

**BLEACHER BUZZ**



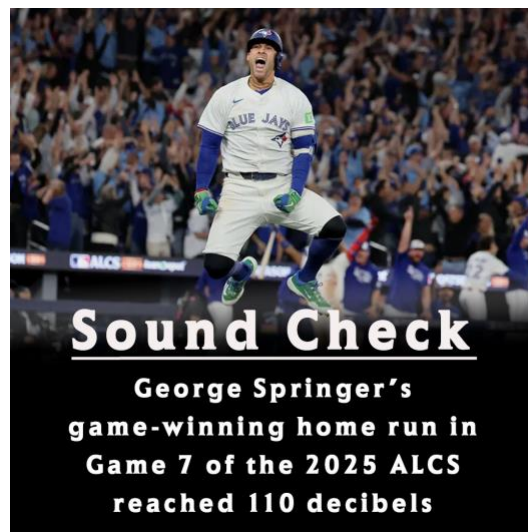
## 2026 Blue Jays Team Preview

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### Intro

Out of all the local sports teams, the Toronto Blue Jays are my favourite. When an intense game is happening, the atmosphere is not only electric — but the kind that feels louder and more communal than any other sport.

When the Blue Jays are clicking, the entire country locks in; case in point, the 2025 postseason. As the [Toronto Blue Jays](#) made their first World Series appearance in over 30 years, Canada was ready to believe this could be the year the Commissioner's Trophy ends up on the northern side of the border. According to [Sportsnet](#), Game 7 of the World Series became the most-watched English-language broadcast in Canadian history, outside of the 2010 Winter Olympics.



With the World Series concluded, this is an opportunity to examine where the Blue Jays stand. What can you expect from the franchise in 2026 and what are some things to know so that you can be the most knowledgeable Blue Jays fan in the room? In order to make sense of it all, I broke it all down into several categories:

— The good

- How the World Series was so close
  - The bad
  - The roster additions
  - The scouting and development management
  - Questions/concerns I have moving forward
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## The good

The Blue Jays were a fascinating team to watch in 2025 because they were a team of two halves. The first half, not very good and downright mediocre. The second half, a formidable team nobody wanted to play.

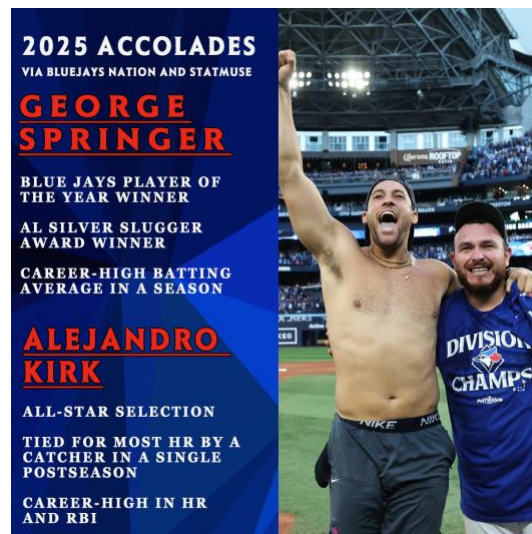
Offensively, Toronto became the hardest team in baseball to strike out. According to [ESPN](#)'s David Schoenfield, the Jays posted the lowest strikeout rate in the majors, while increasing the average exit velocity (how hard a hitter consistently makes contact with the baseball) and batting average.

| PRE AND POST ALL-STAR<br>BREAK STATS (VIA FANGRAPHS) |            |
|--|------------|
| PRE  | POST       |
| RUNS: 11TH   | RUNS: 1ST  |
| RBI: 10TH  | RBI: 1ST   |
| AVG: 1ST   | AVG: 1ST   |
| SLG: 12TH  | SLG: 2ND   |
| OWAR: 6TH  | OWAR: 6TH  |
| HR/9: 24TH   | HR/9: 17TH |
| FIP: 21ST  | FIP: 17TH  |
| SV: 27TH   | SV: 23RD   |

Several players elevated their games when it mattered most:

- **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.** set an all-time MLB playoff OPS [record](#) (1.289), hitting eight home runs and driving in 15 runs. He later earned the league's first Entertainer of the Year [Award](#) and an All-MLB First Team [selection](#). Although his batting wasn't as great as previous years, he was reliable on first base, making incredible catches with his signature splits.

- **Alejandro Kirk** had a career-high 15 home runs, then tied the MLB record for home runs by a catcher in a single postseason with [five](#). According to Sportsnet Stats, the Blue Jays won [eight](#) straight playoff games when Kirk homered.
- **George Springer** managed to step up. He [won](#) Blue Jays Player of the Year, an AL Silver Slugger, and posted a career-high batting average. His home run which defeated the Seattle Mariners to advance to the World Series was later described by none other than the [Seattle Times](#) as “one of the biggest non-World Series plays in baseball history”.
- **Ernie Clement** set an MLB [record](#) with 30 hits in a single postseason, while **Addison Barger** recorded [14](#) hits over a 10-game stretch in the playoffs (via Sportsnet). **Andrés Giménez** entered the postseason with the lowest OPS among qualified AL hitters — then became tied with the [3rd-most](#) RBI from the #9 spot in a batting in a postseason all-time.



In picture: Springer (left) and Kirk (right)

The common thread? Toronto found a way to pick each other up and used the momentum to their advantage.

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## Why the World Series was so close

On paper, it might have looked like the Dodgers were going to easily win the World Series —but the reality couldn't have been farther from the truth. So how exactly did the Blue Jays go the distance when the Dodgers had the more talented roster?

**[TURN THIS INTO A PHOTO IDEA]** According to [Sportsnet Stats](#), prior to Game 7, the Blue Jays had:

- more postseason runs
- a better team batting average,
- a lower combined ERA (both starters and relievers)

As previously mentioned, the bats came alive for the Blue Jays. So what was the x factor that tipped the scales in the Dodgers favour? A historic performance from pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto.

In Game 7, he threw 105 pitches — 73 for strikes — becoming the first pitcher since 2015 to throw [consecutive complete](#) games in the World Series.

Yamamoto [went](#) 3–0, allowing just two errors over 65 batters faced while striking out 23 per cent of hitters. Although I don't like to reference ERA (Earned Runs on Average) for pitchers due to factors out of their control like bad luck with outfielding and the Home Run Factor (see image below), Yamamoto had an unbelievable 1.02 ERA.

But there's more to it than just one player. It was several factors, such as several costly baserunning errors from Bo [Bichette](#), Addison [Barger](#) and George [Springer](#) in games three, six and seven respectively. a dead ball that [lodged](#) in the outfield padding, a [roster change](#) in the outfield that resulted in a crucial out, and a blown pitch from Blue Jays reliever Jeff [Hoffman](#).



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## The bad

### **Photo idea (strongly recommended):**

- **Graphic:** Solo Home Run Issue via Team Rankings

- Show:
  - MLB rank in home runs (11th)
  - MLB rank in slugging (7th)
  - Runners left stranded in scoring position (T-18th)

On the surface, the Blue Jays' offence looked good in 2025. Take a look at the stats and see Toronto [finished](#) 11th in Major League Baseball in home runs and seventh in slugging percentage. You might think 'why is this under the bad heading?'

The context behind these hits makes a difference.

The Blue Jays often relied on solo home runs and struggled to string together quality at-bats to bring in additional runners. That inconsistency became especially noticeable against elite pitching.

Toronto was [tied](#) for 18th in "Runners Left in Scoring Position". For newer fans, this stat refers to how often a team strands baserunners on second or third base at the end of an inning. High totals suggest difficulty delivering timely hits rather than an inability to get on base.

It mirrored patterns from past years, raising questions about approach and in-game adjustments. Even though the new hitting coach David Popkins managed to turn the team around in the second-half, the first-half demonstrated an issue many Blue Jays fans have: the team struggles to get the players on base home.



## Santander not providing the expected impact

To improve upon this, the Blue Jays went out and signed all-star slugger Anthony Santander. [MLB Network](#) listed Santander as the 53<sup>rd</sup> best player coming into 2025. Instead, he was arguably the most *disappointing* player in 2025.

Santander's overall impact fell short of expectations for a player coming off a [season](#) of 42 HR and 102 RBI. His struggles compounded the team's issues with runners in scoring position, particularly when injuries or slumps forced him out of the lineup.

Santander's presence did not sink the offence. However, his absence was certainly felt, to the point where fans were wondering how the lineup was going to work since the rest of the team picked up the offence while he was off with shoulder, ankle and back injuries.

**POSSIBLE PHOTO IDEA:** HAVE A PICTURE OF ANTHONY SANTANDER. HE WAS RANKED 53 BY MLB NETWORK HEADING INTO 2025, 2026 N/A. 3 DIFFERENT INJURIES (FOX SPORTS), 6 HOME RUNS, 100 LESS GAMES THAN 2024, OPS+ DIFFERENCE OF 80, -2 OUTS ABOVE AVERAGE (how many outs above average a fielder makes compared to the league average), -2 FIELDING RUN VALUE (how many runs a defender saves or costs his team), K% (STRIKEOUT PERCENTAGE how often a hitter strikes out) INCREASED BY 8.2

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## Bullpen overuse and late-inning damage

Toronto's bullpen was asked to shoulder an unsustainable workload in 2025, and the cracks eventually showed.

Relievers were frequently pressed into high-leverage situations earlier than ideal, a byproduct of close games. That strain became most visible late, where mistakes proved costly.

Let's talk about the ace of relief pitchers for this team: Jeff Hoffman. Per Sportsnet Stats, Hoffman allowed a single-season [franchise-record](#) 13 home runs in the ninth inning or later. While Hoffman remained the go-to guy, this statistic highlighted the thin margin for error with relievers. Hoffman [struggled](#) throughout the regular season, giving up game-winning home runs, requiring head coach John Schneider an explanation as to why he would go back to Hoffman on back-to-back nights.

For years, the Blue Jays have failed to bring in elite talent in the bullpen. Aside from Jordan Romano's [all-star](#) season back in 2022, there has yet to be a pitcher fans can feel confident in to close a game in the ninth inning.

**Photo idea (strongly recommended):**



- **The last time the Blue Jays had an elite relief pitcher (2022)**

Russia just invaded Ukraine, inflation hit 8.1% in Canada,

👉 **Verdict:** Excellent photo candidate.

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### Likely loss of Bassitt's innings and leadership

Chris Bassitt's future with the Blue Jays remains uncertain, but his potential departure would leave a tangible void.

Bassitt may not have been the flashiest arm in the rotation, yet his value extended beyond the box score. He consistently provided innings, absorbed pressure and stabilized a pitching staff that faced injuries and role changes throughout the season.

In the postseason, Bassitt shifted to a bullpen role and delivered, posting **6.2 scoreless innings with an 8.0 strikeout-to-walk ratio and a 28.2 whiff rate**, per Sportsnet Stats. His performance also came with candour, acknowledging the toll a long season had taken on the staff.

Losing Bassitt would not simply mean subtracting a starter — it would mean replacing durability, adaptability and leadership, traits that rarely appear in projections but often determine how a season holds together.

### Photo idea (recommended):

- You already have a **strong Bassitt graphic**
- This fits perfectly here and adds emotional weight to the section.

👉 **Verdict:** Yes, you can responsibly write that Bassitt is *likely not coming back* while still acknowledging his importance.



It wasn't catastrophic, but it was messy — and contenders can't afford many messes.

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## The question marks heading into 2026

The foundation is strong. The margins are where things get complicated.

### Bullpen certainty

| 2025 RELIEVER COMPARISON<br>VIA FANGRAPHS  |     |     |      |      |
|--|-----|-----|------|------|
|  | FIP | WAR | HR/9 | BB/9 |
| <br>JEFF<br>HOFFMAN   | 4TH | 4TH | 4TH  | 3RD  |
| <br>PETE<br>FAIRBANKS | 3RD | 3RD | 3RD  | 1ST  |
| <br>DEVIN<br>WILLIAMS | 2ND | 2ND | 2ND  | 4TH  |
| <br>EDWIN<br>DÍAZ     | 1ST | 1ST | 1ST  | 2ND  |

Relievers are volatile by nature — which raises a fair question: if volatility is unavoidable, why not pay for the best one available?

Toronto passed on elite options like Edwin Díaz, despite the fact that deferrals — which push salary payments into the future — remain uncapped until the next collective bargaining agreement in 2027. Per Spotrac, the Blue Jays already rank among the top teams in deferred money, while the Dodgers have committed nearly \$1 billion in deferrals across multiple stars.

Ownership appetite, not rules, is the real limiter.



**TOP FIVE HIGHEST PAYROLLS  
IN 2026 VIA SPOTRAC**

**TAX THRESHOLD: \$244 MILLION**

|              |   |                 |
|--------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. DODGERS   |  | \$342 MILLION + |
| 2. METS      |  | \$303 MILLION + |
| 3. PHILLIES  |  | \$300 MILLION + |
| 4. BLUE JAYS |  | \$294 MILLION + |
| 5. YANKEES   |  | \$280 MILLION + |

**Rotation health and usage**

Kevin Gausman remains a pillar. In 2025, he threw 193 innings with a 3.41 FIP — a stat that strips out defensive luck to better measure pitcher skill — while posting 4.1 WAR, third-highest on the team (via FanGraphs). But he enters a contract year, and unresolved extensions have a way of becoming distractions.

There's also intrigue behind him. Could **Ricky Tiedemann** or **Yimi García**, both returning from elbow procedures, contribute in relief roles early? Can Tyler Rogers' submarine delivery or Louis Varland's knuckle curve play consistently over a full season?



**RICKY  
TIEDEMANN**

MILB STATS  
VIA BASEBALL  
REFERENCE

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**140 IP**  
**226 K**  
**1.07 WHIP**  
**\* 3.39 FIP**  
(APPROXIMATELY)  
**14.2 SO/9**  
**0.5 HR/9**

### Health and payroll flexibility

Anthony Santander's injury history remains concerning after multiple issues limited him to 54 games in 2025. Toronto also sits above the CBT threshold, where every additional dollar spent comes with steep penalties.

That doesn't prevent spending — it just makes every decision louder.

### The future of Bo Bichette and Kyle Tucker

In the off-season, the Blue Jays management has been trying to establish a deal with outfielder Kyle Tucker and shortstop/second-baseman Bo Bichette. Per theScore,

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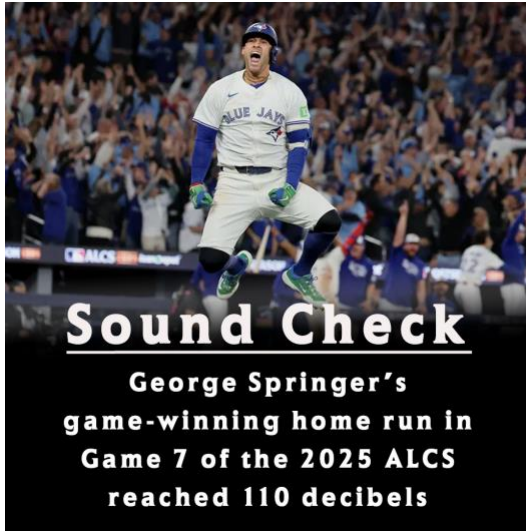
### Conclusion: the projection

The best regular-season record in Blue Jays history remains 99 wins, set in 1985 (via Statmuse). Toronto doesn't need to chase history to contend again.

Taking into account expected regression, injury risk and bullpen volatility, a **92-win projection** for 2026 feels realistic — slightly below FanGraphs' 94-win model, but still comfortably in playoff territory.

This team has proved it can evolve, survive adversity and rise when it matters most. The question now isn't whether the Blue Jays are good enough.

It's whether the final few decisions — the expensive ones, the uncomfortable ones — will match the belief that's already been earned.



## TOP FIVE HIGHEST PAYROLLS IN 2026 VIA SPOTRAC

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3. PHILLIES  \$300 MILLION +
4. BLUE JAYS  \$294 MILLION +
5. YANKEES  \$280 MILLION +

**10 YEAR/\$400 MILLION**  
REPORTED ASKING PRICE VIA MLB.COM



THIS IS \$40 MILLION MORE THAN AARON JUDGE FOR THE MOST EXPENSIVE CONTRACT FOR A RIGHT FIELDER VIA SPOTRAC

**10 YEAR/\$300 MILLION**  
REPORTED ASKING PRICE VIA NEW YORK POST



THIS IS \$41 MILLION AWAY FROM TYING FRANCISCO LINDOR FOR THE MOST EXPENSIVE CONTRACT FOR A SHORTSTOP VIA SPOTRAC

## FORMER BUFFALO BISCONS ALUMNI



## BATting COACH SHOUTOUT

**DAVID POPKINS**



**2025  
BASEBALL AMERICA  
COACH OF THE YEAR**

**FIRST YEAR AS THE BLUE JAYS  
BATting COACH**



## DID YOU KNOW?

THE TORONTO BLUE JAYS SCORED AN MLB-RECORD 105 RUNS THROUGHOUT THE 2025 POSTSEASON.


EVERY TEAM TO HAVE AT LEAST 92 RUNS IN A SINGLE POSTSEASON WENT ON TO WIN THE WORLD SERIES.

SOURCE: SPORTSNET STATS




# HOME RUN FACTOR

ROGERS CENTRE RANKED 13TH/30TH  
VIA BASEBALL SAVANT



WALL HEIGHT  
+  
OUTFIELD DIMENSIONS  
+  
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS  
=  
HOME RUN FACTOR



## KAZUMA OKAMOTO

NPB STATS  
SINCE 2018  
VIA SPORTSNET

HOME RUNS (1ST)  
RBI (1ST)  
SLG (2ND)  
OPS: (3RD)  
RUNS SCORED (1ST)

6X NPB ALL-STAR  
3X CENTRAL LEAGUE  
HOME RUN CHAMPION

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| <br>PETE FAIRBANKS  | 3RD | 3RD | 3RD  | 1ST  |
| <br>DEVIN WILLIAMS | 2ND | 2ND | 2ND  | 4TH  |
| <br>EDWIN DIAZ     | 1ST | 1ST | 1ST  | 2ND  |



|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  | <p><b>RICKY TIEDEMANN</b></p> <p><b>MILB STATS</b><br/>VIA BASEBALL<br/>REFERENCE</p> <hr/> <p><b>140 IP</b><br/><b>226 K</b><br/><b>1.07 WHIP</b><br/><b>• 3.39 FIP</b><br/>(APPROXIMATELY)<br/><b>14.2 SO/9</b><br/><b>0.5 HR/9</b></p> <p><b>2025 ACCOLADES</b><br/>VIA BLUEJAYS NATION AND STATMUSE</p> <p><b>GEORGE SPRINGER</b></p> <p>BLUE JAYS PLAYER OF THE YEAR WINNER<br/>AL SILVER SLUGGER AWARD WINNER<br/>CAREER-HIGH BATTING AVERAGE IN A SEASON</p> <p><b>ALEJANDRO KIRK</b></p> <p>ALL-STAR SELECTION<br/>TIED FOR MOST HR BY A CATCHER IN A SINGLE POSTSEASON<br/>CAREER-HIGH IN HR AND RBI</p> |  |
|---|---|---|



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