

CENTER FIELD NATIONAL LEAGUE

1. Jackson Chourio, BREWERS (6th) - You could rate the top three players on this list in any order, and I wouldn't spend any time arguing with you about it. All three were born in March or April, but they are years apart: PCA was born in 2002, Jackson in '03, and Chourio in '04. I'm going with the youngster: Chourio did not improve in 2024, but he did not decline, which gives him two strong seasons before he's turned 22-years-old. There are just not many players who start at that level and *don't* have great careers: I remain very convinced that Chourio will be one of the best players of the coming decade.

2. Pete Crow-Armstrong, CUBS (5th) – The best defensive player of the trio, and it's probably not close: when PCA was sitting near the top of the leaderboards in WAR in the middle of the summer, a reader asked me if it was possible for a player with a .300 on-base average to really be an MVP candidate. I answered that it was possible if the player had a lot of strong positives in other dimensions of his game. PCA fits that bill: he had a poor on-base average, but he hit for power, was terrific on the bases, and made jaw-dropping plays in center on a regular basis, netting the Gold Glove. He was not an MVP last year, but he certainly could be someday. A fun, charismatic player who had Chicagoland kids making a run on blue hair dye: he is the kind of player you hope sticks around on one team for the duration.

3. Jackson Merrill, PADRES (1st) – A spate of injuries kept Merrill off the field for a third of 2025, but he was excellent when he played. Like the other Jackson, Merrill's season was more of treading water than making gains, but he is so young that you can expect the gains to come quickly.

4. Andy Pages, DODGERS (NR) – The next tier, though Pages did his best to elbow his way into the conversation, posting a 25-homer season while playing solid defense in center. He was the only Dodgers regular who was under the age of 30 last year. Saved the Dodgers season with that catch in the 9th inning of Game 7.

5. Michael Harris III, BRAVES (2nd) – If Julio Rodriguez is the AL champion of second-half surges,

Michael Harris II is NL champ: he now has a career OPS of .662 in the first-half, .846 in the second. He'll be twenty-five next year and while last year was his worst as a hitter, he remains an excellent defensive player and a solid hitter.

6. Jung Hoo Lee, GIANTS (7th) – Maybe the Giants should play their June slate entirely on the road: everyone in the lineup seemed to struggle that month, and Lee (0 HR, .143 BA, .551 OPS) was a big driver of that lack of...drive. Batted third for most of the year and that feels like a good fit, though he was very successful hitting in the 7th spot (.846 OPS).

7. Oneil Cruz, PIRATES (4th) – Came out of the gate looking like he was going to challenge Elly for the title of 'Best Cruz in the NL East', posted a .902 OPS with 8 homers and 12 steals through April. Then he slid for five straight months. Oneil's home run outputs by month: 8, 4, 3, 2, 2, 0. His walk rate improved from 8% to 12%, but he led NL centerfielders in errors and struck out a lot. They hit him leadoff for most of the year, but he might have better luck hitting further down in the order. That would necessitate the Pirates finding *other* hitters to put on the lineup card, so that particular thesis probably won't be tested in 2026. Sigh.

8. Jacob Marsee, MARLINS (NR) – He looked good. Very good. Called up late after posting an .817 OPS in Triple-A, Marsee torched major league pitching to the tune of a OPS of .917. He stole 59 bases in professional baseball last year and hit 19 homers, and his walk rate has always been elite. The Marlins might have something here.

9. Dylan Crews / Robert Hassell II, NATIONALS (11th, NR) – Crews a poor start with Washington, got sent to the minors for the summer, and came back better, posting a .749 OPS in September. I think he will rate higher in 2026 than where I have him, but I'm trying to not put the cart too far ahead of the horse. Hassell didn't carry his elite walk-rate into the majors, but he should get another shot, getting in stints at center when James Wood is at DH. Hassell was the 8th overall selection in the 2020 draft and is the last part of the package the Padres sent to