototypical closer with a 100+ mph fastball, a good HR-rate allowed, and a good BB-rate. He has all the makings of an all-time great closer and he should easily crack the top 50 (maybe even 45) in career saves before the end of the year.

7. Lawrence Columbus LaLoosh, SP, YS9, 22 – 'Crash' stormed onto the scene last year at 21. He posted an 87 FIP- and 142 ERA+ on his way to an 8-6 record and what many thought would be a JL Gillstrom award. Alas, that was not meant to be but the future is still bright for Lawrence. At 22, he still has room to grow and if he can get his K-rate over 9 and keep that walk-rate below 3, he will continue to have success and push Castillo and Chavez for the title of staff ace. The only real points of worry are his lack of a 3rd dominant pitch (though the slider is solid) and his struggles controlling the run game.

6. Fernando Moreno, 1B, Huntsville, (soon to be) 25 – Called up as a 20 year old in 2022, Moreno has been a beast the last four years, particularly against right-handers. He already has 142 HR and should be able to breeze past 150 HR before his 25th birthday. He has his struggles against lefties, but has an insane .954 OPS against RHP. On top of his 2025 ASG and Puckett Award, Moreno has been nails in the playoffs for Huntsville, being named Doubleday Series MVP 4 times ('22-'24, '26) and Cartwright Cup MVP twice ('23, '25). Overall, he has 15 HR, 33 RBI, and a 1.038 OPS in 47 playoff games.

5. Ignacio Rodriguez, SP, Havana, 24 – This may be a little controversial because he has been derailed by injury in two of the last three seasons, but the talent is palpable. Ignacio broke into the league at 19, which is very impressive for a pitcher, going 8-10 with a 4.67 ERA in 13 starts. Since then he has had his share of ups and downs, but one of the most impressive K/BB pitchers in the league looks like he is just a healthy season away from stepping into the conversation of the top pitchers in the MBBA. In his one full season since he hit legal drinking age, he led the FL in both strikeouts and K/9. Will 2027 finally be his year?

4. Luis Baca, RF, YS9, 24 – This is where it starts to get difficult as there is a group of about 8-10 guys that are very close in my mind and if you ask me on a different day, I may rank them in a different order. I went with Baca here because I think 2026 will be the rule for Baca and not the exception that 2025 appears to be. The first true EBA superstar to break the bank in the move across the pond, Baca has finally grown into his huge potential and is turning into a nice value for the Nine. He has a respectable glove in right and just crushes right-handed pitching (.309/.378/.499 for his career). The two-time all-star should have many more of those up his sleeve and I wouldn't be surprised if he won a Puckett or two.

3. Mark Dempsey, 3B, New Orleans, 24 – The Utah native has the highest total WAR of any hitter on this list with a 17.5 and he ranks 2nd with 119 HR. Dempsey is not only one of the top under 25 players, he is also one of the top right-handed hitters in the league and is arguably the top 3B in the game. He is already a 2-time all-star and a Puckett Award winner at just 24. Dempsey has light-tower power to go along with the ability to hit .280 and get on base at a decent clip. Despite not being the most fleet of foot, he's still a solid defender at third thanks to his sure glove and laser-guided missile of a right arm.

2. Alfredo Martinez, CF, Las Vegas, 21 – Alfredo is one of those players that make other GMs would knock over their mothers to get their hands on. He is one of the fastest players in the league, has truly tremendous power, a zen-like patience at the plate, good contact rate, is a plus defender in center field, and is left handed to top it all off. He probably visits the elderly in nursing homes, feeds the poor, and volunteers at the local Boys and Girls Club in his time off. As far as baseball, the sky is the limit. He made his MBBA debut around his 19th birthday and in his age 19 and 20 seasons he has collected 78 HR and 60 SB. At 22, he's still growing into his offensive ability and looks every bit like a potential .290/.400/.580 player.

And, finally ...

1. Jesus Tonche, SP, California, 24 – On nearly any other team Tonche is the clear number 1 starter. On California, he plays Robin to 3-time Nebraska winning Diaz's Batman. He came up in 2023 as a 20 year old and had a ho-hum 3.80 ERA and 5.8 K/BB. Since then he led the JL in ERA, WHIP, K/9, and WAR on the way to the Nebraska Award in his first full season as a big leaguer. He does like to challenge hitters and isn't afraid to go upstairs for strikeouts. In most parks that would be an issue, but South Pacific Field helps to cover up his one weak area. Jesus is well on his way to becoming one of the great pitchers in MBBA history.





STRANGE. BUT TRUE

Baseball history is full of oddballs and cranks, and weird little sayings from guys with maybe more pragmatics than formal education. It's a game that once bred oddities of great delight whether a team won or lost. And, yet, it's a game about winning in the end, and so the odd-balls have a certain Darwinian pressure put on them. It's not enough these days to be interesting. You need a full game in today's world, right? Gimme War till I bleed...

But it seems like there's still a niche, still a little crack for the specialist, the guy who can only do one thing, and still have fun doing it.

*In that light, let's hitch our wagons to the trail of **California Crusader GM Ted Schmidt** as he takes a spin through a few of the more strange players of the modern-day MBBA.*

Any true baseball fan, as a natural progression of loving the game, becomes a kind of amateur scout. In doing so, we develop an ideal of what makes a second baseman, or a top of the rotation starter, or a good bench depth guy. We hold fast to these values, deriving from them our view of the perfect team.

Is it strange, then, that we seem to pay an inordinate amount of attention to the oddballs? Those misfits who manage to parlay a single exceptional skill into a big league career despite serious flaws in their overall games? The "swings from his nose to his toes" .300 hitter, the pitcher with the fastball your



grandma could hit but who carves out a career on guts and savvy, and the guy who can't get the ball out of the infield but makes up for it with unbelievable speed? Yes, there was a time when baseball oddities were about kooks and cranks and guys who could pull off a good hot foot. But now it's these guys whose actual performance is so odd that captivate our attention more than they should.



What makes these players so compelling?

One could simply say that everyone loves the freak show, but it's probably deeper than that. Perhaps it's that their existence challenges our models of perfection, proving that we don't know everything. Maybe by showing another way, they excite us to re-evaluate our preconceptions. They keep the game fresh and interesting.

Or maybe it's just that these things give Collins and Stever something to argue about. You pick it.

Sadly, however, one has to wonder if these oddballs may be a dying breed.

The modern baseball world is so heavily scouted, especially at the minor league level, that we seem to rely more and more on a player's attributes than his performance. After all, if the guy's not 6-6 with a 95 mph plus fastball, why even bother to give him a chance to develop into a starter? Yeah that kid can hit, but does he have the right type of bat/body for that position?

When I sat down to pen this piece about finding those fun guys that bucked the trend for any period of time, I expected to find a bunch. But the truth is that there are only a few of them now.

Guys like ...



Phil Chapman, now with Calgary, has somehow managed to put together a twelve year career despite being a first-baseman who has no deep ball threat and doesn't walk. Go figure. He actually has more triples than homeruns (84 to 53) and more stolen bases than doubles (359 to 221). Chapman's now played for five teams in his career, as general managers are always striving to replace this square peg in a round hole. Chapman, however, has so far managed to land on his feet every time he's jettisoned for another hulking masher. His .295 career average probably has something to do with that. Chapman himself noted, "I'll probably see a sixth team before I'm done. I'm only thirty-

two, and I feel that as long as I can swing the bat and run, someone will need my services."

He had a bit more to say about how he used to dream about making his name in front of a single fan base, but has long since accepted that wasn't going to happen.

Joining Chapman (both in this list and with Calgary this year) is another very strange player, Bryan Vogel.



Perhaps early in his career, Vogel looked more like a complete package, a lefty with solid contact, power, speed, and a terrific glove. But that vision rapidly proved to be a mirage, as Vogel never really developed a consistent enough stroke to hit for average, and his lack of ability to take the base on balls hurt his on base average significantly.

Then again, how many second basemen are there with a career .269 OBP who are multi-time all stars?

Without doing the research, I'll guess not too many. Probably around the same number with career iso powers that are only 14 points lower than their batting average (.225 to .239).

All of Bryan Vogel's offensive value is about the Long Ball.

"I don't know how he does it," declared Tim Summer (his former assistant GM in Yellow Springs). "Six foot nothing, two hundred and thirty pound 30 year-olds with MS aren't supposed to crush 70 extra base hits a year and play all world defense up the middle. The guy's just a chubby tank, but those hands though."

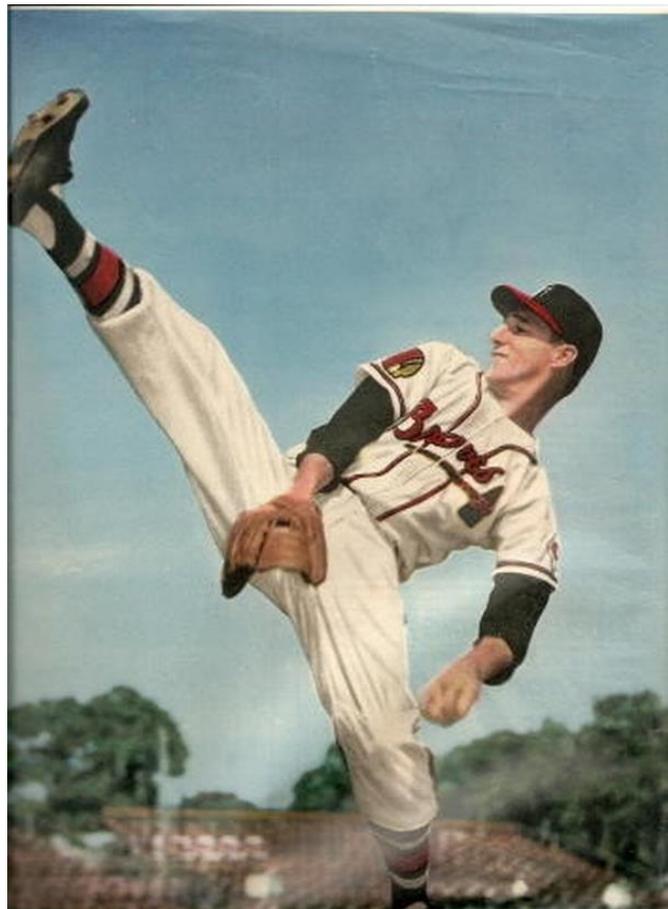
It's interesting that oddball players like Chapman and Vogel seem to cluster onto specific teams.

In all likelihood the explanation lies in that GM's who don't mind the atypical player snap them up when others overlook them. Fittingly, a couple of the weirder players are currently playing for the most eccentric (some would say genius) GM in the league.

The case of Ramon Farias, who joined the Louisville Sluggers last season, only further emphasizes how early some GMs count out players who don't fit in their little boxes. In a league where nearly every highly rated pitching prospect is a giant with heat in the upper 90's, Farias has made a nice little career as a prototypical lefty junkballer. His 90 mph sinker and forkball have carried him to a 3.77 FIP and 4.03 era for his career despite playing in front of some very bad defenses.

While less reliable, taller, harder throwing right handers have gotten 10 mil per year contracts, Farias collects his couple million every year and keeps getting ground balls and avoids walks.

Joining him on that same staff for nearly opposite reasons is reliever Esteban "Spud" Parra. Parra is not a control pitcher. He reportedly once missed a lake when skipping rocks, but that hasn't stopped four teams from employing the 29 year old fireballer whose stuff lives in the triple digit range despite topping 6 walks per 9 innings four times.





"You really only know that it's going to break downward," said longtime Barnstormer Bob Burke of his former division rival's stuff. "Frankly, batting against him is frightening, but I'm even more thrilled I've never had to catch the guy. Scholsy (former Louisville catcher) probably shit a brick when he heard Genius traded for Parra only weeks after he found out he didn't have to chase around 100 mph cutters from Clulow anymore. I bet he was even happier when he got shipped to Huntsville three days later. Maybe I'll start a rumor Huntsville is looking to acquire (Seattle's) Psycho

Pierce."

Along with Pierce, Seattle can lay claim to another seriously flawed, but consistently effective player in Ed Davis. At 6'3", 255 pounds, Davis is an oh-so rare breed, a hulking behemoth of a righty junkballer.

Despite playing his practically his entire career in the Storm's hitting paradise, Davis owns a 137-126 record and a shiny 4.14 FIP. He's never struck out even five and a half batters per nine, and many days his stuff doesn't break 90, but somehow he just keeps getting the job done. Maybe it's that opposing hitters can't wrap their minds around a big 250 pound right winding up and dribbling an 89 MPH fastball up to the plate.

So, yeah, there are a few guys around these days who just don't seem to fit the mold, but maybe as many as back in the "good old days." You have to look for them now. Which, I admit is a little sad.

We're becoming a league of super athletes. We search for giant starters with cannons for arms who can't pitch a lick as soon as their hard stuff starts to go. We demand our hitters do it all—hit for average, depend on their power stroke, and fly out of the box. We eschew power and average for OBP, even at the expense of giving up 35 homers because the guy can't get on base.

Maybe it's confirmation bias and the need to win now to please the modern day fan. The flawed prospect we called up has a bad month, so we know his flaws will keep him from being productive in the bigs, but when a five tool prospect struggles in that same month, we give him time because our scouts tell us he's much better than this.

Following the advice of our scouts is often wise, but what do you say to maybe giving the ugly ducklings a bit more time to shine? Because, for whatever reason, when they succeed, baseball is a lot more interesting and fun.



Thanks for reading!

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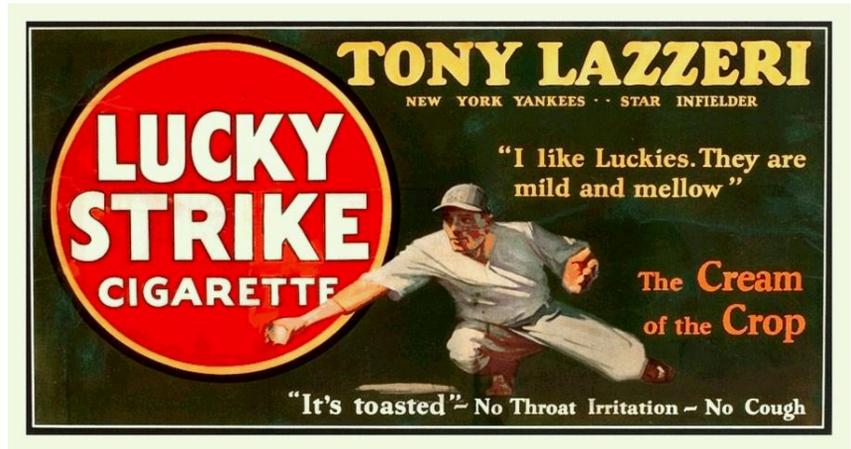


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