LOMBARDI LINEUP:

WILL WE SEE A FIRST-TIME WORLD SERIES CHAMPION?



Tampa Bay Rays player shows jersey. The Rays have not yet won a World Series title.
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The MLB Postseason is set to begin and sitting at the top of both leagues are franchises vying to make history. The Tampa Bay Rays and Milwaukee Brewers hold two of the best records in the MLB, yet neither of them has ever won a World Series title. Given the amount of talent both clubs have displayed throughout the regular season, is it finally time for one of these small-market teams to break through?

The Rays last appeared in the World Series during the shortened 2020 season, ultimately falling to the Los Angeles Dodgers in six games. Postseason success has eluded them ever since, including a first-round exit after their historic 100-win season in 2021. Tampa Bay has not won a single playoff series since capturing the American League pennant.

Entering this year, few analysts expected the Rays to be as dominant as they were. Most projections had them as a middle-of-the-pack club hovering around .500. Instead, Tampa Bay racked up 98 wins and comfortably captured the American League East division.

Leading the Rays all season is likely AL MVP finalist Junior Caminero, who played in all 162 games, batting .276 and crushing 42 home runs to ignite the offense. Tampa Bay also led the AL in batting average, with Chandler Simpson hitting .306 and Yandy Diaz at .293. Their small-ball approach to offense was particularly lethal due to their ability to avoid striking out and causing chaos on the basepaths, while their pitching staff shut down opposing hitters.

Despite star ace Shane McClanahan being sidelined for the American League Division Series, the Rays still boast a formidable rotation. Drew Rassmussen and Nick Martinez have consistently delivered quality starts, and midseason acquisition Freddy Peralta has posted a dominant 0.98 ERA in his new threads. The Rays' primary struggle has been their bullpen, posting a 4.12 combined ERA. However, a key bright spot has been their closer, Bryan Baker, who leads the MLB with 40 saves and posted a 1.44 ERA in the regular season.

In a wide-open American League field, the Rays' balanced roster gives them their best opportunity to return to the World Series.

Milwaukee has waited over four decades for another World Series appearance, last making it in 1982. This year, the Brewers made history by recording their best regular season record ever, finishing at the top of the National League at 103-59.

Like Tampa Bay, the Brewers are eager to move past recent postseason heartbreak. Milwaukee is coming off back-to-back postseason disappointments, including a sweep by the Dodgers last year and a devastating loss to the Mets after blowing a ninth inning lead in 2024.

The National League presents an elite gauntlet of contenders, with heavyweights like the Dodgers and Braves looming. However, the Brewers' 103 wins weren't a fluke.

Heading Milwaukee's pitching staff is 24-year-old sensation and likely NL Cy Young award recipient Jacob Misiorowski, who dominated hitters with a 1.80 ERA and 252 strikeouts. He leads a unit that ranks second in the NL in runs allowed and batting average against. Milwaukee also boasts an elite bullpen that ranks among the best in the MLB, anchored by reliable veteran closer Trevor Megill.

The Brewers' offensive approach takes a page out of the Rays' philosophy: situational hitting over sheer power. Milwaukee finished first in the MLB in team batting average, while near the bottom in home runs. Instead of chasing the long ball like most teams today, the Brewers thrive by working counts, getting on base and putting pressure on opposing defenses. This has worked wonders for them in 2026, scoring the second most runs in the MLB.

After decades of near-misses and early exits, both the Rays and Brewers enter October with momentum and a chip on their shoulders. They say pitching and defense wins championships, but only time will tell if their small-ball approach can take down the giants of baseball and bring their cities their first ever trophy.



Milwaukee Brewers players raise hats on the field. The Brewers last made a World Series appearance in 1982.

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