

2023 MLB SEASON PREVIEW

NEW FACES, NEW PLACES

JACOB deGROM, RHP

The most dominant pitcher in baseball, Jacob deGrom left the New York Mets to become the jewel of the newly revamped Texas Rangers rotation. The 34-year-old has battled injuries in recent years, but when he's on there's no one better. Since 2021 deGrom has posted preposterous numbers, including a 1.08 ERA with 146 strikeouts against just 11 walks over 92 innings.

JUSTIN VERLANDER, RHP

Normally losing a pitcher of deGrom's caliber would be



Justin Verlander

devastating for a team's pitching staff, but the New York Mets immediately turned around and replaced one Cy Young Award winner with another. Verlander is enjoying a spectacular late-career run, and last season he won his third Cy Young Award at age 39 only a year removed from Tommy John surgery while helping lead the Houston Astros to a World Series championship.

XANDER BOGAERTS, SS

The Red Sox all-time leader in games played at shortstop,



Xander Bogaerts

Xander Bogaerts received a "Godfather" offer from the San Diego Padres that no sane person could have refused. Now in possession of an 11-year, \$280 million contract, the four-time All-Star becomes the latest superstar to join a Padres team that's all-in on chasing the first World Series championship in franchise history.

TREA TURNER, SS

One of the most athletic and exciting young players in baseball,



Trea Turner

Trea Turner helped lead the Los Angeles Dodgers to a 111-win season last season but is now locked up as the Philadelphia Phillies shortstop of the future. Turner signed for 11 years, \$300 million during the Winter Meetings, and the Phillies hope he can be one of the last pieces needed to get over the hump after falling two wins short of a championship last fall.

DANSBY SWANSON, SS

The rebuilding Chicago Cubs made a major statement by

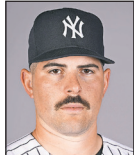


Dansby Swanson

signing Dansby Swanson, a former No. 1 overall pick who already has an All-Star nod, a Gold Glove and a World Series championship to his name during his time in Atlanta. Though Chicago is probably still at least a year away from contention, Swanson figures to be a foundational piece who the Cubs can build around for the next seven years.

CARLOS RODON, RHP

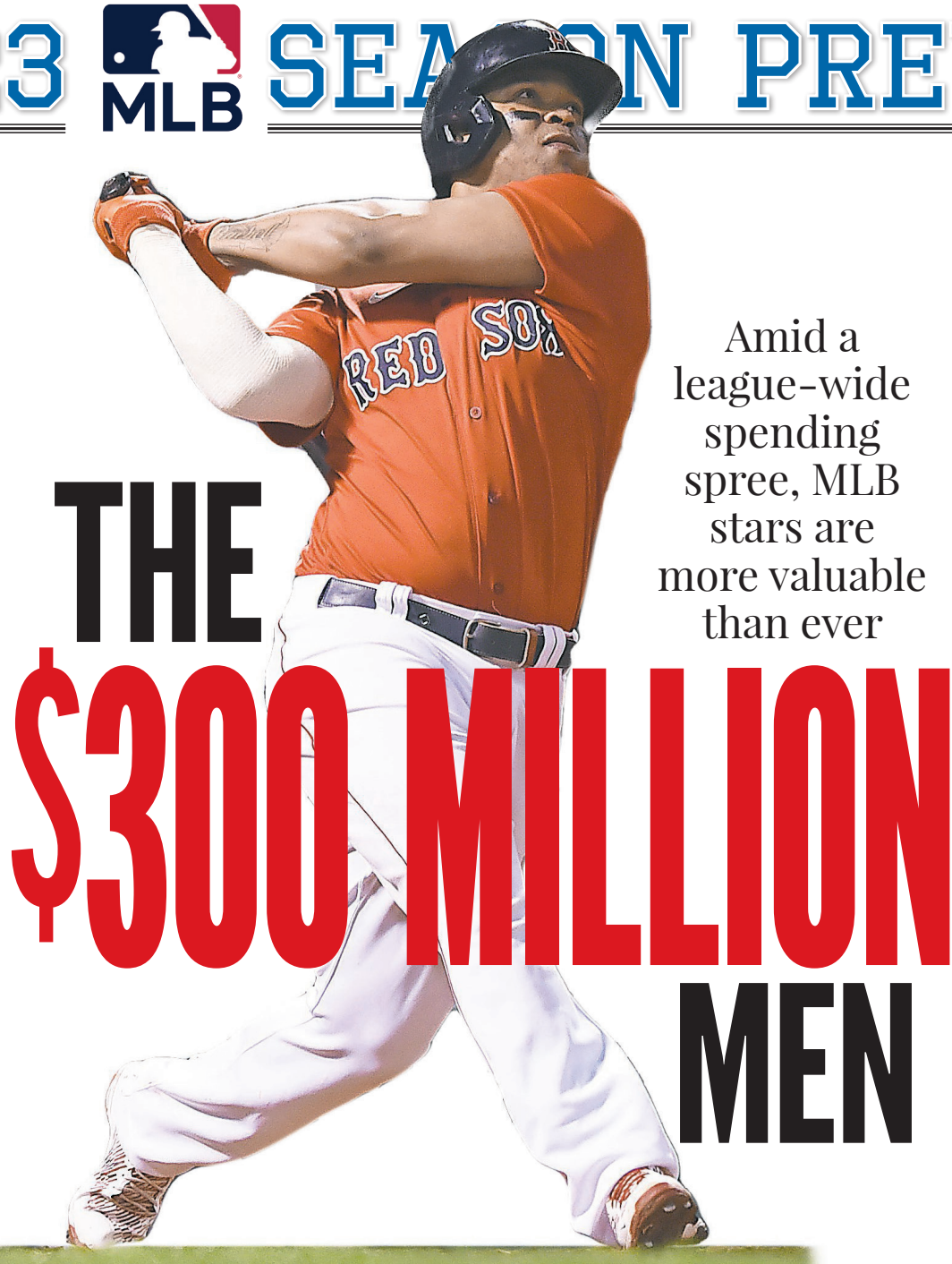
Yankees fans might need to wait a little while to see their



Carlos Rodon

big offseason addition take the hill, as Rodon is expected to start the year on the injured list with a left forearm muscle strain, but once he's back he'll be a huge addition to a New York rotation that already featured ace Gerrit Cole. Rodon signed a six-year, \$162 million deal after posting a 2.88 ERA in 31 starts with the San Francisco Giants last season.

— Mac Cerullo, CNHI Sports Boston



Amid a league-wide spending spree, MLB stars are more valuable than ever

PAUL BILODEAU/CNHI North of Boston

Rafael Devers recently signed a 10-year, \$313.5 million extension with the Red Sox. He is one of five players to ink a deal worth more than \$275 million in the offseason.

BY MAC CERULLO
CNHI SPORTS BOSTON

Major rule changes

This season MLB is introducing radical new rule changes designed to improve the game's pace of play. Here is what fans can expect when they head to the park in 2023.



All eyes will be on the new pitch clock in 2023.

Pitch clock: Pitchers have up to 15 seconds to begin their motion when the bases are empty and up to 20 seconds when there is at least one runner on base. If they take too long they'll be charged with an automatic ball. Pitchers may also disengage the rubber twice per plate appearance, and a third will result in a balk unless an out is recorded on a runner. The disengagement count will reset if a runner advances. Batters must also be in the batter's box and alert to the pitcher with at least eight seconds left on the clock, and batters will also get one timeout per plate appearances. Those who take too long to get back into the box will be charged with an automatic strike.

Ban on defensive shifts: Two infielders must be positioned on each side of second base when a pitch is released. All four must have both feet in the infield dirt when the pitcher is on the rubber, and infielders won't be allowed to switch sides unless there is a substitution.



The new, bigger base, left, is replacing the traditional smaller base, right.

Larger bases: MLB has increased the size of first, second and third base from a 15-inch square to an 18-inch square. The new bases are roughly the size of a pizza box and the larger bases are intended to reduce the likelihood of collisions between runners and fielders on the base paths.

Biggest contracts

1. **Mike Trout**, Angels, 12 years, \$426.5 million (2019-30)
2. **Mookie Betts**, Dodgers, 12 years, \$365 million (2021-32)
3. **Aaron Judge**, Yankees, 9 years, \$360 million (2023-31)
4. **Manny Machado**, Padres, 11 years, \$350 million (2023-33)
5. **Francisco Lindor**, Mets, 10 years, \$341 million (2022-31)
6. **Fernando Tatis Jr.**, Padres, 14 years, \$340 million (2021-34)
7. **Bryce Harper**, Phillies, 13 years, \$330 million (2019-31)
8. **Giancarlo Stanton**, Marlins, 13 years, \$325 million (2015-27)
9. **Corey Seager**, Rangers, 10 years, \$325 million (2022-31)
10. **Gerrit Cole**, Yankees, 9 years, \$324 million (2020-28)
11. **Rafael Devers**, Red Sox, 10 years, \$313.5 million (2023-33)
12. **Trea Turner**, Phillies, 11 years, \$300 million (2023-33)
13. **Xander Bogaerts**, Padres, 11 years, \$280 million (2023-33)

World Series odds

Houston Astros, +600; **Atlanta Braves**, +750; **LA Dodgers**, +750; **NY Yankees**, +850; **NY Mets**, +900; **San Diego Padres**, +1000; **Toronto Blue Jays**, +1200; **Philadelphia Phillies**, +1500; **Tampa Bay Rays**, +2000; **Seattle Mariners**, +2000; **St. Louis Cardinals**, +2000

MVP 2023 odds

National League: Juan Soto, +550; Mookie Betts, +950; Ronald Acuña Jr., +1000; Fernando Tatis Jr., +1000; Trea Turner, +1100; Manny Machado, +1200; **American League:** Shohei Ohtani, +220; Aaron Judge, +700; Mike Trout, +800; Julio Rodriguez, +900; Yordan Alvarez, +1200; Vladimir Guerrero Jr., +1300

their spending to new heights, with owner Steve Cohen running up an extraordinary \$350 million payroll trying to bring the club's first title since 1986.

Despite having one of MLB's smallest markets, the San Diego Padres have done the same thing, and they've become so popular that they've gone from a receiving club in MLB's revenue sharing program to a paying club. In the process they've made a mockery of other small market clubs who pocket every dollar that comes in and invest the bare minimum in their rosters.

THE TOP CONTENDERS

MLB'S BEST TEAMS AND HOW THEY CAN WIN IT ALL



SAN DIEGO PADRES

The Padres finally got over the hump last fall, beating the Dodgers in the NLDS after finishing 22 games behind their rivals in the NL West, and now look primed to push for the first World Series title in franchise history. San Diego has assembled one of the most talented (and expensive) rosters in baseball, adding Xander Bogaerts to a club that already featured Manny Machado, Juan Soto and which is about to get Fernando Tatis Jr. back after a year lost to injury and suspension. The Padres pitching staff is loaded too, so it will be fascinating to see if the club's big bet pays off.



NEW YORK METS

The Mets suffered a brutal blow recently when All-Star closer Edwin Diaz went down with a season-ending knee injury during a post-game celebration in the World Baseball Classic, but Steve Cohen's club should be talented enough to contend anyway. New York boasts the highest payroll in MLB history at approximately \$350 million and added three-time Cy Young winner Justin Verlander and Japanese superstar Kodai Senga to a rotation that returns future Hall of Famer Max Scherzer. The Mets also bring back outfielder Brandon Nimmo, slugger Pete Alonso and shortstop Francisco Lindor, and if Diaz's injury becomes an issue by midseason there's no doubt the Mets will trade for another closer to help bring back the club's first title since 1986.



LOS ANGELES DODGERS

The Dodgers are coming off a quiet offseason by their standards and are expected to take a step back, but considering how dominant they've been in recent years even a "lesser" Dodgers team could easily be a top championship contender. This year's club swapped J.D. Martinez in for Justin Turner and made some notable bullpen acquisitions, but the Dodgers also lost shortstop Trea Turner in free agency and then saw his replacement Gavin Lux go down for the season with a torn ACL. Even still, Los Angeles still has Freddie Freeman, Mookie Betts and a rotation led by Clayton Kershaw and Julio Urias, so the Dodgers aren't going anywhere.



NEW YORK YANKEES

After questions loomed around his future in the Bronx all last year, Aaron Judge is back and should spend the rest of his career as a New York Yankee. The reigning AL MVP is coming off a historic season and returns to anchor one of baseball's strongest lineups, and the Yankees also made a splash by signing lefty Carlos Rodon, one of the top starting pitchers on the market. Rodon will start the season on the injured list with a strained forearm but should soon join ace Gerrit Cole to form one of the top 1-2 punches in the game.



HOUSTON ASTROS

The defending World Series champions are coming off a dominant season and have reloaded by adding slugger Jose Abreu to a lineup that still features Jose Altuve, Alex Bregman, Yordan Alvarez, Kyle Tucker and second-year sensation Jeremy Peña. The Astros did lose ace Justin Verlander in free agency but return starters Framber Valdez, Cristian Javier and Lance McCullers Jr. along with the bulk of a bullpen that put together the strongest October in MLB history last fall. The Astros aren't going anywhere.



ATLANTA BRAVES

Two years removed from a World Series championship, the Braves have locked up their entire young core through the rest of the decade and should be perennial championship favorites for years to come. Top prospect Vaughn Grissom looks set to succeed Dansby Swanson at shortstop and the club also brought in catcher Sean Murphy to complement a group that still includes, among others, outfielder Ronald Acuña Jr., infielders Matt Olson, Austin Riley and Ozzie Albies, starters Max Fried and Kyle Wright, and top NL Rookie of the Year placers Michael Harris II and Spencer Strider.

— Mac Cerullo, CNHI Sports Boston