

Photo of the Day |



UConn men's basketball plays Michigan in the 2026 March Madness championship game. The Huskies were defeated, losing 69-63. PHOTO BY EMMA MEIDINGER, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Lombardi Lineup:

Watch out for the Miami Marlins

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In nearly every sports league, spending equals winning. Baseball is no different, with the reigning two-time champion Los Angeles Dodgers boasting the largest MLB payroll by a wide margin. However, just because a team has a low budget, it doesn't mean they can't compete.

The Miami Marlins rank dead last in MLB payrolls at just over \$82 million. For comparison, Juan Soto alone is earning nearly \$62 million from the Mets this year.

Miami has had an up-and-down past few seasons. They made a surprise playoff appearance in 2023, before former Tampa Bay Rays executive Peter Bendix took over as president of baseball operations for the Marlins. After a dismal start to 2024, he decided to completely overhaul the roster, trading Luis Arraez, Trevor Rogers and Jazz Chisholm Jr. for prospects.

Bendix realized that the worst situation for a baseball team is to be stuck in the middle, like the Marlins had been for years. Not good enough to compete, but not bad enough for a full rebuild. While trading away the team's biggest names was controversial, it may have been necessary to survive in a small market.

To some, 2023 seemed like a step in the right direction, but to Bendix, it was unsustainable. Despite their two World Series championships, the Marlins are the only team in North American professional sports to not have consecutive playoff appearances in 30+ years of existence. Going forward, the Marlins aren't striving for one-off playoff runs like they have in the past. The goal is to build a consistent contender for the first time in franchise history.

Taking a page out of the Rays' playbook, Bendix focused on the team's player development department, in hopes of turning unknown names into legitimate MLB starters.

After a rough start to the 2025 season, the Marlins showed great improvement in the second half. They went 39-33 in the last 72 games, including a series win over the Mets to eliminate them from playoff contention. While they still finished below .500, Miami looked like it had direction once again.

Marlins ace Sandy Alcantara is now four years removed from

his dominant Cy Young season in 2022 but hadn't looked anywhere near that form until last year. In that second half stretch, he posted a 3.34 ERA over 70 innings pitched, a dramatic improvement after recent struggles. In his first three starts of 2026, Alcantara resembled his prime self, not allowing a single run over his first 24 innings, and already having a complete game to his name. If not for Bendix's investment in developing players like him, Alcantara may have become a one-year wonder, but now he has a chance to reestablish himself as a true ace.

On the offensive side, the Miami offense was fueled by the unexpected breakout of Kyle Stowers. The 28-year-old outfielder was the team's sole all-star, batting .288 and hitting 25 home runs before an injury sidelined him for the final month. Stowers' power and ability to hit to all fields gave the Marlins a much-needed middle-of-the-order threat.

This year, the fish are betting on even more of their young hitters to experience a similar breakout. And early on, that gamble is paying off.

26-year-old catcher Liam Hicks has been arguably one of the biggest surprises in the first few weeks. He's been one of the top hitters in baseball over eleven games, batting .296 with three home runs. Mostly known as a contact-focused hitter, Hicks has been able to tap into his power, providing a potential offensive spark from the catcher's position that Miami hasn't seen since J.T. Realmuto.

A top 50 prospect acquired in the Edward Cabrera trade, Owen Caissie is looking like the future of Marlins baseball. After anchoring Canada's offense in the World Baseball Classic, he has continued that momentum into the young season, showing off his power early on. If Caissie truly turns out to be rookie of the year caliber, the Marlins lineup will boast real power in the middle of the order.

The Marlins can't compete with the spending of teams like the Dodgers and Mets. But under new leadership, and embracing their identity as a small market team, they have a path forward. History has shown they can't beat those teams at their own game, but with advanced player development and scouting, they can still build a sustainable core.

Of course, April is far too early to declare the Marlins

are back. The true test will be their ability to endure the 162-game grind, and if their depth can handle the inevitable injuries throughout the season. But their Moneyball approach has built them a young core with a high-ceiling, and if their recent results are any indicator, Miami could be a real threat to crash the playoffs once again.



Jakob Marsee of the Miami Marlins runs the bases during a game. The Marlins are projected to be somewhat successful this season. PHOTO COURTESY OF @MARLINS ON INSTAGRAM.