The road to the World Series runs straight through the reigning champions

By ANTHONY ANGELILLO
Copy Editor

Two seasons ago, the Chicago White Sox lost 121 games, the most of any team in the modern era. As of Sept. 24, they were soaked in champagne inside a Kansas City clubhouse after clinching a playoff spot.

Elsewhere, two teams that fired their managers in April are in for October; one division might crown a champion with a losing record, and the Los Angeles Dodgers are chasing the MLB's first three-peat since the 1998-2000 New York Yankees.

The best of three Wild Card Series started Sept. 29, on NBC and Peacock. Division winners take the top three seeds in each league regardless of record, and the top two skip to the Division Series Oct. 3.

AMERICAN LEAGUE (AL) DIVISION WINNERS

Few saw the Tampa Bay Rays (98-64) coming after back-to-back fourth-place finishes in the AL East. They clinched the division Sept. 22 at Yankee Stadium, locking up the top seed and their first division title since 2021.

Third Baseman Junior Caminero, an AL MVP candidate, sealed a playoff spot with his 40th homer, a walk-off against the Houston Astros Sept. 11, while closer Bryan Baker leads the MLB with 40 saves.

The Cleveland Guardians entered the weekend a game ahead of the White Sox in the AL Central, which they were able to clinch Sept. 27. Third baseman Jose Ramirez, slowed by a broken hamate bone this season, reached 1,000 career RBIs Sept. 18. The Guardians lost to Detroit in the 2025 Wild Card Series and have not won the World Series since 1948.

The AL West could be record-setting for all the wrong reasons. The Astros (81-81) became the first team in MLB History to make the playoffs with exactly a .500 record.

Though the record reflects poorly on the team's overall performance, designated hitter Yordan Alvarez finishes the season with a .316 batting average, 42 home runs, and a 1.033 OPS. Alvarez is not only the clear AL MVP favorite but arguably the best hitter in the MLB this season.

AMERICAN LEAGUE (AL) WILD CARD WINNERS

The New York Yankees (93-68) have the second-best record in the AL but will start playing in the first round. Outfielder Aaron Judge has played just 66 games after fracturing a rib and suffering a calf strain that will keep him off the Wild Card Series roster.

With Judge not playing, he has a great supporting cast in first baseman/designated hitter Ben Rice with 41 home runs, first baseman Luis García Jr. with the eigth-highest slugging percentage at .521 and starting pitcher Cam Schlittler, who is the favorite to win the AL Cy Young.

The Boston Red Sox fired their manager, Alex Cora, after a 10-17 start and promoted Chad Tracy from Triple-A Worcester. Boston was 32-46 June 24 and finished the season (87-75).

The Red Sox and Yankees will face each other for the second year in a row in the Wild Card, after New York eliminated Boston the prior year.

The White Sox had lost over 100 games three years running, and no team had ever reached the postseason after two in a row. Manager Will Venable's lineup has hit 204 home runs, with first baseman Munetaka Murakami leading the charge with 35 homers, and third baseman Miguel Vargas having a resurging season, posting a .250 batting average along with 33 home runs.

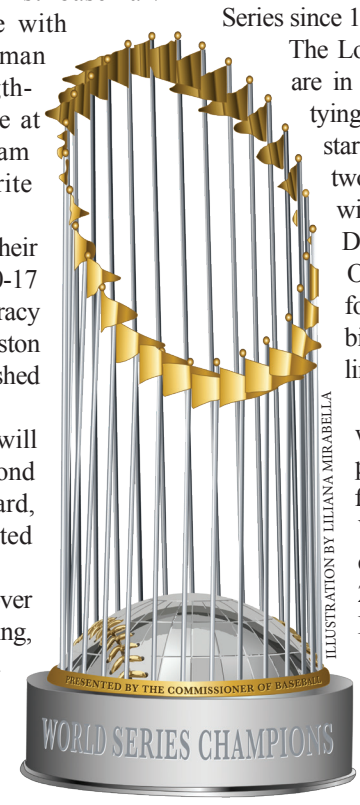


ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

NATIONAL LEAGUE (NL) DIVISION WINNERS

The Milwaukee Brewers have the best record in the MLB (103-59) and became the first team to win four straight NL Central titles. Starting pitcher Jacob Misiorowski, the NL Cy Young heavy favorite, finished the season leading the MLB with a 1.80 ERA, 0.80 WHIP and 252 strikeouts.

Milwaukee also had the best record in 2025, only to get swept by the Dodgers in the NLCS. The Brewers have not reached the World Series since 1982.

The Los Angeles Dodgers (100-62) are in the postseason for a record-tying 14 straight years. They added starting pitcher Tarik Skubal, the two-time reigning AL Cy Young winner, at the trade deadline. Designated hitter Shohei Ohtani, who is done pitching for the season because of biceps trouble, returned to the lineup Sept. 23.

The Atlanta Braves went 76-86 and missed the playoffs last season. Under first-year manager Walt Weiss, Atlanta (94-68) clinched the NL East Sept. 20, with First Baseman Matt Olson leading the lineup with four 20-homer hitters. Outfielder Ronald Acuna Jr. has looked like his 2023 MVP self in Sept. after hamstring issues.

NATIONAL LEAGUE (NL) WILD CARD WINNERS

No team in MLB is hotter than the San Diego Padres, who went 16-6 in Sept. San Diego clinched a third straight postseason berth, a franchise first. Outfielder Fernando Tatis Jr. only had one home run entering June and now has 25 homers and a .289 batting average, carrying the team. Closer Mason Miller anchors the bullpen with an NL-leading 38 saves.

Chicago Cubs outfielder Pete Crow-Armstrong, the NL MVP favorite, joined the 40-40 club Sept. 24, stealing his 40th base to go with an MLB-leading 45 homers. The Cubs defeated the Padres in the 2025 Wild Card Series, and all paths are leading to a second straight matchup this postseason.

The Philadelphia Phillies were 9-19, tied for the worst record in MLB, when they fired manager Rob Thompson, April 28. Under interim manager Don Mattingly, the Phillies went (88-74), clinching the final Wild Card spot over the Arizona Diamondbacks. Mattingly has never won a World Series, and with designated hitter Kyle Schwarber, 45 homers and 2-time MVP Bryce Harper, they look to bounce back after a shaky September to give their coach his first ring.

The Dodgers are still the team everyone has to beat. Los Angeles is the clear favorite to three-peat, and with a rotation of four Cy Youngs and the 2025 World Series MVP Yoshinobu Yamamoto, they look unstoppable heading into October.

If anyone knocks off the Dodgers, my pick is the Brewers, who are looking for revenge after last year's defeat to Los Angeles. With the rotation led by Misiorowski, it looks destined for the two best teams in the MLB to cross paths again.

I judged by its cover: Lizzie McAlpine's 'Angel' was angelic

By KELSEY SWEET
Staff Writer

"Ceilings," "Doomsday" and "Spring Into Summer." The idea that there is light on the other side has always been a common theme singer-songwriter Lizzie McAlpine sticks to when she continues to master her craft.

McAlpine's new album is one of those that feel like it has a little something for everyone. There are moments that make you want to dance, sit and think and songs that remind you of people you love.

From the first song to the last, I really enjoyed listening to it and found myself connecting with the different emotions throughout the album. Each song has its own feeling and story, which made the album really enjoyable to listen to as a whole.

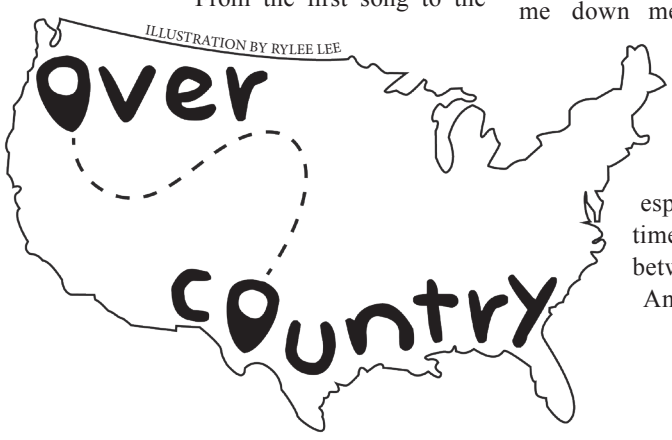


ILLUSTRATION BY RYLEE LEE

Listening to this soundtrack in my college dorm made me miss my best friend, Liv, a little more than usual. The lyrics and overall feeling of the song made me think of all the memories and moments we spent together. I am lucky that I had someone growing up who I could share such vulnerable things with. It was one of those albums that walked me down memory lane and connected me with the past. Liv and I have been best friends for the last six years and, to this day, we always share our thoughts on music with each other, especially on Mcalpine. This time, there is just a little distance between us.

Another theme throughout the album is how it captures the feeling of falling in love. College is a new place where we meet so many new people and it has been such a sweet pleasure watching my friends explore that genre of their lives. There is something exciting about meeting someone, getting to know them and slowly realizing that you are falling for them.

This album captures the feeling of young love and what it is like to be vulnerable for the first time, making it feel relatable, almost like you are experiencing those moments alongside the music.

When I first saw the album, I judged it by its cover. I wasn't completely sure what to expect, but after listening to it, I was pleasantly surprised, this album reminded me of all different aspects of my life.

The three songs that especially stood out to me were "A Car Wash and a New Pair of Pants," "The Light in the Painting" and "Over Country." All of these songs had pretty unique titles and felt surprisingly relatable. I liked how she talked about something as ordinary as a car wash and merged it with a sense of memorabilia.

Those songs do not feel overly serious or forced. Instead, they have a natural sound that makes them easy to listen to while reminding me of home.

The overall vibe of this album reminds me of being young and experiencing everything for the first time. The good, the bad and the ugly. There is a sense of freedom, excitement, friendship and romance that broke out through this soundtrack.

At some points, the album feels almost like a soundtrack to a summer or a college experience where you don't know exactly what is going to happen next, but you're enjoying the moment anyway.

The album does not just tell one story but creates a feeling that listeners can connect to their own experiences and memories. I am doing exactly that at my new home at Quinnipiac.