

# MLB PREVIEW2021

## BURT'S PICKS

CNHI Sports Boston writer Bill Burt picks the order of finish for each division and postseason winners:

■ Division winner  
\* Wild card

### AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST

New York Yankees  
Tampa Bay Rays \*  
Toronto Blue Jays  
Boston Red Sox  
Baltimore Orioles

**CENTRAL**  
Chicago White Sox  
Minnesota Twins  
Cleveland Indians  
Kansas City Royals  
Detroit Tigers

**WEST**  
Houston Astros  
Los Angeles Angels\*  
Oakland A's  
Seattle Mariners  
Texas Rangers

**AL POSTSEASON  
WILD CARD**  
Rays over Angels

**ALDS**  
Yankees over Rays  
White Sox over Astros

**ALCS**  
Yankees over White Sox

**NATIONAL LEAGUE  
EAST**  
New York Mets  
Philadelphia Phillies \*  
Washington Nationals  
Atlanta Braves  
Miami Marlins

**CENTRAL**  
Milwaukee Brewers  
St. Louis Cardinals  
Chicago Cubs  
Cincinnati Reds  
Pittsburgh Pirates

**WEST**  
Los Angeles Dodgers  
San Diego Padres \*  
Arizona D-Backs  
San Francisco Giants  
Colorado Rockies

**NL POSTSEASON  
WILD CARD**  
Padres over Phillies

**NLDS**  
Mets over Brewers  
Padres over Dodgers

**NLCS**  
Mets over Padres



## NEW KIDS ON THE CLOCK

Baseball's saving grace could be its young superstars

BY BILL BURT  
CNHI SPORTS BOSTON

There's a lot to complain about these days — the coronavirus, people hating on others and, of course, how boring baseball is.

Major League Baseball Commissioner Robert Manfred has called inner-circle "town meetings" among execs and owners to see if baseball can get people, especially young people, more excited about the game and its future.

There are a lot of things, some crazier than others, on the table, such as pitch counts, shortening the games to seven innings, designated hitters in both leagues, banning the shift, etc., etc.

Here's one suggestion: Let's focus on the good of baseball, and right now that is young, electric, superstar-caliber talent ... all under the age of 25.

Never before has this sport been overrun with such ability with its young people.

The wait-till-they-get-2,000-at-bats dictum has been tossed aside. The young players are not waiting three or four years to make a difference and really bring some excitement.

What do the names Juan Soto (Nationals), Fernando Tatis Jr. (Padres) and Ronald Acuña Jr. (Braves) have in common, besides their National League affiliation?

They are MVP candidates, right there with Dodgers stars Mookie Betts and Cody Bellinger.

Oh yeah, and the trio is all under 25 years old. In fact, well under 25.

Andrew Vaughn, 1B, White Sox (23)  
Dylan Carlson, OF, Cardinals (22)  
MacKenzie Gore, LHP, Padres (22)  
Cristian Pache, OF, Braves (22)  
Sixto Sánchez, RHP, Marlins (22)

10 more  
under  
25 to  
watch



Fernando  
Tatis Jr.,  
Padres

But here's another common bond between them: They are exciting to watch perform.

Cocky? Absolutely. Some (Soto) more than others. But that is part of their charm. They compete, and they fear nobody.

This is great for baseball, which is looking to draw the younger crowd again. The younger crowd doesn't appreciate the intricacies of the game from previous generations, but they appreciate electric talent and the MLB has never been in this position with so many great — and I mean "great" — players.

And guess what? There's more coming.

The top prospect in baseball is 20-year-old Wander Franco of the Rays. As crazy as this sounds, he might be better than Soto, Tatis and Acuna.

And he's not alone. There are about 10 players in their early 20s who will get an opportunity to display their wares like the current crop.

Spencer Torkelson, 3B, Tigers (21)  
Jarred Kelenic, OF, Mariners (21)  
Bobby Witt Jr., SS, Royals (21)  
CJ Abrams, SS, Padres (20)  
Julio Rodriguez, OF, Mariners (20)

## TOP 15 UNDER 25

● Fernando Tatis Jr., SS, Padres (22): He got paid (14 years, \$340 million) before the Padres had to. Is he the best player in baseball? Maybe.

◀ Juan Soto, OF, Nationals (22): The next Mike Trout? He might be better. Early start to his career is epic, on a par with Ted Williams.

◀ Ronald Acuña Jr., OF, Braves (23): One word to describe him: Electric. Another great two-way player with five tools. Another best-player candidate.

● Luis Robert, OF, White Sox (23): Another five-tool guy as centerfielder. Was on 32-HR pace over 162 games last summer.

● Vladimir Guerrero Jr., 1B, Blue Jays (22): It seems like he's 28 based on highlights we've been seeing. Like his dad, he can hit pitchers' pitch for power. Intelligent hitter.

● Adley Rutschman, C, Orioles (23): The only catcher on list. A Pudge Rodriguez clone as five-tool guy. Also a switch hitter.

● Wander Franco, SS, Rays (20): It's early. He hasn't played a game in the majors. But a switch-hitting, power-hitting shortstop with big-time power.

● Rafael Devers, 3B, Red Sox (24): Normally, a slight dip expected, but with so much young talent not anymore. Elite hitter. Subpar defender.

● Eloy Jiménez, White Sox (24): Injured in spring training, he is out five to six months. Still another Sox gem, who will be an MVP candidate soon.

● Yordan Alvarez, OF, Astros (24): Lost 2020 due to double knee surgery. Had an impressive 2019 with 27 HRs in 87 games with 1.067 OPS. Healthy? A superstar now.

● Ke'Bryan Hayes, 3B, Pirates (24): Another dude with power, average and defense. Needs to walk more, but we're being picky.

● Gleyber Torres, 2B, Yankees (24): 2020 was not a great year, but that was the norm. Saw a 35-to-40 HR guy in 2019. Expect rebound year.

● Ozzie Albies, 2B, Braves (24): Entering his fifth season. Not a superstar, but could be .300/30 HR/100 RBI guy with all-star potential.

● Mike Soroka, RHP, Braves (23): After looking like future Cy Young winner in 2019 (13-4, 2.68 ERA), tore Achilles last August. Control and savvy are his strengths.

● Bo Bichette, SS, Blue Jays (23): A lot more nimble and less powerful than his dad (Dante), Bo is showing some electric play in field and at plate.

## WORLD SERIES METS WIN SUBWAY SERIES

It's taken a while — just over two decades — but it's going to happen again. The Yankees and the Mets first met for a World Series in October 2000. They are among the top five teams in baseball, and neither will have an easy road there. The Dodgers again will be the best team in baseball, but they won't meet the lofty expectations with some hungry teams chasing, including division rival San Diego, which will have the talent to compete. The Mets are loaded, too, and their year is here. The Yankees will need a late-July trade, probably for a big-time pitcher, to officially put them over the top in the American League. The Yankees need a healthy **Aaron Judge** (left), and it's time **Giancarlo Stanton** (left) earned his keep, which will happen in 2021. I like both of these teams to excite baseball fans worldwide with a classic Subway Series. This time it'll be the New York Mets, after adding two stars in **Francisco Lindor** and **Carlos Carrasco**, winning in seven games.



**Jacob deGrom**, Mets RHP  
2020: 4-2, 2.38 ERA, 104 strikeouts  
Career: 70-51, 2.61 ERA, 1,359 strikeouts

### NL AWARDS

**MVP:** Fernando Tatis Jr., Padres

**Cy Young Award:** Jacob deGrom, Mets

**Rookie of the Year:** MacKenzie Gore, Padres

### AL AWARDS

**MVP:** Aaron Judge, Yankees

**Cy Young Award:** Gerrit Cole, Yankees

**Rookie of the Year:** Wander Franco, Rays

## MVP FAVORITES

### 2021 AL MVP ODDS

Mike Trout (Angels)	+200
Alex Bregman (Astros)	+1000
Aaron Judge (Yankees)	+1200
Jose Ramirez (Indians)	+1200
Matt Chapman (A's)	+1500
Anthony Rendon (Angels)	+1500

### 2021 NL MVP ODDS

Juan Soto (Nationals)	+750
Mookie Betts (Dodgers)	+750
Cody Bellinger (Dodgers)	+800
Ronald Acuna Jr. (Braves)	+850
Fernando Tatis Jr. (Padres)	+850
Nolan Arenado (Cardinals)	+1200