

WAUKESHA SOUTH BASEBALL

Pitcher injured in Christmas parade to take the mound tonight

Tiegs will make his start three months after tragedy

Freeman Staff
WAUKESHA — Waukesha South junior Erick Tiegs will make his first start of the season tonight at Frame Park, just over three months after he was injured in the Waukesha Christmas Parade tragedy.

Parade Accident, Erick Tiegs was determined to get back on the mound this spring," a tweet from the Waukesha South baseball team account read. "Erick will start on the mound for South on Thursday vs. @FAHSAthletics. 7:30 p.m. Frame Park. Let's Go!" The Blackshirts will be facing Fort Atkinson in their first game of the spring.

A smorgasbord of sports

Delsman gives his thoughts on a variety of sporting news

Here's everything I know about the world of sports. I thought you should know it too.



CHUCK DELSMAN

■ The NCAA men's Final Four is finally here and the semi-finals will be played Saturday in New Orleans with the championship game set for Monday. Kansas is the lone No 1 seed to survive and Duke and Villanova are No. 2 seeds. Rounding out the semi-finals is No. 8 seeded North Carolina. All four are really playing well coming into

Saturday. So, who is going to win? Both Kansas and Duke are 4.5-point favorites. Villanova suffered a big injury when starting guard Justin Moore injured his

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PREP BASEBALL: Waukesha North 6, Pewaukee 4

Northstars win in wild finish

Seventh-inning rally by Pirates falls short

By Michael Grennell
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WAUKESHA — Sports are always full of dramatic moments, where the course of a game can turn on a dime without any warning.

Baseball is no exception. In the span of just a few seconds on Wednesday night, the players on the Waukesha North and Pewaukee baseball teams experienced a wild roller coaster of emotions, bouncing from jubilation to anguish and back.

With the bases loaded and one out in the top of the seventh inning, Northstars senior shortstop Payton Frehner fielded what appeared to be a game-ending double play. He flipped the ball over to second baseman Colin Kania, who stepped on the bag for the second out. Kania turned and fired the ball over to first base, but the throw went wild.

Suddenly, two more Pewaukee runs had scored to cut the deficit to 6-4, and it appeared the Pirates had a man on first base with the potential tying run coming up to bat with two outs.

However, that's only how it appeared.

The chaos on the field was not yet over. Pewaukee second baseman



Waukesha North senior Payton Frehner jogs into third base after advancing on a hit during a game against Pewaukee on Wednesday night.

Luke Sopha had made the turn to try and race to second base while the ball was still loose. But he slammed on the brakes and attempted to dive back into first base. By that time the Northstars had corralled the ball from foul territory and fired the ball back to first.

The umpire raised his fist to call the third and final out. The Northstars had won 6-4 on a wild final play of the night.

"I probably should have took the bag on second, but I flipped it to my man at second," Frehner said. "Little bit of a wild throw but we recovered and we made the out at first. So ultimately we won the game."

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Waukesha North senior Owen Pockat looks to his catcher for the pitch call during a game against Pewaukee on Wednesday night.

BREWERS PREVIEW

Brewers in search of fifth straight postseason appearance



Associated Press

FILE — Milwaukee Brewers' Christian Yelich waits to take the field during the team's game against the Cleveland Indians in Cleveland on Sept. 11, 2021. Yelich has been through highs and lows in his four seasons with the Brewers. He's ready for another high, and even with the lockout feels ready to get back to his old self.

Dominant pitching staff will hope for improvement from offense

By Steve Megargee
AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE — With Cy Young Award winner Corbin Burnes heading the rotation and three-time All-Star Josh Hader leading the bullpen, the Milwaukee Brewers believe they have a championship-caliber pitching staff.

Whether they contend for the World Series title that has eluded this franchise throughout its existence could depend on how much help that staff gets from its lineup. The Brewers have made four straight playoff appearances but haven't reached a World Series since 1982 and have posted a 1-6 postseason record over the last three years.

"Going four years in a row, I feel like eventually we've got to get over the hump of winning a World

Series," pitcher Brandon Woodruff said. "I think that's a realistic goal."

The Brewers went 95-67 and won the NL Central last season before scoring just four runs in a 3-1 NL Division Series loss to the eventual World Series champion Atlanta Braves.

Now they want to take the next step.

"We know we're going to be a run prevention-oriented team," president of baseball operations David Stearns said. "We're still built around our pitching staff. We're built around our defense. That's not going to change. But we also want to score a few more runs than we did last year, and we think some of the moves we've made will help us to do that."

Those moves included acquiring power-hitting outfielder Hunter

Renfroe from the Boston Red Sox and signing 2013 NL MVP Andrew McCutchen. The Brewers fired Andy Haines as hitting coach and replaced him with Connor Dawson and Ozzie Timmons.

"This is a pretty laid-back crew," McCutchen said. "Seems like I fit in pretty well. Guys come in, they know what they need to do to get ready. That lets you know the type of team that we have. They have expectations of things they need to accomplish."

The Brewers also need 2018 NL MVP Christian Yelich to approach the form he showed his first two seasons in Milwaukee. After leading the NL in OPS in 2018 and 2019, Yelich hit .205 in 2020 and batted .248 with just nine homers and 51 RBIs last season.

While the strength of Milwaukee's lineup is uncertain, the Brewers know they have quality pitching.

Their rotation features three All-Stars in Burnes (11-5, 2.43),

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NL CENTRAL PREVIEW

How will NL Central shape up in 2022?

Brewers could face tougher challenge in division this year

Associated Press

Capsules of National League Central teams, listed in order of finish last year:

MILWAUKEE BREWERS
2021: 95-67, first place, lost to Atlanta in Division Series.

Manager: Craig Counsell (eighth season).

Opening Day: April 7 at Chicago Cubs.

He's Here: OF Hunter Renfroe, OF/DH Andrew McCutchen, RHP J.C. Mejia, INF Mike Brosseau, C Pedro Severino.

He's Outta Here: LHP Brett Anderson, OF Jackie Bradley Jr., 3B/1B Eduardo Escobar, OF Avisail Garcia, LHP Daniel Norris, RHP Hunter Strickland, 1B Daniel Vogelbach.

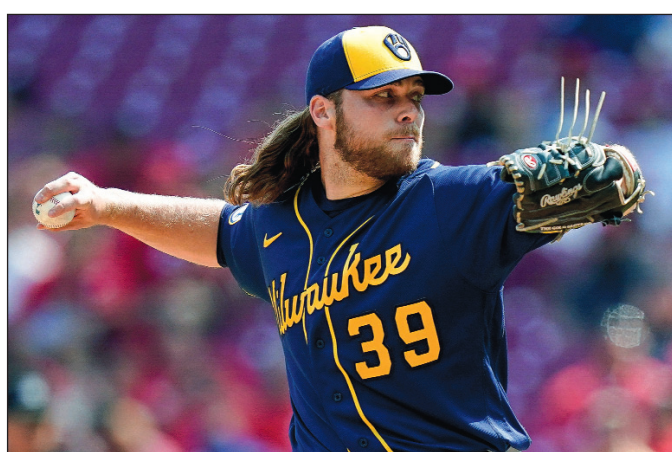
Top Hitters: SS Willy Adames (.262, 25 HRs, 73 RBIs, .818 OPS with Rays and Brewers), RF Hunter Renfroe (.259, 31, 96, .816 OPS with Red Sox), 3B Luis Urias (.249, 23, 75, .789 OPS), LF Christian Yelich (.248, 9, 51,

.736 OPS in 117 games), C Omar Narvaez (.266, 11, 49, .743 OPS in 123 games).

Projected Rotation: RH Corbin Burnes (11-5, NL-best 2.43 ERA, 234 Ks in 167 IP, NL Cy Young Award), RH Brandon Woodruff (9-10, 2.56, 211 Ks in 179 1/3 IP), RH Freddy Peralta (10-5, 2.81, 195 Ks in 144 1/3 IP), RH Adrian Houser (10-6, 3.22), LH Eric Lauer (7-5, 3.19).

Key Relievers: LH Josh Hader (4-2, 1.23 ERA, 34/35 saves, 102 Ks in 58 2/3 IP), RH Devin Williams (8-2, 2.50, 3 saves), RH Brad Boxberger (5-4, 3.34, 4 saves), LH Brent Suter (2-5, 3.07, 1 save), RH Jake Cousins (1-0, 2.70).

Outlook: The Brewers have reason to believe they can earn a fifth straight playoff berth thanks to their exceptional pitching. Milwaukee's starting rotation features three 2021 All-Stars in Burnes, Woodruff and Peralta. Hader remains the team's premier closer. The concern for the Brewers is whether they can get more production from a lineup



Associated Press

FILE — Milwaukee Brewers starting pitcher Corbin Burnes throws during the ninth inning of the team's game against the Cincinnati Reds in Cincinnati, on July 18, 2021.

that produced a total of six runs in a 3-1 Division Series loss to eventual World Series champion Atlanta. The Brewers would love Yelich to recapture his 2018-19 form after two straight disappointing seasons. They're also hoping Adames builds on the success he had after coming over from Tampa Bay last May. They need Renfroe to replace the production of Garcia, who signed with Miami after hitting 29 homers and knocking in 86 runs last season. Milwaukee

signed McCutchen to be the primary DH and play the outfield occasionally.

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS
2021: 90-72, second place, lost to Dodgers in wild-card game.

Manager: Oliver Marmol (first season).

Opening Day: April 7 vs Pittsburgh.

He's Here: LHP Steven Matz, DH Corey Dickerson, DT Albert Pujols, LHP

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BUCKS

Bucks to wrap up road trip against Nets

Milwaukee seeks revenge after loss in last matchup

Milwaukee Bucks (47-28, second in the Eastern Conference) vs. Brooklyn Nets (40-36, eighth in the Eastern Conference)
New York; today, 6:30 p.m.

BOTTOM LINE: Milwaukee visits the Brooklyn Nets after Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 40 points in the Bucks' 118-116 win against the Philadelphia 76ers.

The Nets have gone 28-19 against Eastern Conference opponents. Brooklyn is 8-3 in games decided by 3 points or fewer.

The Bucks are 29-18 in Eastern Conference play. Milwaukee ranks fifth in the NBA in 3-point percentage, shooting 36.8% as a team from downtown this season. Sandro Mamukelashvili leads them shooting 42.9% from 3-point range.

The teams play for the fourth time this season. The Nets won the last meeting 126-123 on Feb. 27, with Kyrie Irving scoring 38 points in the victory.

TOP PERFORMERS:
Patty Mills is scoring 11.8 points per game with 2.0 rebounds and 2.3 assists for the Nets. Kevin Durant is averaging 32.1 points, 7.9 rebounds and 7.2 assists over the past 10 games for Brooklyn.

Antetokounmpo is scoring 29.9 points per game with 11.6 rebounds and 5.8 assists for the Bucks. Khris Middleton is averaging 21.8 points and 5.1 rebounds while shooting 44.4% over the past 10 games for Milwaukee.

LAST 10 GAMES
Nets: 7-3, averaging 121.2 points, 43.3 rebounds, 27.5 assists, 8.6 steals and 6.4 blocks per game while shooting 52.2% from the field. Their opponents have averaged 112.6 points per game.
Bucks: 7-3, averaging 120.6 points, 47.0 rebounds, 24.9 assists, 7.1 steals and 3.7 blocks per game while shooting 48.9% from the field. Their opponents have averaged 117.0 points.

North

From Page 1B

Pirates co-head coach Adam Dobberstein pointed out just how close of a play that ended up being, and how the outcome could have been very different.

“Luke smoked that ball,” he said. “If that ball is three feet in either direction it’s probably into the gap and maybe out to the wall, and then we got the tying run on second or third with one out.

“Yeah, I mean it’s a disappointing loss right? We had high expectations and we had a great year last year and a good group coming back. We love our team and it’s disappointing that we gave up the four runs in the first inning. Just a very unusual thing for Nick. He’s been so solid and so reliable for us, and you know, it happens. That’s baseball. And I thought from that point forward I thought we competed and chipped away.”

That final dramatic play was made possible largely by Frehner, who had experienced a dramatic moment of his own just a few innings prior.

With the bases loaded and two outs in the bottom of the fifth, Frehner attempted to score on a close play at the plate, however he was tagged hard on the helmet for the final out of the inning. The play left Frehner lying on the ground for several moments, and it appeared to the fans that he would have to exit the game. Frehner walked over into the dugout, but then a few seconds later he was running back out onto the field with his glove to the

sound of applause from the bleachers.

Then in the bottom of the sixth inning, Frehner ripped a two-out, two-run double up the middle to extend the Northstars’ lead to 6-2. And as it would turn out, those two runs would end up winning the game for North.

“Payton Frehner is our main man. He’s our number three (hitter), he’s our shortstop. We live through him, he’s a leader on and off the field,” North head coach Don Radomski said. “And you talk about that play at the plate, he is also a linebacker in football and he plays baseball like he plays football, and that’s what we love about him. He’s got an energy to him and adrenaline through him. He’s got great self-confidence and we had a fantastic year out of him last year and he just showed tonight that he’s ready to go this year.

“It was a big W for us. I know it’s the beginning of the season, but that is a very solid ball club in Pewaukee. We have a lot of respect for those guys. We know what we were seeing in those guys on the mound who were good pitchers. We knew that they were solid pitchers and we battled at the plate. But at the same time we know there’s a lot of room for improvement. We left probably 10-plus guys on the basepaths. We could have buried them a little earlier. But our pitchers were fantastic.”

Frehner ended the night going 3-for-3 at the plate with two doubles, a triple and three RBI. That performance earned him praise from Dobberstein.

“(Frehner) was a one-man wrecking crew tonight. It was his game,” he said. “You know you go

3-for-3 with a couple extra-base hits, I mean he really provided a lot of their offense, so you tip your cap.”

But there was one more dramatic moment at Frame Park on Thursday night. One that might have gone unnoticed to many in the stands, but a moment that nevertheless was a big event for senior Owen Pockat. After not pitching for two years due to injury, Pockat stepped back onto the mound once again and threw three innings of work — allowing one hit and two runs while striking out four.

“We had Owen Pockat come in and he did a fantastic job,” Radomski said. “Owen is coming off an injury — he hasn’t pitched in two years. For him to come out like that in a big game and to do what he did was fantastic.”

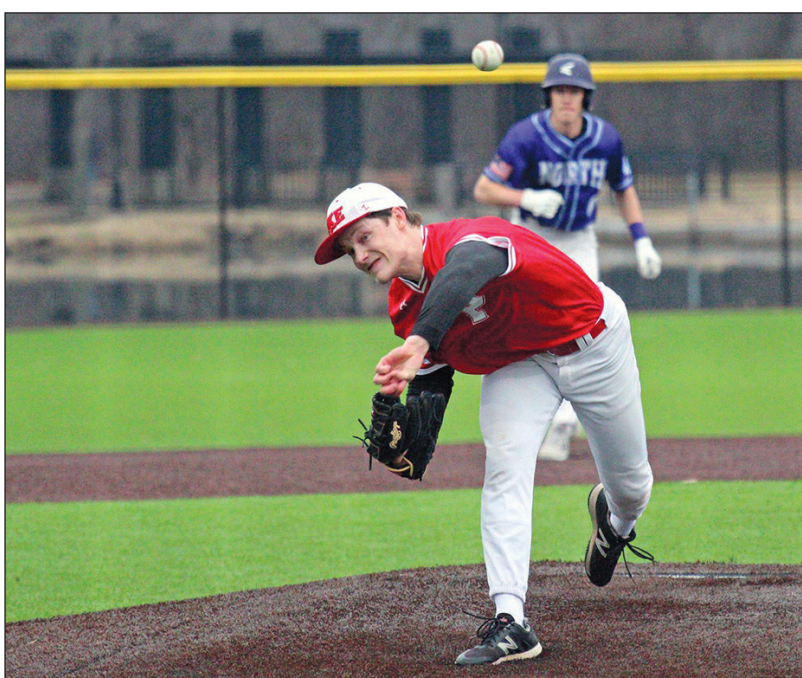
Needless to say, it was a big moment for Pockat.

“It felt good. A little nerve-wracking, my stomach kind of dropped a little bit,” he said. “But at the end of it — even though I maybe didn’t do as well as I wanted to — my team was there, so I feel good about it.

“It’s awesome. I love the feeling of getting out there, playing with my teammates, and it’s always a fun experience playing baseball.”

Northstars starting pitcher A.J. Curtiss earned the win after allowing three hits and one run while striking out five over three innings of work against Pewaukee. Senior Spencer Robertson pitched a scoreless inning of relief with one strikeout. De’Angelo Rivera came up with a big hit in his only at-bat of the night, as he finished 1-for-1 with a triple and two RBI.

Meanwhile, Pewaukee was led by first baseman Logan Dobber-



Michael Grennell/Freeman Staff

Pewaukee starting pitcher Nick Doubek delivers a pitch early in Thursday's game against Waukesha North.

stein on offense, as he had two hits in four at bats and drove in a run for the Pirates.

Looking at the opening night results, Radomski said he’s ready to see what the rest of the year has in store.

“Just really excited how everything came together,” Radomski said. “Those guys have put a lot of dedication and time in the offseason, and it showed today. It was great. It was a great team win. We had a lot of contributions from many different players, and that’s what we’re all about.”

For Pewaukee, Dobberstein said a loss like this will be a major

learning experience for a young Pirates squad.

“We did some good things, we competed well. And I think for our guys, we have a lot back, but we lost a really nice senior class, some really good players,” he said. “And so our younger guys and our newer guys have that target, and I thought that tonight it was a good reality of welcome to varsity baseball, and you’re going to get a target and you’re going to get everyone’s best shot.

“So you learn from it and we certainly came away with a bunch of things that we feel we’ve got to get better at.”

Brewers

From Page 1B

Woodruff (9-10, 2.56) and Freddy Peralta (10-5, 2.81). Hader had 34 saves in 35 opportunities last season.

“The guys who are going to pitch most of our innings this year have done some pretty incredible things already,” manager Craig Counsell said.

The Brewers open the season April 7 in Chicago against the Cubs.

NEW LOOK

The Brewers acquired Renfroe in a trade that sent Jackie Bradley Jr. to Boston. The Brewers will put Renfroe in right field and hope he at least matches the production of Avisail Garcia, who signed with the Miami Marlins after homering 29 times and driving in 86 runs last season.

McCutchen, who batted .222 with 27 homers and 80 RBIs for the Philadelphia Phillies last season, will be the Brewers’ primary designated hitter but also can play the outfield.

ROOKIE TO WATCH

LHP Ethan Small posted a 1.98 ERA in 18 minor-league games last season and figures to make his major-league debut at some point this year. LHP Aaron Ashby could have an even bigger impact, but he spent enough time on the Brewers’ roster last season that he no longer qualifies as a rookie.



Associated Press

Milwaukee Brewers center fielder Tyrone Taylor throws during a spring training game against the San Diego Padres on Wednesday in Peoria, Ariz.

WHO’S ON FIRST

Rowdy Tellez has never had more than 370 at bats in a season, but that could change this year. Tellez figures to get the majority of the Brewers’ starts at first base. The 27-year-old Tellez hit .272 with seven homers and 28 RBI in 56 games for the Brewers last year after they acquired him from Toronto at midseason.

MILESTONE

WILLIN REACH

Counsell is set to become the franchise record-holder for career managerial victories this season. He enters his eighth season with a 529-479 mark. The record is held by Phil Garner, who went 563-617 from 1992-99.

MAKING HISTORY

The Brewers are seeking their fifth straight playoff berth. Before this stretch, they never had reached the playoffs in as many as three consecutive seasons.

Delsman

From Page 1B

Achilles and will not play. That gives Kansas a big edge and the Jayhawks will win cover the points, winning 71-59. The second game is special with longtime rivals North Carolina and Duke clashing in an epic battle. Both teams are playing great, I’m not big on this pick but I’m taking North Carolina and the points. I’ve got NC winning by a 80-78 score. Come Monday, it will be Kansas over NC, 81-76.

■ The amount of money being thrown around in the NFL these days is absolutely crazy. Where does it end? Here is a list of the money being paid to a group of very average quarterbacks this coming year. Kirk Cousins \$35 million. Jared Goff \$33 million. Ryan Tannehill \$29 million. Imagine how much money Dan Marino, John Elway and Joe Montana would be worth if they could turn back the clock and play next season.

■ The LPGA Tour doesn’t get the amount of publicity it deserves. But after last week’s JTBC Classic in California last Sunday, No. 1 ranked Jin Young Ko increased her number of consecutive under-par rounds to 34 straight. That’s the new LPGA record, breaking the old mark of 29. What’s the PGA Tour record you ask? That mark is 26, held surprisingly by Tim Petrovic.

■ Speaking of golf, who’s hotter than Scottie Scheffler? Nobody. Scheffler dominated play last week at the prestigious Dell Technologies Match Play Championship in Texas. Scheffler defeated red-hot Kevin Kisner by a lopsided 4-and-3 margin. Scheffler won for the third time in his last five PGA starts. Guess who’s going to be a popular Masters pick in a couple of weeks?

■ The Milwaukee Brewers will be gunning for a fifth straight National League playoff berth this season when the season starts April 7 when they play the Cubs in Chicago. I like this team a lot, from the owner, to the GM to the manager to the players. I see them winning another NL Central Division title. Here are three of my biggest questions. Can they pitch as dominantly as they did last year? Will Christian Yelich return to the brilliant form he displayed his first two years with the club and not the totally disappointing numbers of the past two seasons? And can Yelich once again hit for power, something he didn’t do the past two seasons?

■ I’ve been telling everyone all season that I like the Milwaukee Bucks chances of repeating as NBA champions or at least making the finals. After getting off to a slow start, due to injuries, the Bucks are playing their best basketball of the season right now. But the NBA East is loaded. I think six teams could win the Eastern Con-

ference title. My money is on Giannis and the Bucks.

■ Here’s my power rankings as of this week in the NBA. 1. Phoenix, 2. Memphis, 3. Milwaukee, 4. Golden State, 5. Boston, 6. Philadelphia, 7. Miami, 8. Dallas, 9. Utah, 10. Toronto. Who’s your top 10?

■ Hopefully you watched the NCAA women’s Elite Eight games Monday night. In the opener No. 2 seeded UConn upset No. 1 seeded North Carolina State in arguably the most exciting game I’ve ever watched. UConn won the game in double overtime, 91-87. The game was played at the highest of all levels in women’s college hoops with nine ties and 13 lead changes. The Final Four will start Friday as South Carolina meets Louisville and Stanford plays UConn. South Carolina, Louisville and Stanford are all No.1 seeds. I’m taking South Carolina and UConn. In the finals I’ve got South Carolina stopping UConn by five points.

■ Just about everyone has Michael Jordan as the GOAT in professional basketball. But from my angle, what about Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and LeBron James? I’m not sold he’s better than those two. And what about Wilt Chamberlain? In 1962 he averaged 50.4 points and 25.4 rebounds per game. I think Oscar Robertson is in the conversation. My choice. It’s Kareem right now. LeBron might pass him up the next few seasons.

■ Should he or shouldn’t

he? That’s the question facing Wisconsin Badgers sophomore guard Johnny Davis. Should he leave and head to the NBA or should he stay one more year with the Badgers? I think he needs one more year in college hoops. I’m not sure how he’d fit into an NBA team right now. He struggled a little down the stretch when he faced tough defenses.

■ The NHL season, which seems to go on forever, is slowly coming to a close. I’m taking the Tampa Bay Lightning to win the Stanley Cup. Look for Florida, Carolina, Pittsburgh and Colorado to be tough to eliminate.

■ As a Brewers fan, I hate to say it, but hooray for the St. Cardinals for signing future first ballot Hall of Famer Albert Pujols to a one-year contract to finish his brilliant career. With the DH now in the National League, I’ve got Pujols hitting .260 with 26 home runs.

■ Let’s just be honest about it. The Deshaun Watson situation in Cleveland is a mess. The Browns signed him last week to a guaranteed \$230 million contract and this is a guy who might not even play this season, or be limited to eight or so games. Two Texas grand juries have declined to indict him on criminal charges. But he still faces 22 civil lawsuits by women who have accused him of sexual misconduct or sexual assault. Come on, not one or two women, but 22. Who gets messages from 22 different women?

Central

From Page 1B

Packy Naughton, RHP Nick Wittgren.

■ **He’s Outta Here:** Manager Mike Shildt, LHP Kwang Hyun Kim, LHP Jon Lester, LHP Andrew Miller, LHP J.A. Happ, 2B Matt Carpenter, RF Jose Rondon, RHP Carlos Martinez.

■ **Top Hitters:** 1B Paul Goldschmidt (.294, 31 HRs, 99 RBIs), LF Tyler O’Neill (.286, 34, 80, 15 SBs), 3B Nolan Arenado (.255, 34, 105), RF Dylan Carlson (.266, 18, 65), 2B Tommy Edman (.262, 11, 56, 30 SBs), C Yadier Molina (.252, 11, 66).

■ **Projected Rotation:** RH Adam Wainwright (17-7, 3.05 ERA, 206 1/3 IP), RH Miles Mikolas (2-3, 4.23), LH Steven Matz (14-7, 3.82 for Toronto), RH Dakota Hudson (1-0, 2.08), RH Jake Woodford (3-4, 3.99).

■ **Key Relievers:** RH Giovanny Gallegos (6-5, 3.02 ERA, 14 saves), RH Ryan Helsley (6-4, 3.02), LHP Genesis Cabrera (4-5, 3.73), RH Jordan Hicks (0-0, 5.40), RH Nick Wittgren (2-9, 5.05 for Cleveland), LH T.J. McFarland (4-1, 2.56).

■ **Outlook:** The Cardinals return virtually intact with the exception of Marmol taking over for Shildt, who was fired for what team president John Mozeliak called “philosophical differences” despite a late-season surge and a third straight playoff appearance. The veteran cast of characters should help Marmol in his first ground as a big league manager. Dickerson is the only major addition to the everyday lineup, and erstwhile slugger Pujols is back to pro-

vide a few DH at-bats. Matz joins the rotation but the pitching staff will be minus top starter Jack Flaherty and right-hander Alex Reyes at the beginning of the season. Flaherty has a small labrum tear in his right shoulder and Reyes, an All-Star closer last season before losing that job, is also dealing with shoulder trouble. He was 10-8 with a 3.24 ERA and 29 saves in 69 relief appearances last year. The biggest issue for the Cardinals is rotational depth, and getting both those arms back sooner than later would bode well for another run at the NL Central and a spot in the playoffs.

CINCINNATI REDS

2021: 83-79, third place.

■ **Manager:** David Bell (fourth season).

■ **Opening Day:** April 7 at Atlanta.

■ **He’s Here:** OF Tommy Pham, LHP Mike Minor, RHP Chase Petty, RHP Hunter Strickland, OF Jake Freley, 1B Colin Moran.

■ **He’s Outta Here:** 3B Eugenio Suarez, RF Nick Castellanos, LF Jesse Winker, C Tucker Barnhart, RHP Sonny Gray, LHP Wade Miley, RHP Michael Lorenzen, LHP Amir Garrett, RHP Mitch Givens.

■ **Top Hitters:** 1B Joey Votto (.266, 36 HRs, 99 RBIs, .938 OPS), RF Tyler Naquin (.270, 19, 70), 2B Jonathan India (.269, 21, 69, 34 doubles, .835 OPS, NL Rookie of the Year), C Tyler Stephenson (.286, 10, 45, .797 OPS), SS Kyle Farmer (.263, 16, 63).

■ **Projected Rotation:** RH Tyler Mahle (13-6, 3.75 ERA), RH Luis Castillo (8-16, 3.98), RH Vladimir Gutierrez (9-6, 4.74), LH Mike Minor (8-12,

5.05 with Royals), RH Hunter Greene (10-8, 3.30 with Double-A Chattanooga and Triple-A Louisville), LH Nick Lodolo (2-2, 2.31, 78Ks in 50 2/3 IP with Double-A Chattanooga and Triple-A Louisville).

■ **Key Relievers:** RH Art Warren (3-0, 1.29 ERA, 34 Ks in 21 IP), RH Luis Cessa (2-1, 2.05), RH Lucas Sims (5-3, 4.40, 76Ks in 47 IP), RH Tony Santillan (1-3, 2.91, 56 Ks in 43 1/3 IP), RH Jeff Hoffman (3-5, 4.56, 79 Ks in 73 IP).

■ **Outlook:** The Reds are a little banged-up already. Castillo and Minor experienced shoulder soreness this spring, which will delay their first appearances. Relief pitcher Tejay Antone likely is out for the season, and third baseman Mike Moustakas hurt his shoulder diving for a grounder and might not be ready for opening day. Cost-cutting by the Reds led to the departure of regulars Suarez, Winker, Castellanos, Barnhart and others. India, the NL Rookie of the Year, and Stephenson will be expected to shoulder more of the offensive load. Votto returns for a 16th season after one of the best years of his career. The Reds have high hopes for rookie pitchers Greene and Lodolo, who have been brought along methodically in the minors and likely are ready. But offense is going to have to come from new and different sources for Cincinnati to contend in the NL Central.

CHICAGO CUBS

2021: 71-91, fourth place.

■ **Manager:** David Ross (third season).

■ **Opening Day:** April 7 vs. Milwaukee.

■ **He’s Here:** OF Seiya Suzu-

ki, RHP Marcus Stroman, SS Andrelton Simmons, INF Jonathan Villar, LHP Wade Miley, OF Clint Frazier, C Yan Gomes, RHP Chris Martin, RHP Mychal Givens, LHP Drew Smyly, RHP David Robertson, LHP Daniel Norris.

■ **He’s Outta Here:** RHP Zach Davies, C Robinson Chirinos, C Austin Romine, INF Matt Duffy.

■ **Top Hitters:** OF Seiya Suzuki (.317, 38 HRs, 88 RBIs with Hiroshima Toyo Carp of Japan’s Central League), INF Patrick Wisdom (.231, 28, 61, .823 OPS), 1B Frank Schwindel (.326, 14, 43, .962 OPS), C Willson Contreras (.237, 21, 57).

■ **Projected Rotation:** RH Kyle Hendricks (14-7, 4.77 ERA), RH Marcus Stroman (10-13, 3.02 for Mets), LH Wade Miley (12-7, 3.37 for Cincinnati), RH Alec Mills (6-7, 5.07), LH Drew Smyly (11-4, 4.48 for Atlanta).

■ **B RH David Robertson** (0-0, 4.50 ERA for Tampa Bay), RH Mychal Givens (4-3, 3.35, 8 saves for Colorado and Cincinnati), RH Rowan Wick (0-1, 4.30, 5 saves), RH Chris Martin (2-4, 3.95, 1 save for Atlanta).

■ **Outlook:** Better than the end of last season, but still murky at best. Kris Bryant, Anthony Rizzo and Javier Baez were shipped off ahead of last year’s trade deadline, and the Cubs stumbled to their worst record since they went 66-96 in 2013. The off-season additions of Stroman and Miley should help a pitching staff that finished with a 4.87 ERA last year. While Simmons isn’t much of an offensive threat at this point in his career, he could provide a boost with his glove while playing behind a

more contact-oriented rotation. Ross has several new options for his bullpen, and lots of question marks — especially after Codi Heuer was lost for the season to Tommy John surgery. Ross could do a lot of mixing and matching at the beginning of the year as the bullpen shakes out. Schwindel and Wisdom each made the most of increased playing time in 2021, and the Cubs are hoping their performances were a sign of things to come. Frazier is looking to get his career back on track after he was released by the Yankees, and he looked impressive during spring training.

PITTSBURGH PIRATES

2021: 61-101, fifth place.

■ **Manager:** Derek Shelton (third season).

■ **Opening Day:** April 7 at St. Louis.

■ **He’s Here:** LHP Jose Quintana, C Roberto Perez.

■ **He’s Outta Here:** C Jacob Stallings, 1B Colin Moran, RHP Chad Kuhl, LHP Steven Brault.

■ **Top Hitters:** CF Bryan Reynolds (.302, 24 HRs, 90 RBIs, .912 OPS), 3B Ke’Bryan Hayes (.257, 6, 38), LF Ben Gamel (.255, 8, 26), 1B Yoshi Tsutsugo (.217, 8, 32 with Rays, Dodgers and Pirates).

■ **Projected Rotation:** RH Mitch Keller (5-11, 6.17 ERA), RH JT Brubaker (5-13, 5.36), RH Wil Crowe (4-8, 5.48), LH Jose Quintana (0-3, 6.43 with Dodgers and Giants), RH Bryce Wilson (1-4, 4.91).

■ **Key Relievers:** RH David Bednar (3-1, 2.23 ERA, 3 saves), RH Chris Stratton (7-1, 3.63, 8 saves), RH Duane Underwood Jr. (2-3, 4.33), RH Sam Howard (3-4, 5.60), RH Heath Hembree (2-7, 5.59 with Reds and Mets).

■ **Outlook:** The Pirates remain very much in the early stages of a top-to-bottom rebuild as Shelton and general manager Ben Cherington enter their third season together. Pittsburgh’s farm system is now littered with high-end prospects like 2021 top overall pick catcher Henry Davis, 2019 first-round pick pitcher Quinn Priester and 2020 first-round pick infielder Nick Gonzales. That’s the good news. The bad news is their arrival is still likely at least a year away, meaning 2022 could look an awful lot like 2021, when the offense sputtered and the pitching was wildly inconsistent. Reynolds was one of the few bright spots while making his first All-Star Game. He figures to be the fulcrum around which the rest of the lineup swings. Hayes is hoping to be free of the wrist problems that limited him to 96 games. Towing 6-foot-7 shortstop prospect Oneil Cruz appears close to reaching the majors after hitting a home run in a brief appearance last fall and following it up with a solid spring. Yet he is likely to start the season in the minors, perhaps to get more experience in the outfield. Perez will take over the catching duties from Stallings, traded to Miami last fall. Perez will attempt to handle a staff that lacks a true ace. Keller is hoping to finally harness his potential after a wild 2021. Bednar, a Pittsburgh native, was a feel-good story a year ago and figures to open as the team’s closer. He just may not have a ton of opportunities as the front office keeps its eyes firmly on the future rather than the present.