

THE FLUSHING LEDGER

Queens' Home for Mets Baseball Since the Bad Old Days

SPORTS · BASEBALL

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CITI FIELD, FLUSHING, N.Y.

SEASON PREVIEW · METS BEAT

Nine Games In, the Mets Face Their Hardest Opponent: Their Own Recent History

After three straight division flags and a 112-win high-water mark, a 4-5 start and a reshaped roster have Flushing asking the same question in every corner of the ballpark: is this still the team that wins in October, or the team that's rebuilding on the fly to make sure it can?

By **Marisol Kwan**, Mets Beat Writer · *The Flushing Ledger*

Nine games do not a season make, and every person drawing a paycheck inside Citi Field will tell you that, unprompted, before you've finished the question. But nine games are enough to notice things, and what's been noticed around this ballclub in the season's first ten days is a team that looks like it, mostly — and also a team still stitching together a winter's worth of roster surgery in real time, in front of a fan base that has forgotten what patience feels like.

The record is 4-5. The Mets sit tied for second in the National League East with the Braves and Phillies, a game and a half behind a Miami club nobody expected to be hosting first place in April. None of that is a crisis. It is, however, unfamiliar. This is a team that has not finished a season anywhere but first in the division since 2026 — a 102-win title in 2027, a franchise-record 112 wins in 2028, and a 92-win flag last year that felt, by comparison, almost pedestrian. Getting used to checking the standings and not seeing your team's name on top, even in the second week of April, is going to take some fans longer than others.

A DYNASTY CATCHING ITS BREATH

It helps to remember what's still here. Francisco Lindor and Juan Soto have combined to win six straight Gold

Gloves between them — three apiece at short and in right field, dating back to 2027 — and both remain the emotional and statistical spine of this roster. Garrett Crochet, meanwhile, enters the year as the reigning back-to-back winner of the league's top pitching honor, an ace in every sense who took a good rotation and made it a great one the last two Octobers. Whatever questions surround this team in April, they don't start with the players who were already stars in September.

"You don't win 112 games by accident, and you don't forget how in one winter. What you do is retool the parts that got old or got expensive, and hope the new parts catch up to the old ones fast."

— LONGTIME SCOUT, ON THE METS' OFFSEASON APPROACH

What's changed is almost everything around them. The bullpen that closes out Díaz's ninth innings has two new setup arms in it. The outfield has two new starting-caliber bodies in it. The back of the rotation has a different name in it than it did last September. None of that is unusual for a team coming off a division title — but it does mean

April is, in part, an audition, and auditions are rarely as smooth as the finished show.

GROWING PAINS, NOT ALARM BELLS

Here's the case for staying calm. Griffin Jax and Doug Nixhazy, the two relief arms brought in over the winter, are still finding their innings and their roles in a bullpen that had to be almost entirely re-sequenced around Edwin Díaz. Evan Carter and Walker Jenkins, the two new outfield bats, are still figuring out playing time in a mix that now runs six deep with Soto, Wyatt Langford, Edward Lanzano and Hiroshi Ishida also in the picture — a genuinely good problem, but a problem that takes a few weeks to sort into a rhythm. And the middle of the rotation, from Nolan McLean down through Reese Olson, Braxton Ashcraft and rookie-ish Jackson Jobe, is exactly the caliber of group that needs a month to find its final order.

None of that is what keeps a manager up at night in early April. What keeps him up is a shortstop cupboard that, beyond Lindor himself, is close to bare on the 40-man — a hole the front office has quietly not addressed this winter and one rival executives believe could become a summer trade chip in the other direction, if Flushing decides its surplus in the outfield is worth more as an infielder than as a fourth or fifth outfielder.

BY THE NUMBERS

Mets record	4–5
NL East standing	T-2nd, 1.5 GB
Current streak	L2
2029 finish	92–70, 1st
2028 finish	112–50, 1st
2027 finish	102–60, 1st

Standings through games of April 7. Three straight division titles is the longest active streak in the National League.

THE WINTER LEDGER

Whatever else this front office did over the winter, it did not sit still. The through-line, once you lay all the moves next to each other, is a team trying to get younger and cheaper at the margins without giving up anything from the core — selling into strength, buying into need, and

turning over almost every complementary piece on the roster in the process.

OFFSEASON TRANSACTION LOG

MOVED OUT

- OF Cody Bellinger (retained 20% of salary), plus three farm arms, to Detroit
- 3B Mark Vientos (retained 20%) to Baltimore for RHP Griffin Jax
- RHP Alejandro Rosario and two picks to Philadelphia for two prospects
- RHP Taj Bradley — a July rental — flipped to Houston in March for two young arms
- OF Hector Osorio to Minnesota in the deal that returned Jenkins

BROUGHT IN

- OF Evan Carter from Texas (for a veteran arm, a prospect, and a 4th-rounder)
- OF Walker Jenkins and a pitching prospect from Minnesota
- LHP Doug Nixhazy from Detroit
- RHP Griffin Jax from Baltimore
- OF Estuar Suero, a reclamation add, from independent Kansas City
- LHP Jackson Humphries from Cleveland — agreed to *this morning*

Read individually, the Bellinger and Vientos trades looked like salary shedding dressed up as a baseball move — both came with the club eating a slice of what remained on the deal. Read together with the return, though, the picture looks more deliberate: this is a front office turning two expensive, aging pieces into a cheap, controllable reliever and a stack of lottery tickets, while using the savings and the outfield's newfound depth to go get Carter, a plainly better all-around player than what he replaced. It is not a rebuild. It is a team trying to stay good without staying expensive, and so far the early returns — a retooled bullpen that should be markedly better by June, an outfield that can rotate around matchups all summer — look like the kind of moves that age well, even if they didn't make a ripple on the back page in November.

DOWN ON THE FARM

If the big-league club is a known quantity trying to reassemble itself, the farm system is the part of the operation with the most interesting news to report. Triple-A Syracuse opened its year on a five-game winning

streak and sits 6–3 atop the International League, carried early by a pair of near-ready arms and bats: right-hander Scott Davis, who profiles as rotation depth as soon as this summer, and third baseman Jeff Claus, who has been the loudest bat in the Syracuse lineup through the season's first week and looks like the org's next infield option once a 40-man spot opens up.

The system's real headline, though, is two levels down, in Binghamton. Left-hander Jayden Rener has yet to put up eye-popping Double-A numbers, but scouts inside and outside the organization have started using the word that gets front offices' attention: frontline. If the ceiling scouts see is anything close to real, Rener is not just the best arm in the system — he's a piece the Mets could either build a rotation around in two or three years, or use as the centerpiece of a much bigger trade before then. Either way, his name is the one to watch all summer.

Below that, the picture is the usual complex-league static — St. Lucie and Brooklyn haven't started their seasons yet, the Dominican Summer League affiliates are mid-schedule with one club well over .500 and one well under, and a handful of the pieces added in this winter's sell-off trades (infielder Jarren Advincula chief among them) have quietly restocked a farm system that, like the big-league roster above it, still doesn't have a clear shortstop of the future in the pipeline. If that hole gets filled, in other words, it's more likely to happen by trade than by call-up.

WHAT THE FAITHFUL EXPECT

Three flags in a row will do something to a fan base, and what it's done to this one is erase the concept of a rebuilding year from the conversation entirely. Sports radio and the message boards have not been shy about the Bellinger and Vientos trades — both were popular players, and "selling for prospects and salary relief" is not a sentence Mets fans wanted to hear again after finally getting out from under it. But that grumbling has been mostly drowned out by real excitement over what came back: Carter's speed and glove have already made highlight packages twice this week, Jenkins is drawing "best athlete on the roster" praise in camp reports, and Rener's name is starting to show up in trade-value arguments on message boards before he's thrown a single Triple-A inning.

The honest read from here is that the record catches up to the talent. This roster is too deep in the middle of the lineup and too strong at the top of the rotation to stay a .500 team once the new pieces settle in, and the bullpen retool — unglamorous as it looked in December — should be paying real dividends by the time the calendar turns to June. The shortstop depth behind Lindor remains the one soft spot nobody's fixed yet, and it's worth watching whether a summer outfield surplus gets converted into exactly that. But barring a genuine step back from the stars at the top of this roster, the fourth straight NL East race should run through Flushing again before the leaves start turning. The Marlins have the early headline. Don't expect them to keep it.