

11. Max Fried, YANKEES – One of the most underrated pitchers in baseball. Like Burnes, he is under-rated because baseball analytics puts a lot of weight on strikeouts, and Fried has notched 8.8 per nine innings pitched over his career, a respectable amount but not in realm of Strider or Skenes. He makes up for that by never walking anyone, playing his position well (three Gold Gloves), and limiting home runs. That last part will be a bit trickier in the Bronx, but he's a wonderful pitcher.

12. Cole Ragans, ROYALS – Proved his breakout turn with the Royals wasn't a fluke: posted a 3.14 ERA last year and struck out 223 hitters in 186.1 innings. One thing you look at for a pitcher who bumps his innings up a lot is how they fared in the second half: Ragan held his split, posting a 3.16 ERA in the first half and a 3.10 in the second half. He's had multiple Tommy John surgeries which worries you, but he's an elite pitcher right now.

13. Framber Valdez, ASTROS – Three-year average is 192 IP, 3.06 ERA, 188 strikeouts, and a 15-8 W-L record. Pretty good. Second rated southpaw on this list, behind Skubal. Could rate higher.

14. Spencer Strider, BRAVES – Missed all of last season and likely will not be back at the start of the season, but if he comes back healthy, he will likely rival Skenes as the best strikeout pitcher in the league. Has only had one healthy season, but he's a terrific talent, someone who could top 300 strikeouts if he gets near 200 innings in a season.

15. Chris Sale, BRAVES – The back injury that scratched him from the Wild Card series is a concern, but he returned to vintage form in 2024, finally snaring the Cy Young trophy that eluded him for the seven years from 2012 through 2018, where he was the best pitcher in the American League. An easy player to root for: you probably don't want to talk to him on a day he's pitching, but he's a fierce competitor who got better as the year progressed (2.70 ERA in the first half, 1.86 in the second). I'd vote for him in the Hall if he never threw another pitch.

16. Garret Crochet, RED SOX – Ranking him behind Sale as the two White-turned-Red Sox aces. He was terrific last year and then told the White Sox he had no interest in stressing his arm for a team that had no chance of winning. He shouldn't face the same existential struggle in Boston, and he is the real deal: Crochet actually posted a better strikeout rate *and* a better walk rate than Paul Skenes, though he gave up more home runs.

17. Blake Snell, DODGERS – Like Cease, the walks sometimes get to him. Started slowly last year because he didn't sign a contract until spring training was underway, and wisely decided to avoid that outcome in 2025, signing a five-year, \$182 million deal with the Dodgers, who'll give a nine-figure contract to just about anyone these days. Does have two Cy Young Awards, which is more than I can claim, so I probably shouldn't judge him too harshly.

18. Justin Steele, CUBS – Steele started 2024 giving everyone a panic: fielding a bunt on Opening Day, he injured his hamstring and had to limp his way to the IL. He missed time later with elbow concerns, but he posted his third straight year with an ERA just over 3.00 (3.07 last year, 3.10 over the past three years). You'd like to see him get in a full season of health, but when he steps on the mound, he puts the Cubs in a position to win.

19. Michael King, PADRES – Proved his transition into starting in New York wasn't a fluke by posting a 2.95 ERA for the Padres last year, running out identical rate stats to 2023. I might be rating him too high, but there is just nothing in his profile that gives me any cause for concern. Even if he was the only hitter the Padres got back for Soto, he'd be worth it.

20. Shohei Ohtani, DODGERS – Coming back from a surgery that wasn't *exactly* a Tommy John, and also from surgery on his non-throwing shoulder after an awkward slide in the World Series. Shohei is in the camp with Skenes and Strider: a pitcher who is extremely difficult to hit (6.5 hits/9 IP, which is matched in history only by Nolan Ryan), but the injury concerns and the fact that he spends his off-days launching baseballs into the cheap seats limits his rank as a pitcher. Who knows, though: maybe he gives up on hitting next year and wins 30 games.

21. Aaron Nola, PHILLIES – He gives you quality innings: over the last seven seasons, Nola has ranked in the top ten in innings pitched six times. The year he didn't rate was 2021, when he notched 180.2 innings. A workhorse: I think there is just tremendous value in having a pitcher who will get you six innings and make every start. That's Nola.

22. Sonny Gray, CARDINALS – His strikeout rate jumped last year (11.0 K/9, up from 9.0 in 2023), but his ERA took a hit (from 2.79 to 3.84). Inning for inning, he's quietly been one of the better pitchers in baseball over the last ten years, but not, in my opinion, one of the truly elite. The innings hold him back: do you want a pitcher like Gray, who will be elite but has