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ARIZONA FALL LEAGUE ANNOUNCES AWARD WINNERS FOR 2026 SEASON

PHOENIX – The Arizona Fall League has announced its end-of-season award winners for the 2026 AFL season.

Joe Black MVP Award: Surprise Saguaros INF Welbyn Francisca (CLE)

Joe Black, known for his extensive charity work in the Greater Phoenix area and beyond, is most notably historic for being the first African American pitcher to win a World Series game. The 2026 Joe Black Arizona Fall League MVP is Cleveland's Welbyn Francisca. MLB Pipeline's No. 19 Guardians prospect led the league in six categories, ranking in the top 10 in 12. The 20-year-old led the circuit in hits (32), RBI (29), total bases (55), batting average (.427), slugging percentage (.733), and OPS (1.227). He also finished second in extra-base hits (13), and doubles (7), fourth in runs (23), sixth in on-base percentage (.494), and seventh in both home runs (4), and triples (2). The International Free Agent signee out of La Romana in the Dominican Republic won the Week 1 NFP Hitter of the Week after he recorded multiple hits in three of four games played, including a 5-for-5 showing on Opening Day, being a triple shy of the cycle and one hit shy of tying the single-game Fall League hits record.

Dernell Stenson Sportsmanship Award: Salt River Rafters OF Teo Banks (WSH)

Washington Nationals prospect Teo Banks is the 2026 recipient of the Dernell Stenson Sportsmanship Award, presented annually to the Fall League player who best exemplifies unselfishness, hard work, and leadership. Banks earned the award after receiving high praise from his teammates and coaching staff throughout the season. "Nicknamed 'The Captain' by our players in Wilmington this year, Teo exemplifies everything you want in a leader," Salt River Rafters manager Ted Tom said. "From his relentless work ethic and having a strong desire to be a better player, to his natural ability to assist others, his 'Captain' moniker has been extended to our clubhouse here in Salt River. You know there will be a crowd wherever Teo is, from the clubhouse to the cafeteria and into the dugout."

Offensive Player of the Year: Peoria Javelinas OF Tai Peete (STL)

St. Louis Cardinals prospect Tai Peete made an impact in all facets of the game. MLB Pipeline's No. 17 Cardinals prospect ranked top 10 in the league in 12 different categories, including being tied for the league lead with 20 stolen bases. The Riverdale, Georgia native recorded a Fall League record after hitting a triple in four consecutive games from Oct. 16 to Oct. 22. Ending the year second with five three-baggers, Peete also ranked second in hits (27), runs scored (24), total bases (51), extra-base hits (13), and slugging percentage (.662), while ranking fourth in average (.351) and OPS (1.103), and 10th in home runs (3), doubles (5), walks (17), and RBI (17). Peete was the Arizona Fall League Home Run Derby Runner-Up after hitting 15 home runs in the fifth-annual event.

Pitcher of the Year: Salt River Rafters RHP Jarlin Susana (WSH)

Across six regular-season appearances, Nationals right-hander Jarlin Susana posted a league-leading 26 strikeouts, while holding opponents to a third-best .162 batting average against. MLB Pipeline's No. 65 overall prospect and No. 3 Nationals prospect was selected as the National League starting pitcher for the 20th annual Fall Stars Game on Nov. 8, opening the showcase with back-to-back heaters at 102.7 and 103.1 mph. Susana was named AFL NFP Week One Pitcher of the Week after opening the 2026 Arizona Fall League season with the fastest recorded pitch in league history (velocity records back to 2015) at 103.4 mph before, two innings later, he topped it with 103.8.

His average fastball this season is 100.7 mph, while owning each of the nine fastest recorded pitches ever in the AFL and 32 of the fastest 34.

Reliever of the Year: Mesa Solar Sox RHP Kenya Huggins (ATH)

Right-hander Kenya Huggins appeared in six games, allowing two earned runs across 10 1/3 innings pitched, posting a 1.74 ERA. MLB Pipeline's Athletics No. 23 prospect held opponents to a .189 batting average while striking out 13 of 42 (31%) batters faced. Huggins' fastball topped at 98.8, with his changeup inducing a 57.1% chase rate. The 2022 fourth-round pick out of Chipola Junior College was named to the National League Fall Stars roster and did not allow a run across 2/3 of an inning.

Defensive Player of the Year: Peoria Javelinas OF Vance Honeycutt (BAL)

Orioles prospect Vance Honeycutt's elite speed and defense made him one of the more exciting names coming into the Fall League. Defensively, Honeycutt posted a fielding percentage of 1.000 with 33 total putouts and a league-leading three outfield assists, while also stealing nine bases with the Javelinas. The 2024 first-round pick out of North Carolina has held a .966 fielding percentage across three professional seasons and was the 2023 ACC Defensive Player of the Year, ending the year with the fourth-highest DRS (12.07) in Division I.

Breakout Player of the Year: Salt River Rafters C/1B Jack O'Dowd (COL)

An undrafted free agent who played a season in the independent MLB Official Partner Frontier League, Jack O'Dowd led the league with eight doubles, six home runs, and 14 extra-base hits. O'Dowd also ranked third in the AFL in total bases (50) and RBI (21), fourth in slugging percentage (.641), and eighth in hits (24). The Rockies farmhand won the Week 3 NFP Hitter of the Week after hitting three home runs and leading the league in total bases, slugging percentage, and OPS. O'Dowd was named to the National League Fall Stars roster and AFL Home Run Derby, hitting 15 home runs and making the semifinal round.

AFL Community Champion Award: Scottsdale Scorpions RHP Maddox Long (SCO)

In its second season, the Arizona Fall League Community Champion Award is presented each season to an AFL player who exemplifies a strong commitment to community service and positive impact beyond the game. This award celebrates a player's contributions to local communities through charitable activities, volunteer work, mentorship, and other acts of service. The recipient is recognized not only for their performance on the field but for their dedication to giving back and being a role model within the community. Detroit Tigers right-handed pitcher Maddox Long earned this award after attending local reading program events, PLAYBALL events, and receiving high praise for his character and connection with fans throughout the season. "Maddox is exactly what this award is about," said Donna Petersen, Arizona Fall League Projects, Events & Outreach Director. "He has this quiet way about him that immediately puts people at ease, and you can tell that everything he does comes from a genuine place. He has taken the time to talk with young players, encourage them to think about college and their future, and be a positive example for kids who are just starting to figure out what they want to be. Those are the kinds of moments that make an impact. Maddox didn't just participate in our community programs this season-he really connected with the people in them. And that is why he is so deserving of this award."

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