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SF Chronicle

Giants hired Tony Vitello, but how will his coaching staff be filled?
Shayna Rubin

The San Francisco Giants made an unconventional decision to hire Tony Vitello out of the college ranks to be their manager, bringing new blood into Major League Baseball. What is to be seen is whether Vitello's coaching staff hires will be just as unconventional.

Will Vitello and the Giants dip further into the college coaching pool when crafting the staff? Or will it be built to compensate for Vitello's lack of professional experience?

The answer likely lies somewhere in between, but could skew toward a staff with more pro experience.

Before he's formally introduced as the Giants' manager on Thursday, Vitello is assuredly spending plenty of hours on the phone, putting together ideas and names of coaches he's most comfortable with, those in his circle of trust who might want to follow him to San Francisco. If Vitello wants to pull from his staff at the University of Tennessee, he'll have to sell associates — who may have families rooted in Knoxville — on leaving a less-taxing college schedule for the 162-game MLB grind.

But Vitello won't be calling every shot. Deciding who fills out the major league coaching staff will be a collaborative effort with the Giants front office, and it's likely Giants decision-makers will prefer to fill the dugout with professional coaching experience to help Vitello navigate his first foray into the pros.

Will that include anyone from fired manager Bob Melvin's staff? A new manager portends an entirely new dugout staff, but many of the 2025 coaches haven't been told whether they're returning in 2026, sources told the Chronicle.

"We want whoever the next manager is to have agency in the decision," president of baseball operations Buster Posey said at the end of the season. "I do think there will be more input,

especially with having gone through this a year now and gathering different information. What we've relayed to our coaches is just that, there will be agency for the new manager. We'll place a recommendation with the manager, but ultimately they're free to look at other opportunities as well."

Though anxiety-producing for those with jobs up in the air, the uncertainty comes with the timeline. Vitello's hiring is still fresh and MLB doesn't want teams to make big announcements during big postseason days, which means there may not be any definitive decisions made until Thursday after Game 5 and before a potential Game 6 of the World Series.

There are immediate roles to fill. Melvin's firing came with changes in several spots; bench coach Ryan Christenson and third base coach Matt Williams told the Chronicle they would not return to San Francisco.

Because pitching staff management poses a blind spot for a converted college coach — college coaches don't have to navigate intricacies of bullpen management as they play only four times a week — perhaps Giants officials will recommend few changes within the pitching coach staff. Plus, San Francisco's pitchers had a 3.82 ERA that ranked 10th in MLB in 2024.

The nature of a decidedly mediocre 81-81 season — the inconsistent offense, gutting losing streaks and head-scratching mistakes — might signal the front office is looking to make sweeping coaching changes.

There are also coaches who are close to Vitello who have a rich résumé in professional baseball. Jayce Tingler, who managed the San Diego Padres and is currently the bench coach in Minnesota, is one of them.

Six teams — the Braves, Rockies, Orioles, Twins, Padres and Nationals — are in the process of hiring managers, and there might be coaches still in the interview process for those openings the Giants could pursue to fill their staff.

The Mercury News

Vitello says he was 'selfish' to take Giants manager job, but it was 'right decision'

Laurence Miedema

Tony Vitello will arrive in the Bay Area next week with a clear conscience. That doesn't mean the Giants' new manager didn't agonize over his decision to leave the University of Tennessee.

"It was selfish," Vitello told a handful of reporters, including from the Knoxville News Sentinel, this week in Knoxville. "It was personal reasons. I have always tried to be a good teammate, but I feel like I made a selfish decision that was one I needed to make. It was the right decision."

Vitello will be officially introduced as the Giants' 40th manager on Thursday, eight days after he was picked by Giants president of baseball operations Buster Posey to replace Bob Melvin. The delay is to avoid, as much as possible, stealing some of the spotlight from the Dodgers-Blue Jays World Series. Game 1 is tonight in Toronto. The Giants' introductory news conference would be on the off-day before a potential Game 6.

There already has been plenty of discussion about Posey's bold move to hire the fiery 47-year-old Vitello. He has established himself as one of the top (and most colorful) coaches in college baseball — the Volunteers won the College World Series in 2024 and under his seven-year watch Tennessee has had nearly a dozen first-round draft picks and 52 players drafted in all. But he's the first coach to jump directly from campus into a MLB manager job.

Vitello won't meet with the Bay Area media until next week, but on Thursday he picked a handful of Tennessee media members to discuss his decision. He took a few questions but only answered ones regarding coaching Tennessee baseball and his life in Knoxville. He opened the session by saying, "By now, you all know I officially accepted a position to babysit (Giants firecracker outfielder and former Volunteers star) Drew Gilbert."

Vitello added, "There was a lot of factors. There is a brand new stadium I am going to miss out on (at Tennessee). Anything to do with San Francisco, anything to do with Tennessee — at the end of the day it was not relevant to the decision."

Vitello also apologized to Tennessee fans for how the pursuit played out in the media. Vitello's name was first widely linked to the Giants on Oct. 18 and a decision wasn't made for nearly a week.

"I did not have anything to do with that, and it put everyone in a whirlwind," Vitello said in his statement. "Now that we look back on it, I think [it] was unfair. Hopefully, people don't think I'm a diva because that's kind of how it seemed to play out."

Vitello said he'd remain connected to the UT community even if his office is now in San Francisco.

“People saying bye and everything like that, I’m not going anywhere. So real estate people quit texting me,” he joked. “Whether it’s football games, basketball games, supporting these guys in some form or fashion, I’m not going anywhere. I don’t know if this will get me in trouble, but in my mind, a goal is to come back to Tennessee in some capacity.

“Whether it’s part-time living or some other job way down the road or maybe I go back to Nashville and become a country singer or something like that. But that’s something that stuck out in my head because obviously I feel like this was a great place for me.”

Although Vitello is making an unprecedented jump to the majors, Brewers manager Pat Murphy has a better view than most about what is ahead for the Giants and their new manager.

Murphy was a head coach at Arizona State and Notre Dame before reaching the majors. But he got his feet wet as a Special Assistant to Baseball Operations with the Padres, and then managed a few seasons in the minors. Murphy even had experience managing the Dutch National Team during the 2000 Olympics. The Oranje just missed the medal round, but defeated Cuba with a smattering of former big leaguers, including former Giants batting coach Hensley Meulens.

Murphy said this week he’s not sure he could have made the jump directly to the majors, but believes Vitello can do it.

“I’m excited for this guy,” Murphy told The Associated Press. “I hear great things. I’ve met him before, but I’m not close associates with him. I’ve heard great things about him. They have a great team and a great organization, so I think it’s going to work, and I don’t think that can happen a lot. I know I wouldn’t have been ready.”

Murphy added, “What I know for sure is that I couldn’t have made the jump successfully. Because it’s two different games. I say it’s like harness racing and thoroughbred racing. What facilitates that thing is if you have a president or other group of people around you that are going to help you facilitate that and the differences.”

Murphy said that’s where Posey comes in.

“It’s one of those things that if you have everything in place helping you through it, I think the best parts of him can come out, the needed parts, building the connections, the impact on players, the parts that he’s not used to,” Murphy said. “There will be people around him to fill him in. Buster Posey is not dumb. He knows what he’s doing. He knew the scrutiny, and he knew the importance of this hire. And I think it’ll go well for them.”

Vitello told the reporters in Knoxville that he might be the first, but not the last college coach to make the leap.

"I will say this about college verse MLB, the versus is fading and there is more of a blend going on," he said. "College baseball is getting so good and followed so closely by fans and in such big numbers that it is becoming a stepping stone or a version to Major League Baseball on a different level. I think the two are starting to cooperate and work together more and I think you are starting to see more crossover and will continue to see more."

MLB.com

Back from multiple surgeries, Miles makes AFL debut Maria Guardado

Giants pitching prospect Spencer Miles couldn't help but feel some nerves as he prepared to make his Arizona Fall League debut on Oct. 9.

The 25-year-old right-hander hadn't pitched competitively since June 2024 due to Tommy John surgery, but his unease centered less on the health of his arm and more on the iffy weather.

Miles' older brother, John Austin, had flown in from Missouri to watch him make his long-awaited return to the mound, but the rain was starting to pick up as the Scottsdale Scorpions' game entered the late innings.

"I'm like, 'Holy smokes, he might not even get to see me pitch, and he flew out here to see me throw,'" Miles said in a phone interview. "So the nerves were kind of high from that perspective. A little less from a health standpoint because I know I've put in all the work, and I know I'm super capable. I just had to go out there and do what I can do given the circumstances."

In the end, the weather cooperated enough for Miles to come out of the bullpen and pitch the bottom of the eighth for Scottsdale. He certainly didn't disappoint, topping out at 98.4 mph as he worked a 1-2-3 inning in front of his brother, who hadn't seen him pitch in three years.

The Giants, too, haven't seen Miles in action as much as they would have liked since drafting him in the fourth round of the 2022 MLB Draft. Miles missed the entire 2023 campaign after undergoing back surgery and then made only five appearances in '24 before he suffered a right flexor strain that led to season-ending Tommy John surgery.

The injuries have limited Miles to only 14 2/3 affiliated innings since turning pro, but the 6-foot-3 hurler is finally healthy and looking to make up for lost time in the Fall League this year.

The Giants are being careful with Miles' workload since he's coming off elbow surgery, but he's looked sharp in his first three appearances (two starts) for Scottsdale, giving up only one unearned run over five innings while striking out seven and walking one.

"It's been kind of weird," Miles said. "It's almost like a little time-travel thing. You have two surgeries, and it's like two or three years later, and you spent three years in Arizona rehabbing."

I come back, and fortunately, all my stuff and my velocities and everything is pretty much the same or a little better. I've been fortunate in that sense."

Despite the setbacks, Miles remains an intriguing arm who should still have a chance to stick as a starter given his deep repertoire. He can touch the upper 90s with his sinker and four-seam fastball and also mixes in a curveball, changeup and cutter, which he developed after he was drafted.

Miles said he used to throw a slider, but a few Giants coaches -- including former director of pitching Brian Bannister and pitching coordinators Clay Rapada and Matt Yourkin -- advised him to scrap the pitch in favor of a cutter. Miles worked with Danny Hill, a fellow University of Missouri alum who runs a baseball facility in his hometown of Columbia, Mo., to find a grip that helped produce the shape he was looking for.

"Now is kind of the first time I've gotten to test it," Miles said. "But it's really opened up my arsenal, and it's one of my better pitches. It's 90-93 [mph], and it's got some vertical break on it and some good horizontal [movement]. It really alleviates the four-seam because it's kind of another fastball but kind of an off-speed because sometimes it slides a little more and turns into a little slider. It's really helped everything, especially fastballs up."

Miles hasn't pitched above Single-A San Jose, but his promising showing in the Fall League should boost his stock and potentially put him in the mix to be protected from the Rule 5 Draft this offseason. He knows he'll have to stay healthy to continue on his upward trajectory, but he could be poised for a breakthrough season now that he's finally back to full strength.

Giants shortstop prospect aims to make up lost ground in Fall League

"Obviously, I'd like to make the big leagues next season," Miles said. "We'll see what happens and where I start. I'd like to think of myself as kind of a wild card. I haven't played. I'm 25, but I'm a little more experienced in between the years because of the rehab. I'm a strike-thrower, older guy. We'll see. We'll see where I start, but if I make the big leagues next year, that'd be nice."

NBC Sports Bay Area

Tony Vitello shares 'selfish' decision to leave Tennessee for Giants manager job Taylor Wirth

Leaving the University of Tennessee certainly was not an easy decision for Tony Vitello.

The Giants' new manager spoke to a small group of local reporters on Thursday at Lindsey Nelson Stadium in Knoxville, Tennessee, about his historic decision to leave the Volunteers, who he had spent eight seasons with. Vitello explained why he made the -- admittedly -- "selfish" decision to take his new job in the MLB. (h/t Knox News' Mike Wilson)

"By now, you all know I officially accepted a position to babysit Drew Gilbert," Vitello said, jokingly.

"... It was selfish. It was personal reasons. Again, I've always tried to be a good teammate, but I feel like I made a selfish decision that was one I needed to make. It's the right decision, and I just hope it doesn't give me Lane Kiffin status around here, because I feel like I'm a VFL. I think if someone truly invests in being a VFL for any amount of time, they're just that — a Vol For Life. That's what I am in my mind."

Vitello told reporters that he was glad his candidacy became public because it forced him to have difficult conversations with the people within the program that he felt indebted to, especially his players. He spoke to those players about the process on multiple occasions, including after the team's scrimmage on Tuesday, before his decision was announced on Wednesday.

Vitello clarified that he still was weighing his decision on Tuesday afternoon when Volunteers fans attended the team's scrimmage at Lindsey Nelson Stadium and shared their appreciation for him with various gestures around the stadium.

"If that is the last time I ever stepped foot on this campus or this field as an employee or as a Vol wearing our orange, I'm just so thankful for the people that showed up," Vitello said of the fans' gestures. "It will forever be ingrained in my memory, and it made what was the last day on the job -- technically -- very, very special."

The Athletic

The San Francisco Giants say they're close. This offseason will prove if they really believe it.
Grant Brisbee

The San Francisco Giants are close. At least, they seem to think so. It's why they're willing to spend millions on an unproven manager. An organization doesn't do that unless it thinks the roster might be a personality away from doing something special. The Giants might be a personality away, alright. That, and a few more players. (Some of the good ones.)

This is where a team's spending really starts to matter. The Dodgers spent scores of millions on Michael Conforto because they were running out of things to spend on. The Rockies won't become a contender if you slap two \$40 million players onto their roster. That squishy spot in the middle, though, is where the wins can be bought, and every win the Giants can buy is orders of magnitude more important than the wins most teams can buy. The Giants' budget should be a big story this offseason.

Let's examine the players the Giants have under contract, those entering their arbitration years, and the pre-arbitration players who are criminally underpaid. Let's also guesstimate what they might have to spend.

The six highest-paid players on the roster will make roughly \$137 million next season. Those players would be Rafael Devers, Matt Chapman, Robbie Ray, Logan Webb, Willy Adames and Jung Hoo Lee. It doesn't get much more flexible in 2027, either, as Adames' backloaded contract is set to increase, which would wipe out any savings from Ray leaving in free agency. About a fifth of the roster is spoken for, and that should be the case for the next couple of offseasons, at least.

Just those six players will make more than the Brewers' roster did last season. They'll make twice as much as the entire 2025 Marlins did. That says more about those teams than the Giants, but the larger point stands: A chunk of the payroll is already spoken for.

Patrick Bailey and/or Ryan Walker might be Super Two players

Patrick Bailey and Ryan Walker each have two years and some change of service time, which is riiiiight where the cutoff usually is for Super Two players. That would be the difference between a modest pre-arbitration raise and a much more substantial increase. (Red Sox outfielder Jarren Duran got \$3.85 million as a Super Two player last season, for example.)

The extra payroll the Giants would have at the expense of Bailey and Walker wouldn't be the difference between Kyle Tucker and Kyle Schwarber in terms of total contract value, but it could be close to the difference between their annual salaries in 2026. It's enough money to matter.

The recent history of Giants payroll is all over the place
Here's how the Giants have spent over the past decade:

2016: \$178.8 million (6th out of 30 teams)
2017: \$189.8 million (4th)
2018: \$205.7 million (2nd)
2019: \$178.6 million (5th)
2020: \$73.4 million (9th)
2021: \$171.9 million (9th)
2022: \$162.4 million (12th)
2023: \$189.4 million (12th)
2024: \$207.1 million (10th)
2025: \$178.3 million (13th)

It's almost charming that the first and 10th years are so similar, but a \$178 million payroll is much less impressive in 2025 than it was in 2016. The Giants' fall in the league-wide payroll rankings tells that story.

The Giants have been willing to be a top-10 payroll team when the roster has justified the investment, and it's worth noting that the last time they did it, it was with a new manager/president of baseball operations combo. Maybe every new regime gets a new set of training wheels when it comes to the payroll.

The Giants are well under the luxury tax threshold for 2026
The league's luxury tax threshold will be \$244 million next season, so even with the Big Six making a Brewers-size payroll, the Giants shouldn't have to worry about any penalties for next season. Even if they signed the most expensive free agent on the market, they'd still be comfortably under.

After getting sent to luxury tax timeout in 2023, they got (way) under the threshold last season and reset the penalties. They're back with the first-time offenders again, which means they'd pay a 20 percent penalty on any salary over \$244 million.

It would be fun to worry about that. You will not have to worry about that.

Remember that calculating payroll for the luxury tax includes costs like health care and retirement, which aren't publicly available. The way to work around this is to make up a number between \$5 million and \$13 million and hope you're close. Add that to the payroll and, boom, it's now a luxury tax payroll. It's only unscientific if you think about it.

It's a figure that's good enough for our purposes, anyway, considering that the Giants aren't likely to come close to it. They'd have to reach \$225 million to start worrying, and that would be quite the offseason. Not sure if they could get there even if they wanted to.

The Giants will have the wiggle room to get creative
If the Giants spend on another player in the Adames/Devers salary range, they can use some pre-arbitration players to fill gaps. The roster looks something like this right now:

C
Patrick Bailey
1B
Rafael Devers
2B
Casey Schmitt
SS
Willy Adames
3B
Matt Chapman
OF
Heliot Ramos
OF
Jung Hoo Lee
OF
Open
DH
Open
Bench
Open
Bench
Open
Bench
Open
Bench
Open
Bench
Open
SP
Logan Webb
SP
Robbie Ray
SP
Landen Roupp
SP
Open
SP
Open
RP
Ryan Walker
RP
Open
RP
Open
RP

Open

RP

Open

RP

Open

RP

Open

RP

Open

Total payroll (est.)

\$142,000,000

All of those open roster spots seem daunting, but it doesn't take much to get rid of a lot of them:

C

Patrick Bailey

1B

Rafael Devers

2B

Casey Schmitt

SS

Willy Adames

3B

Matt Chapman

OF

Heliott Ramos

OF

Jung Hoo Lee

OF

Open

DH

Bryce Eldridge

Bench

Internal option

Bench

Normal backup catcher

Bench

Internal option

Bench

Open

SP

Logan Webb

SP

Robbie Ray

SP
Landen Roupp
SP
Open
SP
Open
RP
Ryan Walker
RP
Minor-league free agent
RP
Minor-league free agent
RP
Internal option
RP
Internal option
RP
Open
RP
Open
RP
Open
Total payroll (est.)
\$147,000,000

Feel free to define “internal option” as you see fit. Jerar Encarnacion and Luis Matos are two of the more obvious fits, but anyone on the 40-man roster has a chance.

When it comes to the Giants’ must-fill openings, the list looks something like this:

- Outfielder (preferably a center fielder)
- Backup catcher
- At least two starting pitchers
- At least two veteran relievers

Just for yuks and chuckles, pick the most expensive player for each opening and see where that gets the Giants. Kyle Tucker, Victor Caratini, Framber Valdez, Ranger Suárez, Edwin Díaz and Robert Suarez would probably push the Giants over the luxury tax threshold. You wouldn’t be opposed to it.

Two of the top-shelf players would still probably be too much for the Giants, even with some lower-cost free agents around them. Tucker for \$35 million and Valdez for \$30 million, say, would get them far too close to the luxury tax, even if they grab an Oracle Park reclamation special like Zac Gallen or Zach Eflin to fill out the rotation. One of the Zac or Zach or Zacks. They’d also have to pretend that bullpens don’t exist.

Any single player they want, though? As long as that player is interested, the Giants shouldn't get priced out. They can afford the best outfielder on the market, and it would still give them enough flexibility to get a quality starting pitcher or two. They can get one of the very best starting pitchers, and it would still leave them enough to get another hitter you've heard of. They can rebuild the bullpen with semi-expensive relievers, or they can wait for the market to shake out. (After they've re-signed Tyler Rogers, of course.)

What's more likely is a quantity of quality. Instead of the Kyle Tucker aisle, they might shop in the Harrison Bader aisle, while keeping an eye on second basemen like Brandon Lowe, Gleyber Torres and Jorge Polanco. Instead of the best starting pitcher on the market, they might get the third-best pitcher on the market. Or they might swoop in and get both the seventh- and eighth-best starters on the same day. You get the idea.

Just about every option is available to them, though, even after the Devers trade. They can target one guy and harass his agent until he breaks down in tears. They can spread the risk (and the money) around. They can sign Miles Mikolas, Trent Grisham and absolutely nobody else, just to annoy you.

It's as wide open as it's been in a while, especially if the Giants would even consider returning to a top-five payroll again. Attendance went up after they added Adames and Devers to the payroll. There just might be a lesson there.

Only the Giants know how much they're actually willing to spend, but they'll have options. It's a roster that isn't too far away, and the window is closing. They've spent plenty to get here, but it's the dollars they'll spend before Opening Day that will make the difference.

The Athletic

Top 50 MLB free agents for 2025-26: Contract predictions, team fits for Tucker, Schwarber, more

Jim Bowden

MLB free-agent season is almost here, so it's time for my annual ranking of the top free agents with contract predictions and the best team fits for each player. Players currently in MLB who are eligible for free agency technically become free agents the day after the World Series ends but cannot sign with a new team until five days after the final out.

This year's free-agent class is headlined by outfielder Kyle Tucker, who many expect to sign a contract somewhere in the \$400 million to \$500 million range. It also features two of the game's top power hitters, designated hitter Kyle Schwarber and first baseman Pete Alonso. Several standout starting pitchers are likely to be available too, led by left-handers Framber Valdez and Ranger Suárez, along with a pair of right-handers who pitched for the Padres this season, Dylan Cease and Michael King. Two impact closers are expected to hit the market, in Edwin Díaz and Robert Suarez. There are also three potential free agents from Japan who made my top 50 ranking.

Along with my colleagues at The Athletic, I will be actively covering free agency and the offseason trade market from start to finish. To kick things off, here is my ranking of the top 50 free agents for the 2025-26 offseason, along with my thoughts on the players as well as information from my conversations with decision-makers across the game.

(Note: Ages are as of Dec. 31, 2025.)

1. Kyle Tucker, RF

Age: 28

Bats: L Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 4.5

2025 team: Chicago Cubs

Agent: Excel Sports Management

Despite a season that was marred by injury and inconsistent performance, Tucker is expected to be the highest paid free agent in this year's class, with most analysts believing he will get between \$400 million and \$500 million based on the recent contracts given to Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (\$500 million; Blue Jays) and Juan Soto (\$765 million; Mets). Even in a season that saw Tucker dealing with multiple injuries, he was able to impact the game in all areas thanks to his hit tool, power, defense, arm and speed. In 136 games for the Cubs, he hit .266/.377/.464 with 22 homers, 25 stolen bases and a near 1:1 walk-to-strikeout ratio (87 walks and 88 strikeouts). Teams view him as a complete player who will be a threat to hit 30 homers and steal 30 bases every season.

Tucker's left-handed swing would play great at Yankee Stadium and his speed would be an important added element to the Yankees lineup. He'd also be a great fit for the Dodgers, who could then move Teoscar Hernández to left field and improve their right field defense. Tucker won't turn 30 until 2027, and his young age relative to the rest of this class makes him even more inviting to both clubs for the long-term as they could backload the contract to fit their budgets better with expiring contracts down the road.

Salary comps: Juan Soto 15-years, \$765 million; Shohei Ohtani 10-years, \$700 million; Vladimir Guerrero Jr. 14-years, \$500 million; Mike Trout 12-years, \$426 million; Mookie Betts 12-years, \$365 million; Aaron Judge 9-years, \$360 million

Best team fits: Dodgers, Yankees, Mets, Phillies, Giants

Contract prediction: 10-years, \$427 million

2. Kyle Schwarber, DH

Age: 32

Bats: L Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 4.7

2025 team: Philadelphia Phillies

Agent: Excel Sports Management

In addition to being one of the premier power hitters in the game, Schwarber is highly valued around the league for his clubhouse presence. Although he's basically limited to the DH position, Schwarber offers consistency — he hit 56 home runs this year and has hit 40 homers or more in three of the last four years — and also durability, having played in 150 or more games each of the last four years, including 162 this year. Every team except the Dodgers and Yankees should want him to be its DH. Although the Phillies will make every effort to re-sign him, it will be fascinating to see what offers Schwarber gets on the open market for his special power bat and ability to mentor younger players.

Salary comps: Rafael Devers 10-years, \$313.5 million; Giancarlo Stanton 13-years, \$325 million; Alex Bregman 3-years, \$120 million; Pete Alonso 1-year, \$30 million

Best team fits: Phillies, Mets, Tigers

Contract prediction: 5-years, \$160 million

3. Pete Alonso, 1B (player option)

Age: 31

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 3.4

2025 team: New York Mets

Agent: Boras Corp.

Alonso became the Mets' all-time home run leader this year (he's now at 264) and he put together a nice rebound season after a down 2024, hitting 38 bombs and leading the National League with 41 doubles. He is beloved in Queens, and the feeling is mutual. The Mets were not willing to give him a long-term contract last offseason, and if they don't change their tune this time around, they'll probably lose him. Alonso has belted 37 or more homers in each of the last five seasons and although he's a below-average defender at first base, he works at it and he's durable, having played all 162 games in each of the past two seasons. Alonso has a player option worth \$24 million he's expected to decline. He made \$30 million in 2025.

Salary comps: Freddie Freeman 6-years, \$162 million; Matt Olson 8-years, \$168 million; Paul Goldschmidt 5-years, \$130 million

Best team fits: Mets, Phillies, Red Sox, Mariners, Rangers

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$182 million

4. Framber Valdez, LHP

Age: 32

2025 bWAR: 3.8

2025 team: Houston Astros

Agent: Octagon

Valdez has pitched in plenty of big games and has a track record of performing in the postseason. He's an elite ground-ball pitcher who pitches deep into games. He did struggle down the stretch this season, allowing four or more runs in four of his final five starts and was the subject of some controversy. Even with that end to his season, he's still the best starting pitcher in this year's class.

Salary comps: Garrett Crochet 6-years, \$170 million; Tyler Glasnow 5-years, \$136.5 million; Carlos Rodón 6-years, \$162 million; Blake Snell 5-years, \$182 million

Best team fits: Astros, Orioles, Mets, Braves, Cubs, Padres, Giants

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$190 million

5. Bo Bichette, SS

Age: 27

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 3.4

2025 team: Toronto Blue Jays

Agent: Vayner Sports

Bichette was leading the American League in hits before he suffered a left knee sprain on Sept. 6 that ended his regular season. He batted .311/.357/.483 with 44 doubles, 18 home runs and 94 RBIs, a huge bounce-back season after a career-worst 2024. He's led the AL in hits twice in the last five years and has a career batting average of .294. He's a below-average defender at shortstop, however, and several interested teams view him as an option for third base going forward. His prime years have just begun and he's one of the youngest free agents on the market, though he has dealt with several lower body injuries the past couple of years. As long as teams have a clear sense of the health of his knee, Bichette will have plenty of suitors in free agency because he could be considered a fit as a shortstop, a third baseman or a second baseman.

Salary comps: Willy Adames 7-years, \$182 million; Dansby Swanson 7-years, \$177 million; Marcus Semien 7-years, \$175 million; Matt Chapman 6-years, \$151 million

Best team fits: Blue Jays, Red Sox, Tigers, Yankees, Phillies, Dodgers, Cubs, Mariners, Mets

Contract prediction: 7-years, \$189 million

6. Alex Bregman, 3B (opt-out)

Age: 31

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 3.5

2025 team: Boston Red Sox

Agent: Boras Corp.

Bregman has an opt-out in his contract with the Red Sox and his camp has already indicated that he plans to test the free-agent market for a second straight offseason. He battled a quad injury for a good part of the 2025 season, and still managed to slash .273/.360/.462 with 28 doubles, 18 home runs and 62 RBIs in 495 plate appearances, though he was significantly less productive after returning from the IL (.727 OPS) than he had been before the injury (.927 OPS). Bregman was a leader in the Boston clubhouse by example and words, mentoring many of the Red Sox young future stars. He will be sought-after in free agency as the industry views him as a winning player who can contribute on both sides of the ball and perform on the biggest stage in the biggest moments. He'll likely seek a long-term contract instead of settling for a shorter-term deal like he did last year. By opting out of his deal with the Red Sox, he's walking away from a guaranteed \$41.67 million in each of the next two seasons.

Salary comps: Matt Chapman 6-years, \$151 million; Willy Adames 7-years, \$182 million; Rafael Devers 10-years, \$313.5 million; Anthony Rendon 7-years, \$245 million; Nolan Arenado 8-years, \$260 million; José Ramírez 7-years, \$141 million

Best team fits: Red Sox, Tigers, Yankees, Phillies, Dodgers, Cubs, Mariners, Mets

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$182 million

7. Ranger Suárez, LHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 4.7

2025 team: Philadelphia Phillies

Agent: Boras Corp.

Suárez has been one of the most consistent left-handed starters in baseball over the last two seasons, making a combined 53 starts with an ERA and FIP both hovering around 3.30 over that span. He doesn't throw hard but his secondary pitches are very effective and he throws strikes. There should be plenty of interest in the lefty considering he has only 762 career innings at the major-league level on his pitching odometer.

Salary comps: Tyler Glasnow 5-years, \$136.5 million; Robbie Ray 5-years, \$115 million; Yusei Kikuchi 3-years, \$63.68 million; Carlos Rodón 6-years, \$162 million; Nathan Eovaldi 3-years, \$75 million; Sonny Gray 3-years, \$75 million; Blake Snell 5-years, \$182 million

Best team fits: Phillies, Mets, Braves, Orioles, Cubs, Padres, Giants, Astros, Tigers

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$164 million

8. Dylan Cease, RHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 1.1

2025 team: San Diego Padres

Agent: Boras Corp.

Cease has started 32 or more games in each of the last five seasons, striking out more than 200 batters each year while logging between 165 and 190 innings. This season, he led NL starters in strikeouts per nine innings (11.5) but also saw his walk total increase and his ERA jump to 4.55. His HR/9 also rose from 0.9 in 2024 to 1.1 this year. The wobble in command is a concern, but his ability to miss bats, durability and career FIP of 3.67 will have several contending teams lining up to bid for his services.

Salary comps: Garrett Crochet 6-years, \$170 million; Tyler Glasnow 5-years, \$136.5 million; Carlos Rodón 6-years, \$162 million; Blake Snell 5-years, \$182 million

Best team fits: Padres, Braves, Mets, Orioles, Cubs, Giants, Angels, Red Sox, Tigers

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$187 million

9. Tatsuya Imai, RHP

Age: 27

2025 team: Saitama Seibu Lions (Nippon Professional Baseball)

Agent: Boras Corp.

Imai is an undersized (listed at 5-foot-11, 154 pounds) right-handed starter for the Saitama Seibu Lions who is expected to be posted this offseason. He sits in the mid-90s with his fastball but can reach the high-90s when he needs it. His best secondary pitch is a wipeout slider and he mixes in a changeup, splitter, curveball and sinker. A two-time All-Star in Japan, Imai posted a 1.92 ERA in 163 2/3 innings this season. Despite his slight build, he's been durable and profiles in MLB as a mid-rotation innings-eater who can keep hitters guessing.

Best team fits: Mets, Giants, Red Sox, Cubs, Orioles, Astros, Padres

Contract prediction: 7-years, \$154 million

10. Cody Bellinger, OF/1B

Age: 30

Bats: L Throws: L

2025 bWAR: 5.0

2025 team: New York Yankees

Agent: Boras Corp.

Bellinger's ability to play above-average defense at all three outfield positions and first base increases his free-agent worth, although it looks like he's found a home in left field. He has been a perfect fit for the Yankees, where playing half his games at Yankee Stadium with the short porch in right helped him hit 29 home runs while slashing .272/.334/.480 (he had a .909 OPS at Yankee Stadium and a .715 OPS at every other park). I think he'll opt out of his contract and try to get the Yankees to give him a longer deal.

Salary comps: George Springer 6-years, \$150 million; Teoscar Hernández 3-years, \$66 million; Brandon Nimmo 8-years, \$162 million

Best team fits: Yankees, Mets, Astros, Padres, Guardians, Royals, Angels, Mariners

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$168 million

11. Zac Gallen, RHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 1.1

2025 team: Arizona Diamondbacks

Agent: Boras Corp.

Just two years ago, Gallen was the starting pitcher for the NL in the All-Star Game and finished in the top 10 in the Cy Young Award voting for the third time in four years. He followed that up last year by going 14-6 with a 3.65 ERA and was expected to be one of the top free-agent starters in this year's class. However, he had a down year, going 13-15 with a 4.83 ERA and 4.51

FIP over 33 starts. His rate of strikeouts per nine innings was the lowest of his career at 8.2, down from 9.5 the previous year. He just turned 30, but over the past two seasons, he hasn't been the same pitcher he was at his peak. Will teams see a pitcher who can compete for Cy Youngs again, or one who is more of a mid-rotation starter like he was the last two years?

Salary comps: Seth Lugo 2-years, \$46 million; Sonny Gray 3-years, \$75 million; Nathan Eovaldi 3-years, \$75 million; Yusei Kikuchi 3-years, \$66.38 million

Best team fits: Orioles, Red Sox, Tigers, Astros, Padres, Giants, Braves, Mets, Cardinals, Cubs

Contract prediction: 5-years, \$135 million

12. Munetaka Murakami, 1B/3B

Age: 25

Bats: L Throws: R

2025 team: Tokyo Yakult Swallows (Nippon Professional Baseball)

Agent: Excel Sports Management

Murakami will be posted by his NPB club this offseason. The slugging corner infielder underwent arthroscopic elbow surgery and also had an oblique injury this year, but still hit .286/.392/.659 with 24 homers in 69 games. Despite these physical setbacks, he is expected to be sought-after in free agency, although his injury history could affect how teams evaluate his worth. He profiles as a .240 to .260 type of hitter in MLB with legitimate 30-home run power. Defensively, he's below average at third base and just adequate at first base. Despite the missed time this year, he has still averaged more than 30 homers a season in Japan and he has a .394 career OBP. At 25, he's just entering his prime years.

Salary comps: Freddie Freeman 6-years, \$162 million; Matt Olson 8-years, \$168 million; Paul Goldschmidt 5-years, \$130 million; Edwin Encarnación 1-year, \$20 million; Carlos Santana 3-years, \$60 million; Josh Bell 2-years, \$32 million

Best team fits: Padres, Mets, Mariners, Diamondbacks, Guardians, Red Sox

Contract prediction: 6-years, \$160 million

13. Michael King, RHP (mutual option)

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 1.2

2025 team: San Diego Padres

Agent: Excel Sports Management

King entered the 2025 season as the potential No. 1 free-agent starter in this class after going 13-9 with a 2.95 ERA in 2024. However, he was placed on the IL on May 25 with a pinched thoracic nerve and when he returned on Aug. 9, he threw only 17 2/3 innings over the

remainder of the regular season and only one inning in the postseason, striking out three of the four batters he faced. His medicals will determine the type of contract he gets this offseason, and it is difficult to predict his contract without seeing those records. With that caveat and taking into account the potential injury risk, I predict he'll land a similar contract to what Nathan Eovaldi got from the Rangers and Sonny Gray got from the Cardinals, even though King is considerably younger than both. That said, if the medicals are completely clear, I could see him getting a five-year deal in the \$140 million range.

Salary comps: Nathan Eovaldi 3-years, \$75 million; Sonny Gray 3-years, \$75 million; Yusei Kikuchi 3-years, \$63.68 million

Best team fits: Padres, Yankees, Orioles, Braves, Mets, Cubs, Angels, Astros, Tigers, Red Sox

Contract prediction: 3-years, \$75 million

14. Edwin Díaz, RHP (opt-out)

Age: 31

2025 bWAR: 3.0

2025 team: New York Mets

Agent: Wasserman Group

Díaz is expected to opt out of his contract to pursue a longer, more lucrative deal, though he's made it clear his preference is to return to the Mets. He was again dominant this season, posting a 1.63 ERA with 28 saves and 98 strikeouts in 66 1/3 innings. He ended up with a 0.874 WHIP, too. After making roughly \$21 million a season each of the last three years, he has player options for \$18.5 million each of the next two years and a team option in 2028 for \$20.4 million (\$1 million buyout) should he not opt out of his current deal. If he does opt out, a new contract for four years with a slight raise probably brings him back to Queens.

Salary comps: Josh Hader 5-years, \$95 million; Tanner Scott 4-years, \$72 million

Best team fits: Mets, Dodgers, Yankees, Braves

Contract prediction: 4-years, \$88 million

15. Robert Suarez, RHP (opt-out)

Age: 34

2025 bWAR: 2.3

2025 team: San Diego Padres

Agent: Amuse Sports Agency

Suarez and Díaz will be the most sought-after closers in this year's class. Suarez led the NL with 40 saves, posting a 2.97 ERA with 75 strikeouts over 69 2/3 innings. He logged a 2.17 ERA during the second half of the season with 32 strikeouts and only four walks in 29 innings. The Padres

are expected to move on from Suarez because they're unwilling to commit to the long-term contract and dollars he's expected to get in free agency. Mason Miller, acquired at the trade deadline, will take over as the Padres' full-time closer next year, and they feel their strong bullpen depth will be enough if Suarez departs.

Salary comps: Josh Hader 5-years, \$95 million; Edwin Díaz 3-years, \$64 million; Tanner Scott 4-years, \$72 million

Best team fits: Padres, Mets, Dodgers, Yankees, Braves, Red Sox, Tigers

Contract prediction: 4-years, \$80 million

16. Shane Bieber, RHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 0.7

2025 team: Cleveland Guardians/Toronto Blue Jays

Agent: Rosenhaus Sports

Bieber had Tommy John surgery in April 2024 and returned to the majors on Aug. 22 with the Blue Jays after being acquired at the trade deadline from the Guardians. He made seven regular-season starts for Toronto, allowing two runs or fewer in five of the outings and pitching at least five innings in all of them. He's been a significant factor in the Blue Jays' run to the World Series, starting Games 3 and 7 of the ALCS. Bieber won the AL Cy Young in 2020 and finished in the top seven in voting in 2019 and 2022. He looks similar to the pitcher who dominated then, although his stuff is a tick down. That said, most pitchers coming back from Tommy John are much better a second year removed from the surgery. He'll probably have to accept another shorter-term deal with an opt-out clause that allows him to get back into free agency next offseason, when he might really be able to cash in if his stuff fully returns. Perhaps a three-year deal worth \$75 million with an opt-out after Year 1 would make sense here.

Salary comps: Seth Lugo 2-years, \$46 million; Sonny Gray 3-years, \$75 million; Nathan Eovaldi 3-years, \$75 million; Yusei Kikuchi 3-years, \$66.38 million

Best team fits: Blue Jays, Guardians, Red Sox, Braves, Giants, Orioles, Mets, Astros

Contract prediction: 3-years, \$75 million with a player opt-out after each year

17. Josh Naylor, 1B

Age: 28

Bats: L Throws: L

2025 bWAR: 3.1

2025 team: Arizona Diamondbacks/Seattle Mariners

Agent: ISE Baseball

Coming off a season in which he hit 31 homers and helped lead the Guardians to the ALCS, Naylor was traded last December to the Diamondbacks, who then sent him to the Mariners at the subsequent trade deadline. Though his home run total dropped from 31 to 20 in 2025, he improved his contact rate considerably and raised his batting average more than 50 points from 2024. He also added a “speed” element to his game, using his smarts on the basepaths to steal a career-high 30 bags despite being among the game’s slowest runners. At 28, Naylor has proven he’s a solid middle-of-the-order bat capable of hitting .300 with 20-plus homers. He might not be a superstar, but he’s a solid defender and a winning player who has helped the Guardians and Mariners to playoff berths the last two years.

Salary comps: Edwin Encarnación 1-year, \$20 million; Carlos Santana 3-years, \$60 million; Josh Bell 2-years, \$32 million; Paul Goldschmidt 5-years, \$130 million

Best team fits: Mariners, Mets, Red Sox, Diamondbacks, Guardians

Contract prediction: 4-years, \$90 million

18. Kazuma Okamoto, 1B

Age: 29

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 team: Yomiuri Giants (Nippon Professional Baseball)

Okamoto is a 29-year-old corner infielder and a six-time All-Star in Japan who will be posted this offseason by the Yomiuri Giants. In 77 games this season for Yomiuri, the right-handed hitter slashed .322/.411/.581 with 15 home runs but was limited by a left elbow injury that cost him roughly three months of the season. Okamoto has played both infield corners, but most MLB evaluators believe that first base is his best position. He’s a big power bat who has led the league in homers three times and hit a career-high 41 in 2023. He has terrific hand-eye coordination and solid contact skills to go along with the power. Murakami has more raw power than Okamoto — who is four years older — but Okamoto has proven to be more consistent at the plate.

Salary comps: Freddie Freeman 6-years, \$162 million; Matt Olson 8-years, \$168 million; Paul Goldschmidt 5-years, \$130 million; Edwin Encarnación 1-year, \$20 million; Carlos Santana 3-years, \$60 million; Josh Bell 2-years, \$32 million

Best team fits: Mariners, Mets, Red Sox, Diamondbacks, Guardians

Contract prediction: 4-years, \$90 million

19. Eugenio Suárez, 3B

Age: 34

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 3.6

2025 team: Arizona Diamondbacks/Seattle Mariners

Agent: Octagon

Suárez led all third basemen this season with 49 home runs and he drove in 118 runs. He was traded from the Diamondbacks to the Mariners at the deadline but struggled after joining Seattle, hitting just .189 with 13 home runs in 53 games and 220 plate appearances. Suárez's power is real, though, as this was the fifth time in the last six years he hit 30 or more home runs; however, he struggles with strikeouts and his walk rate has dipped the last two seasons. He'll play at 34 years old next year, which is why he'll have to sign a shorter-term deal in free agency.

Salary comps: Matt Chapman 6-years, \$151 million; Josh Donaldson AAV of \$23 million from 2018-23 over three different contracts; Matt Carpenter 2-years, \$39 million; Justin Turner 2-years, \$34 million

Best team fits: Mariners, Red Sox, Tigers, Phillies, Angels

Contract prediction: 3-years, \$72 million

20. Merrill Kelly, RHP

Age: 37

2025 bWAR: 2.9

2025 team: Arizona Diamondbacks/Texas Rangers

Agent: Apex Baseball

Kelly has been consistently solid since 2019, posting an ERA under 4.00 in five of seven seasons. Last year between the Diamondbacks and Rangers, he went 12-9 with a 3.52 ERA in 32 starts. He had 167 strikeouts and 48 walks over 184 innings. Kelly grew up in Arizona and played his junior college and college ball in the state. Don't be surprised if he re-signs with the Diamondbacks to finish his career with them.

Salary comps: Seth Lugo 2-years, \$46 million; Clay Holmes 3-years, \$38 million

Best team fits: Diamondbacks, Rangers, Orioles, Mets

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$30 million

Gleyber Torres heads into free agency for a second straight offseason, this time coming off a much better season than last year. David Reginek / Imagin Images

21. Gleyber Torres, 2B

Age: 29

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 2.9

2025 team: Detroit Tigers
Agent: Octagon

In his first year after leaving the Yankees, Torres had a .358 OBP with 16 home runs for the Tigers and was an important table-setter for them. However, he slumped during the second half of the season and remains a well-below-average defensive second baseman in terms of glove, range and arm strength. Some of his second-half slump may be explained by the fact he was playing through a hernia injury that he had surgery on after the season. Last offseason, he was willing to sign a one-year contract to prove his worth. This time, he should be able to get a multi-year contract.

Salary comps: Tommy Edman 5-years, \$74 million; Jeff McNeil 4-years, \$50 million

Best team fits: Tigers, Giants, Rockies, White Sox, Angels

Contract prediction: 4-years, \$52 million

22. Jorge Polanco, 2B
Age: 32
Bats: B Throws: R
2025 bWAR: 2.6
2025 team: Seattle Mariners
Agent: Octagon

Polanco's left knee is finally healthy and he just put together one of the better years of his career, hitting 26 home runs and posting an .821 OPS, his best since 2021. He followed that up with a memorable postseason. Polanco can play second or third base but is a below-average defender at both spots and comes with a long history of knee troubles. Offensively, he swings the bat well from both sides of the plate and makes a lot of contact.

Salary comps: Gleyber Torres 1-year, \$15 million; Jeff McNeil 4-years, \$50 million; Brandon Lowe 4-years, \$24 million, Ha-Seong Kim 3-years, \$12.5 million; Thairo Estrada 1-year, \$4 million

Best team fits: Mariners, Astros, White Sox, Rockies, Giants

Contract Prediction: 2-years, \$26 million

23. J.T. Realmuto, C
Age: 34
Bats: R Throws: R
2025 bWAR: 2.6
2025 team: Philadelphia Phillies
Agent: CAA Sports

Age is catching up to Realmuto, who is no longer the All-Star, Gold Glove, Silver Slugger catcher he was from 2018-22. He still holds his own offensively and defensively, but his power has diminished. Defensively, he's still good at controlling the running game, ranking in the 99th percentile in pop time and 95th percentile in caught stealing. However, his framing and blocking skills are well below average at this point. In all likelihood, he'll need to take a significant pay cut from his 2025 salary of \$23 million, but catching is always in demand.

Salary comps: Salvador Perez 4-years, \$82 million; Sean Murphy 6-years, \$73 million; Mitch Garver 2-years, \$24 million

Best team fits: Phillies, Padres

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$34 million

24. Trent Grisham, OF

Age: 29

Bats: L Throws: L

2025 bWAR: 3.5

2025 team: New York Yankees

Agent: ISE Baseball

Grisham put together one of the best seasons of his career at a good time, hitting a career-high 34 homers. He had an up-and-down season production-wise but still managed to be one of the Yankees' most productive position players overall (3.5 bWAR). He's never hit for average in his career, but he can draw walks, showed impressive power this season and can play all three outfield positions. That said, he profiles more as a platoon outfielder against right-handers than an everyday center fielder.

Salary comps: Michael Conforto 1-year, \$17 million; Tyler O'Neill 3-years, \$49.5 million; Lourdes Gurriel Jr. 3-years, \$42 million

Best team fits: Yankees, Pirates, Rockies, Twins, White Sox, Angels

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$30 million

25. Chris Bassitt, RHP

Age: 36

2025 bWAR: 2.1

2025 team: Toronto Blue Jays

Agent: Meister Sports Management

Bassitt went 11-9 this year with a 4.01 FIP and for the seventh time in eight years finished with an ERA under 4.00. It was also the fourth year in a row he made 30 or more starts and logged

more than 170 innings. Bassitt lowered his walk rate to 2.7 per nine innings after it rose to 3.7 in 2024. He has never been a big strikeout pitcher, but he has proven durable since recovering from Tommy John surgery in 2016 and his veteran leadership is also a plus in the clubhouse. At 36, he's likely looking at a shorter-term deal.

Salary comps: Nathan Eovaldi 3-years, \$75 million; Sonny Gray 3-years, \$75 million; Marcus Stroman 3-years, \$71 million; Seth Lugo 2-years, \$46 million; Yusei Kikuchi 3-years, \$66.38 million

Best team fits: Blue Jays, Orioles, Tigers, Athletics, Padres, Brewers

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$45 million

26. Tyler Rogers, RHP

Age: 35

2025 bWAR: 2.4

2025 team: San Francisco Giants/New York Mets

Agent: Frontline

Rogers is coming off the best year of his career. He posted a 1.80 ERA with the Giants over 53 games before being dealt to the Mets at the trade deadline. He continued his success there, logging a 2.30 ERA over 28 more appearances. He led the NL in games pitched with 81, the fourth time in six seasons he's led the league in that category. Rogers has one of the most unusual deliveries in baseball and is an extreme ground-ball pitcher who has done a good job against righties and lefties. His durability and the lack of stress he puts on his shoulder and elbow give him a low injury risk despite his career track record of heavy usage.

Salary comps: Tommy Kahnle 1-year, \$7.75 million; Matt Strahm 1-year, \$7.5 million; Kyle Finnegan 1-year, \$6 million; Seranthony Domínguez 2-years, \$14.5 million

Best team fits: Mets, Braves, Dodgers, Giants, Tigers, Yankees

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$15 million

27. Ryan O'Hearn, 1B/OF/DH

Age: 32

Bats: L Throws: L

2025 bWAR: 2.4

2025 team: Baltimore Orioles/San Diego Padres

Agent: Republik Sports

O'Hearn spent the first half of the season with the Orioles, where he hit .283 with 13 home runs in 94 games before being sent to the Padres at the trade deadline. With San Diego, he hit .276 but his power dropped significantly (.463 SLG with Baltimore; .387 SLG with San Diego).

O'Hearn has developed into an everyday player with the ability to hit around .280 with 15 to 17 home runs. He is a below-average defender both in corner outfield spots and at first base. He has solid hands but lacks range. This is his first time as a free agent but he's likely looking at a shorter-term deal.

Salary comps: Max Kepler 1-year, \$10 million; Mike Yastrzemski 1-year, \$9.25 million; Lourdes Gurriel Jr. 3-years, \$42 million

Best team fits: Padres, Pirates, Twins, Rays

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$24 million

28. Raisel Iglesias, RHP
Age: 35
Bats: R Throws: R
2025 bWAR: 1.3
2025 team: Atlanta Braves
Agent: Magnus Media

Iglesias had an impressive four-year run in Atlanta, saving 97 games and tallying a 2.35 ERA in 222 appearances over that span. He had his highest ERA and FIP since 2019 this season, however, and at age 35 is showing signs of decline. That said, he was still durable, appearing in 70 games and leading the NL in games finished with 57. He'll have to prepare for a pay cut from his \$16 million 2025 salary and probably a new home this winter.

Salary comps: Tanner Scott 4-years, \$72 million; Jeff Hoffman 3-years, \$33 million; Taylor Rogers 3-years, \$33 million; Carlos Estévez 2-years, \$22.2 million; Blake Treinen 2-years, \$22 million

Best team fits: Braves, Giants, Reds, Athletics, Orioles, Angels, Tigers

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$24 million

29. Luis Arraez, 1B/DH
Age: 28
Bats: L Throws: R
2025 bWAR: 1.3
2025 team: San Diego Padres
Agent: MVP Sports Group

Arraez has won batting titles as a member of the Twins, Marlins and Padres, winning them in three consecutive years from 2022-24. That streak ended this year when Trea Turner of the Phillies won the NL batting title and Arraez finished fourth. The three-time All-Star and two-time Silver Slugger award winner continues to hit for average and create traffic, although he

does it without much pop or production. He's never hit more than 10 homers, scored 90 runs or driven in 70 in a season. Arraez has a slow bat but he squares the ball up at an elite level and doesn't swing-and-miss; at times, it's like he has a tennis racket, the way he places the ball all over the field. At this stage of his career, he's mostly a first baseman but is a below-average defender.

Salary comps: Gleyber Torres 1-year, \$15 million; Jeff McNeil 4-years, \$50 million

Best team fits: Padres, Athletics, Pirates, Rockies, White Sox, Angels

Contract prediction: 2 years, \$30 million

30. Tyler Mahle, RHP

Age: 31

2025 bWAR: 2.1

2025 team: Texas Rangers

Agent: ISE Baseball

Mahle missed nearly three months of the season with right shoulder fatigue, but he was effective when healthy, posting a 3.37 FIP over 16 starts. Although his four-seamer sits in the low-90s, hitters had a tough time squaring it up and his splitter was a big weapon for him. He knows how to keep hitters off-balance. He has lowered his home run rate and increased his ground-ball and strikeout rates while improving his command and control. Injuries have been an issue for Mahle over the last three seasons — he hasn't topped 130 innings since 2021. When he's healthy, Mahle is a solid middle- to back-of-the-rotation starter, but the injury risk will be a factor for potential suitors.

Salary comps: Justin Verlander 1-year, \$15 million; Frankie Montas 2-years, \$34 million; Jack Flaherty 2-years, \$35 million; Alex Cobb 1-year, \$15 million

Best team fits: Rangers, Orioles, Angels, Mets, Giants, Tigers, Athletics

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$17 million

31. Ha-Seong Kim, 2B/SS/3B (player option)

Age: 30

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 0.4

2025 team: Tampa Bay Rays/Atlanta Braves

Agent: ISE Baseball

In 2023, Kim won a Gold Glove Award as the Padres' primary second baseman while finishing 14th in the NL MVP voting after he hit .260 with 17 home runs, 60 RBIs and 38 stolen bases. He followed that up in 2024 by hitting .233 with 11 homers and 22 steals in 121 games but his

season ended in mid-August when he suffered a tear in his right shoulder labrum diving back to first base. He had surgery on the shoulder before signing with the Rays as a free agent in the offseason. He didn't debut in 2025 until July 4 and only played in 24 games for Tampa Bay before he was claimed off waivers by the Braves near the end of the season. He ended up playing 24 games with Atlanta. The Braves were hoping he wouldn't exercise his \$16 million player option for 2026, but according to media reports he's expected to do that. Now, the Braves will try to re-sign him to a multi-year contract in free agency with the hope that he can be their everyday shortstop. His ability to play second base, shortstop and third base increases his value and overall industry interest.

Salary comps: Gleyber Torres 1-year, \$15 million; Jorge Polanco 1-year, \$7.75 million; Max Muncy 2-years, \$24 million

Best team fits: Braves, Padres, Nationals, Tigers, Giants

Contract prediction: 3-years, \$39 million

32. Zack Littell, RHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 3.2

2025 team: Tampa Bay Rays/Cincinnati Reds

Agent: CAA Sports

Littell started the year with the Rays, where he went 8-8 with a 3.58 ERA over 22 starts. He was dealt to the Reds at the trade deadline and went 2-0 with a 4.39 ERA over 10 more starts. Littell doesn't miss many bats (6.3 K/9 in 2025), but he also doesn't walk many batters either (1.5 BB/9). That formula means he's very dependent on having a good defense behind him and keeping the ball in the park, but his ability to throw a lot of innings has value. He also has experience as a reliever and could be used in a variety of roles.

Salary comps: Clay Holmes 3-years, \$38 million; Tyler Mahle 2-years, \$22 million; Germán Márquez 2-years, \$20 million; Michael Soroka 1-year, \$9 million; Aaron Civale 1-year, \$8 million

Best team fits: Rockies, Athletics, Orioles, Rays

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$10 million

33. Emilio Pagán, RHP

Age: 34

2025 bWAR: 2.0

2025 team: Cincinnati Reds

Agent: Ballengee Group

Pagán appeared in 70 games for the Reds in 2025, tossing 68 2/3 innings with a 3.72 FIP. The four-seam fastball and splitter are his two best pitches. He was much better on the road (1.88 ERA) than at home (3.60 ERA), notable since he pitched in a home ballpark that favors hitters. He's indicated he'd like to return to Cincinnati but should field interest from around the league.

Salary comps: Carlos Estévez 2-years, \$22.2 million; A.J. Minter 2-years, \$22 million; Blake Treinen 2-years, \$22 million; Joe Jiménez 3-years, \$26 million

Best team fits: Reds, Athletics, Pirates, Giants, Nationals, Rockies

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$22 million

34. Brad Keller, RHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 1.5

2025 team: Chicago Cubs

Agent: Excel Sports Management

After a career spent mostly in the rotation with Kansas City, Keller made 14 of his 16 appearances in 2024 out of the bullpen, splitting the season between the White Sox and Red Sox. This year, he was in the bullpen full-time after joining the Cubs. He embraced the role, appearing in 68 games and posting an impressive 2.94 FIP, while being an integral part of the Cubs' bullpen success. He's set himself up for a bright future as a high-leverage reliever.

Salary comps: Tommy Kahnle 1-year, \$7.75 million; Kyle Finnegan 1-year, \$6 million; Gregory Soto 1-year, \$5.35 million; Matt Strahm 1-year, \$7.5 million; Paul Sewald 1-year, \$7 million; Ryan Brasier 2-years, \$18 million; José Leclerc 1-year, \$10 million

Best team fits: Cubs, Dodgers, Mets, Braves, Phillies, Cardinals, Tigers, Astros

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$15 million

35. Devin Williams, RHP

Age: 31

2025 bWAR: -0.3

2025 team: New York Yankees

Agent: Klutch Sports Group

The Yankees acquired Williams last winter with hopes he'd be the impact closer he was with the Brewers. Unfortunately, that's not what they got as he ended the season with an ERA near 5.00 and a negative bWAR. He did finish strong, however, pitching well in September and during the postseason. His Bugs Bunny changeup was there at season's end, too, and it provides hope that he could rebound with a different team next year.

Salary comps: Andrew Kittredge 1-year, \$10 million; Kenley Jansen 1-year, \$10 million; José Leclerc 1-year, \$10 million

Best team fits: Brewers, Braves, Reds, Tigers, Rangers, Giants

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$10 million

36. Luke Weaver, RHP

Age: 32

2025 bWAR: 0.8

2025 team: New York Yankees

Agent: Ballengee Group

Weaver was one of the best high-leverage relievers in 2024 for the Yankees and he had a dominant first half of the season this year, posting a 2.91 ERA. It was a different story in the second half when he posted a 4.40 ERA and there was speculation he was tipping his pitches. This winter, teams will have to decide whether Weaver's second-half issues are fixable and he can be the pitcher he was in the first half.

Salary comps: Blake Treinen 2-years, \$22 million; Andrew Kittredge 1-year, \$10 million; Jeff Hoffman 3-years, \$33 million; Emilio Pagán 2-years, \$16 million; Matt Strahm 1-year, \$7.5 million

Best team fits: Yankees, Braves, Cardinals, Giants, Athletics, Angels, Orioles

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$20 million

37. Ryan Helsley, RHP

Age: 31

2025 bWAR: 0.1

2025 team: St. Louis Cardinals/New York Mets

Agent: Wasserman Group

Helsley started the year as the Cardinals' closer and logged a 3.00 ERA and 21 saves before being dealt to the Mets at the trade deadline. He never was able to get it together with New York, posting a 7.20 ERA over 22 appearances with an embarrassing 1.80 WHIP. His slider remains his best pitch, but his fastball was crushed all year despite an average velocity of 99.3 mph. He'll need to figure out how to improve his fastball effectiveness with his next team.

Salary comps: Andrew Kittredge 1-year, \$10 million; Kenley Jansen 1-year, \$10 million; José Leclerc 1-year, \$10 million

Best team fits: Pirates, Athletics, Tigers, Giants, Rays

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$10 million

38. Justin Verlander, RHP

Age: 42

2025 bWAR: 1.2

2025 team: San Francisco Giants

Agent: ISE Baseball

Verlander has made it clear he wants to pitch in his age-43 season, and the way he pitched down the stretch, the future Hall of Famer deserves one more shot at it. His best month of the season was September, when he made five starts for the Giants, posting a 2.08 ERA and allowing two earned runs or fewer in four of his five starts. He made 29 starts in total and threw 152 innings with a 3.85 ERA.

Salary comps: Clayton Kershaw 1-year, \$7.5 million

Best team fits: Tigers (so he can retire as a Tiger), Giants

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$12 million

39. Nick Martinez, RHP

Age: 35

2025 bWAR: 2.3

2025 team: Cincinnati Reds

Agent: Boras Corp.

Martinez made 26 starts and 14 relief appearances for the Reds this season, going 11-14 with a 1.207 WHIP. His changeup and cutter were effective but he had trouble getting his four-seam fastball past hitters. Going forward, his best role is as a long reliever and spot starter. He'll need to accept a big pay cut from his \$21 million salary this offseason.

Salary comps: Michael Lorenzen 1-year, \$7 million; Martin Pérez 1-year, \$5 million; Aaron Civale 1-year, \$8 million; Michael Soroka 1-year, \$9 million; Colin Rea 1-year, \$5 million

Best team fits: Reds, Pirates, Athletics, Rockies, Twins

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$11 million

40. Marcell Ozuna, DH

Age: 35

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 1.6

2025 team: Atlanta Braves

Agent: CAA Sports

Injuries and age have caught up with Ozuna, as he hit just .232 with 21 home runs in 2025, a far cry from the 39 home runs he blasted in 2024 when he slashed .302/.378/.546 and finished fourth in the NL MVP voting. His bat speed has dropped each of the last three seasons and his exit velocity was only average (48th percentile) last season. Could he be a Comeback Player of the Year candidate next year? Sure, but it's not likely, and it's also not likely he's with the Braves in 2026.

Salary comps: Joc Pederson 2-years, \$37 million; Rhys Hoskins 2-years, \$34 million; Mitch Garver 2-years, \$24 million; Gary Sánchez 1-year, \$8.5 million

Best team fits: Braves, Rangers

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$12 million

41. Jose Quintana, LHP

Age: 36

2025 bWAR: 2.4

2025 team: Milwaukee Brewers

Agent: Wasserman Group

Quintana has put together two straight solid seasons. In 2024, he made 31 starts for the Mets, going 10-10 with a 3.75 ERA over 170 1/3 innings. He signed with the Brewers in the offseason and made 24 starts for them this year, going 11-7 with a 3.86 ERA in 131 2/3 innings. He has the guile to continue as a solid back-of-the-rotation starter despite not missing many bats and walking too many hitters. He might have one more year left in the tank as a fifth- or spot-starter type.

Salary comps: Quintana's last contract, 1-year, \$4 million

Best team fits: Brewers

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$5 million

42. Drew Pomeranz, LHP

Age: 37

2025 bWAR: 0.9

2025 team: Seattle Mariners/Chicago Cubs

Agent: CAA Sports

After beginning the season in the Mariners' farm system, Pomeranz was traded to the Cubs for cash in April. He then was promoted to the big leagues and appeared in 57 games for Chicago, posting a 3.01 FIP with 10.5 K/9 and an ERA+ of 178. He made six appearances for the Cubs in the postseason, allowing one run in six innings. This season was his first pitching in the big

leagues since 2021. His fastball run value ranked in the 85th percentile and his strikeout percentage was in the 84th percentile. Batters hit just .207 against his four-seam fastball and .220 against his knuckle curveball.

Salary comps: Kyle Finnegan 1-year, \$6 million; Chris Martin 1-year, \$5 million; Ryne Stanek 1-year, \$4.5 million; Jakob Junis 1-year, \$4.5 million

Best team fits: Cubs, Padres

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$5 million

43. Jack Flaherty, RHP

Age: 30

2025 bWAR: 0.9

2025 team: Detroit Tigers

Agent: CAA Sports

Flaherty made 31 starts for the Tigers this year, punching out 188 batters — the third most in his career. His 4.64 ERA is misleading based on how well he actually pitched; in my view, his 3.85 FIP was a better barometer of his performance. His knuckle curve was his most effective pitch and the slider was also a weapon. Due to Flaherty's injury history, the medical risk assessments will determine what type of contract offers he receives on the open market.

Salary comps: Matthew Boyd 2-years, \$29 million; Germán Márquez 2-years, \$20 million; Tyler Mahle 2-years, \$22 million

Best team fits: Tigers, Angels, Brewers

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$22 million

44. Brandon Woodruff, RHP

Age: 32

2025 bWAR: 1.3

2025 team: Milwaukee Brewers

Agent: McKinnis Sports Management

Woodruff missed all of the 2024 season and part of this year after undergoing shoulder surgery in October 2023. He made his 2025 debut in July and became a legitimate contender for Comeback Player of the Year with 12 strong starts (3.20 ERA, 0.912 WHIP). However, a right lat strain in late September forced him to miss the playoffs. Obviously, the medical risk assessment will determine what types of offers he gets in free agency, but if healthy, he could be one of the best value signings in free agency.

Salary comps: Matthew Boyd 2-years, \$29 million; Germán Márquez 2-years, \$20 million; Tyler Mahle 2-years, \$22 million

Best team fits: Brewers, Rangers

Contract prediction: 2-years, \$22 million

45. Kyle Finnegan, RHP

Age: 34

2025 bWAR: 1.0

2025 team: Washington Nationals/Detroit Tigers

Agent: The L. Warner Companies

Finnegan was a free agent last winter after saving 88 games in his first five seasons in the majors with the Nationals, but was disappointed when the best offer came late, a one-year, \$5.38 million deal from Washington. He lived up to that contract and more before being traded to the Tigers, which led to his first postseason opportunity. He saved 24 games during the regular season between the Tigers and Nationals and was at his best with Detroit down the stretch (1.50 ERA in 16 appearances).

Salary comps: Tommy Kahnle 1-year, \$7.75 million; Kyle Finnegan's last contract 1-year, \$5.38 million; Gregory Soto 1-year, \$5.35 million; Matt Strahm 1-year, \$7.5 million; Paul Sewald 1-year, \$7 million

Best team fits: Tigers, Cardinals, Marlins, Rays

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$6.25 million

46. Adrian Houser, RHP

Age: 32

2025 bWAR: 3.3

2025 team: Chicago White Sox/Tampa Bay Rays

Agent: BBI Sports Group

Houser started the year with the White Sox, going 6-2 with a 2.10 ERA over 11 starts before being moved at the trade deadline to the Rays, where he then posted a 4.79 ERA over 10 starts. He has an above-average fastball and generates a high ground-ball rate, avoiding the barrel. He also has well-above-average extension. Houser profiles as a back-of-the-rotation innings-eater.

Salary comps: Zack Littell 1-year, \$5.720 million; Griffin Canning 1-year, \$4.25 million; Colin Rea 1-year, \$4.250 million; Martin Pérez 1-year, \$3.5 million; Kyle Hendricks 1-year, \$2.5 million

Best team fits: Rays, Angels, Athletics, Rockies, White Sox

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$4 million

47. Miguel Andujar, 3B/OF

Age: 30

Bats: R Throws: R

2025 bWAR: 0.8

2025 team: Athletics/Cincinnati Reds

Agent: CAA Sports

Andujar has finally found his best role — as a platoon left fielder and pinch hitter against left-handed pitching. He slashed .389/.409/.578 against left-handed pitchers in 2025. In a season split between the A's and Reds, he belted 17 doubles and 10 home runs over 321 at-bats, and he hit .359 in 110 at-bats with the Reds after the trade.

Salary comps: Harrison Bader 1-year, \$5.25 million; Austin Hayes 1-year, \$4.1 million; Tommy Pham 1-year, \$4.025 million

Best team fits: Reds, Phillies, Rockies

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$5.5 million

48. Mike Yastrzemski, OF

Age: 35

Bats: L Throws: L

2025 bWAR: 2.7

2025 team: San Francisco Giants/Kansas City Royals

Agent: Jack Toffey

Yastrzemski hit .231 with eight homers in 96 games for the Giants before being dealt to the Royals at the trade deadline. He hit .237 with for Kansas City, but showed significantly more power, raising his slugging percentage from .355 pre-trade to .403 by the end of the season. He's always controlled the strike zone well, and he walked more than he struck out in his 50 games with Kansas City. Yastrzemski's best role at this point in his career is as a fourth outfielder or platoon starter versus right-handed pitching.

Contract comps: Kiké Hernandez 1-year, \$6.5 million; Andrew Vaughn 1-year, \$5.85 million; Harrison Bader 1-year, \$5.25 million

Best team fits: Royals

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$6 million

49. Paul Goldschmidt, 1B/DH

Age: 38

Bats: R Throws: R
2025 bWAR: 1.2
2025 team: New York Yankees
Agent: Excel Sports Management

Goldschmidt held his own in 2025, slashing .274/.328/.403 with 31 doubles, 10 homers and 45 RBIs in 145 games for the Yankees. Age and decline have caught up with him but he should have another year or two left, especially if he accepts a job as a platoon player, which is his best role at this point in his career.

Contract comps: Paul Goldschmidt's last contract, 1-year, \$12 million; Yandy Díaz 1-year, \$10 million; Josh Bell 1-year, \$6 million

Best team fits: Diamondbacks

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$10 million

50. Cedric Mullins, CF
Age: 31
Bats: L Throws: L
2025 bWAR: 0.4
2025 team: Baltimore Orioles/New York Mets
Agent: Cope Sports Management

Mullins has played himself off being an everyday center fielder despite still being an above-average defender thanks to his plus range. He's still at 15-homer, 15-stolen base type talent, but he's not hit .235 or above in the last three years. I don't see him getting an everyday job anymore, but he would be a quality fourth-type outfielder on a contending team.

Contract comps: Lane Thomas 1-year, \$7.825 million; Trent Grisham 1-year, \$5.25 million; Brandon Marsh 1-year, \$3 million

Best team fits: Phillies, Yankees, Guardians, Royals

Contract prediction: 1-year, \$8 million

The SF Standard

The biggest challenges Tony Vitello will face as Giants manager

John Shea

Buster Posey's risky move to hire University of Tennessee coach Tony Vitello as the Giants' next manager has been well received by many fans despite a justified skepticism rooted from Vitello's lack of experience in pro ball.

With this historic NCAA-to-MLB transition, Posey is banking on Vitello's success in Knoxville translating in San Francisco. But Vitello has a laundry list of challenges ahead and many steps to take to begin winning over fans and his players.

Here are five.

Adjusting to life after college

In college ball, regular seasons are 56 games, roughly a third of a big-league season, with a Friday-Saturday-Sunday conference series and non-conference games Tuesday and/or Wednesday. In the majors, teams can exceed 200 games a year with 162 in the regular season, another month in spring training, and whatever comes in the postseason. The game-planning, in-game strategies, and dealing with players on a daily basis are all drastically different.

With few off days, Vitello must better pace himself over the long grind and know when to pull a starter, which relievers to use, and when and how to keep position players fresh. It's an adjustment. College hitters use metal bats. Relievers don't face a three-batter minimum. The majors have no mercy rules or curfew policies, and no big-leaguer has to maintain a certain GPA. Just a good ERA or OBP.

Vitello has had some extreme rah-rah teams with players known to do some heavy razzing directed at the opposition. Yes, it might be common in some amateur ranks but not so much at the highest level. That would need to be toned down, unless Drew Gilbert has completely revitalized the Giants' culture.

Related

Why Buster Posey is the only MLB executive who could have hired Tony Vitello

The Giants are evolving in an unlikely way, and Tony Vitello is the face of change

In his playing days, Posey wasn't necessarily a rah-rah guy and knew the importance of respecting the opponent. He was far more measured than animated teammates Hunter Pence, Pablo Sandoval, Brian Wilson, and Tim Lincecum. Then again, having been surrounded by those guys, he realizes the benefits that outgoing personalities can have in the clubhouse and on the field. Which is a good reason he hired Vitello.

Building a diverse staff

Vitello can't take in a bunch of college-level coaches on his staff. At Tennessee, he had a limited number of paid assistants but a huge support staff. He would benefit from a grizzled coach alongside him in the dugout. A Ron Wotus type.

In fact, Wotus would be a perfect bench coach. He's such a good soldier, baseball man, and organizational lifer that he has succeeded under five managers (Dusty Baker, Felipe Alou, Bruce Bochy, Gabe Kapler, Bob Melvin) and has been a prized resource in recent years as a special assistant – suiting up and working with players before games and hanging with Posey's inner circle during games.

Melvin's coaches were told they could seek other employment, but holding on to a few would provide some continuity with players, starting with pitching coach J.P. Martinez and first-/third-base coach Mark Hallberg. Pat Burrell, Damon Minor, and Garvin Alston have been extremely valuable to the organization, and Oscar Bernard has built a relationship with Rafael Devers.

Connecting with players

It's one thing for Vitello to get college kids with no leverage to buy into his program; it'll be another to get accomplished big-leaguers with millions in the bank to do the same. He's no longer recruiting kids out of high school, junior college, and the transfer portal. He's inheriting a roster put together by Posey and GM Zack Minasian.

Vitello can use his dandy salesman techniques that landed him many of the nation's top recruits to make Giants players and free agents believe in him and his style of overseeing a roster. Yes, the SEC might be the closest thing in amateur ball to the big leagues, but the Giants have just two players on their 40-man roster from the SEC: Drew Gilbert and Blade Tidwell, both from Tennessee.

Vitello's first order of business is learning and respecting the tendencies of Devers, Willy Adames, Matt Chapman and Logan Webb, and we trust he already has reached out to them all. If they endorse Vitello, it'll be far easier for the rest of the roster to buy in. Players can say all they want about how excited they are about Vitello, but the big test will come when they get on the field and do this for real. Only then will we see if they'll play for him.

Posey would love for Vitello to evolve into a key recruiter on the free-agent market, though the best talking point in those negotiations is dollars. Ownership's commitment is the base of all negotiations, but if the convincing Vitello could help close a deal or two, he'd be a difference-maker. Not just with the prime free agents – this year's class features outfielder Kyle Tucker and starting pitchers Dylan Cease, Ranger Suárez, Framber Valdez, and Zac Gallen – but the middle-of-the-road guys, too.

Embracing history

One extreme difference between Posey and Farhan Zaidi is that Posey is more inclusive and open to different ideas. For example, he knocked down a wall between two booths on the

broadcast level of the press box so that many of his assistants could squeeze into a bigger room to watch games together and express their thoughts.

Also, Posey invited about a dozen former Giants players to spring training to spend a week apiece working with young players. The gesture was warmly received in the clubhouse. Zaidi wanted little to do with Giants of the past or their messaging. Of course, Melvin was all in on welcoming alumni. He's one of them and leaned on their expertise throughout training camp.

Posey needs to educate Vitello on these former stars and make sure they're a vital part of spring training and beyond. That certainly includes Barry Bonds and Will Clark, who were noticeably present more during the summer once Posey took over. Their teachings on hitting and the game overall are invaluable.

Beating L.A.

Most of all, this is about competing with the Dodgers in the National League West. The Giants went 7-19 against the Dodgers and second-place Padres, and that's not acceptable in Posey's world. It shouldn't be in Vitello's, either.

Posey knows he can't come close to the Dodgers' resources or spending habits, but if he can build a winner around the fiery Vitello, with the Giants eventually out-thinking, out-energizing, and even out-playing the Dodgers, it'll be mission accomplished.

Vitello turned a mediocre Tennessee program into a national power, and now he takes over a mediocre big-league team. By mediocre, we mean 81-81, which has been the Giants' ceiling the past four seasons. One playoff appearance in nine years can lead to extreme and drastic measures, and that's what we have with Posey hiring Vitello.

ESPN

Tony Vitello says leaving Vols for Giants 'selfish' decision

ESPN Staff

New San Francisco Giants manager Tony Vitello admitted it was difficult to leave his job as Tennessee baseball coach but ultimately called it the correct decision to make the unprecedented jump straight to the top of a major league clubhouse.

"It was selfish. It was personal reasons," Vitello told reporters Thursday, according to the Knoxville News Sentinel. "I have always tried to be a good teammate, but I feel like I made a selfish decision that was one I needed to make. It was the right decision."

Vitello's hiring marks the first time a big league team has hired a manager directly from a college program without any experience as a professional coach. Vitello was first publicly linked to the Giants on Saturday, when he was identified as the favorite for the job, but he said no decision had been made at that point and expressed some frustration at how the hiring process played out in the media.

"I did not have anything to do with that, and it put everyone in a whirlwind," Vitello said as part of a lengthy statement. "Now that we look back on it, I think [it] was unfair. Hopefully, people don't think I'm a diva because that's kind of how it seemed to play out."

He said he leaned on "anyone and everyone" as he tried to decide between his two options. He ultimately chose the Giants, who announced his hiring Wednesday.

Now Vitello, 47, is taking over a San Francisco team that has missed the playoffs for four straight years and is coming off an 81-81 season. He heads to the majors after leading Tennessee to a 341-131 record, three appearances in the Men's College World Series and a national title in 2024.

This Thursday, Vitello would answer questions only about his Tennessee exit. He is set to address his role with the Giants in an introductory news conference next Thursday.

As Vitello weighed his managing future, Tennessee fans made themselves known during a scrimmage Tuesday, chanting for him and hanging a sign asking him to stay. Though he ultimately chose to leave, Vitello expressed his gratitude to the Volunteers supporters.

"If that is the last time I ever stepped foot on this campus or this field as an employee or as a Vol wearing our orange, I'm just so thankful for the people that showed up," Vitello told reporters. "It will forever be ingrained in my memory, and it made what was the last day on the job, technically, very, very special."