

THE PINSTRIPE DISPATCH

YANKEES BASEBALL • EVERY ANGLE, EVERY DAY

BRONX EDITION • BASEBALL DESK • MAY 17, 2026

Bet on Youth, Bet on Health: The Yankees at the Turn

A retooled lineup and a patched-together rotation have the Bombers treading water in third place — and the answers to both problems might already be in the building, on the injured list, or riding buses through the low minors.

By Nick Ferraro | Pinstripe Dispatch Staff Writer
THE BRONX — Forty-six games into 2026, with the calendar about to turn to summer

The record sits at 21-25, third place in the American League East, six games off the pace. On a team that spent its winter retooling rather than rebuilding, that's not the number anyone in the front office circled in October. But spend a week around this club and the mood in the clubhouse doesn't match the standings — it's calmer than that, more patient, the kind of quiet confidence that comes from a roster that believes its best baseball, and its healthiest roster, are both still ahead of it.

That belief rests on two pillars: a lineup that got meaningfully better over the winter, and a pitching staff that has been without two of its most important arms for most of the season. Put those two things right, and the version of the Yankees this front office actually built starts to look a lot more like a contender than a .457 baseball team.

BY THE NUMBERS — ORGANIZATION AT A GLANCE

CLUB	REC	POS	GB
New York (MLB)	21-25	3rd, AL East	6.0
Scranton/WB (AAA)	18-26	10th	13.0
Somerset (AA)	16-22	5th	7.0
Hudson Valley (A+)	15-22	6th	6.0
Tampa (A)	25-13	1st	—

The big-league club and the two top affiliates are all a few games under .500. The bottom of the system is playing the best baseball in the organization.

New Faces at the Corners

The headline move of the winter arrived in late January, when the Yankees landed **Cody Bellinger** in free agency. He was the most complete player available on the market and he's played like it — a left-handed bat that doesn't need a platoon partner, a glove that can cover left, center or first depending on the night, and a professional at-bat in the middle of a lineup that badly needed one. If this front office's offseason has a signature

transaction, it's this one, and forty-six games in, it looks like exactly the value-add acquisition the roster was missing.

The rest of the winter reads less like a splash and more like a series of quiet upgrades. **Paul Goldschmidt** arrived in February on a short-term deal that looked, on paper, like veteran insurance at first base and designated hitter. It's turned into something closer to a true platoon: his numbers against left-handed pitching have been good enough that manager and front office alike now talk about first base as a matchup decision rather than an everyday job, with Ben Rice holding the strong side of it. **Randal Grichuk** came aboard three weeks later as a right-handed outfield bat off the bench — unglamorous, but exactly the kind of piece a lineup this left-handed needed in reserve.

Two trades rounded out the position-player winter. **Max Schuemann**, acquired in early February, was pitched as a versatile infield depth piece; injuries at shortstop have instead made him a near-everyday player, and he has held up better than reasonable to expect from a utility man pressed into everyday duty. Two weeks before Bellinger signed, the club also brought in left-handed reliever **Ryan Weathers**, who has quietly become one of the few bullpen arms here that can be trusted for more than three outs at a time. A waiver claim on infielder **Marco Luciano** in late January hasn't yet turned into everyday at-bats, but scouts around the system still like the bat speed enough to call him a bench piece worth stashing.

Add it up and the front office's offseason grade, at the quarter-plus pole, looks like a solid B-plus: one genuine difference-maker in Bellinger, two useful complementary veterans, and two trade pieces already overperforming their profile. None of it fixed the rotation. That was always going to have to happen a different way.

“You don't win a division in January — you just try not to lose it in January,” is how one longtime voice in the organization put it this spring. “We feel good about who we added. Now it's on the health side of things.”

The Health Question

That last part is the whole ballgame. **Gerrit Cole** and **Clarke Schmidt** have combined to make zero starts for the big-league club this season, and their absence is the single largest gap between this team's record and its ceiling. In their place, **Max Fried** has been every bit the front-line starter the Yankees signed him to be, and the real story of the rotation has been **Cam Schlichter**, a homegrown arm who has taken the next step and looks like a legitimate second starter rather than a back-end innings-eater. **Will Warren**, **Luis Gil** and **Elmer Rodriguez** round out a rotation that is, on stuff alone, a fringe playoff group — and would be a very different, very dangerous one the moment Cole and Schmidt are activated.

The bullpen carries its own subplot. **David Bednar** has settled in as the closer and has the swing-and-miss stuff to hold the job. The more interesting name is **Carlos Rodón**, working in relief rather than the rotation for reasons the club hasn't fully explained publicly — and yet, by results, he's arguably the best arm in that bullpen, with the stamina to work multiple innings if a spot start is ever needed. If Cole or Schmidt has a setback on the way back, don't be surprised if Rodón's next outing comes as a starter instead of the eighth inning.

On the position-player side, the injury list is just as consequential. **Anthony Volpe** is expected back at shortstop within a matter of days, which will push Schuemann back into the utility role he was actually signed for. **Jose Caballero** is a longer-term absence, and **Giancarlo Stanton**'s return — whenever it comes — adds a

middle-of-the-order bat back to a lineup that has otherwise had to manufacture its power.

Somewhere in Tampa, the Kids Are Alright

If the big-league record is a source of mild frustration, the farm system offers a more complicated picture — and, in one clubhouse in particular, real reason for optimism. Low-A Tampa has the best record in the entire organization at 25-13, running away with its division while the two full-season affiliates directly above it, Double-A Somerset (16-22) and Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre (18-26), have scuffled. It's the classic shape of a system that graduated a wave of talent to the majors and is still restocking the middle levels — the young core is arriving, it just hasn't climbed the ladder yet.

The name to know is **Dax Kilby**, a 19-year-old second baseman who is already holding his own at Double-A and is, by consensus, the best prospect in the system. He's shared the Somerset infield with **George Lombard Jr.**, 20, whose polish at the plate and steady defense up the middle make him a strong bet to profile as an everyday middle infielder in the not-too-distant future — and give the org an intriguing look at what its next double-play combination might be. Neither prospect has moved the win column at Somerset yet, but player development and team record rarely move in a straight line together, and evaluators around the league still rate both as legitimate top-of-the-system assets.

One level up, outfielder **Yanquiel Fernandez** has continued to hit at Triple-A and looks like the closest thing to big-league-ready corner-outfield depth once rosters expand. And keep an eye on the current 26-man roster itself: outfielder **Spencer Jones** is already up with the Yankees, still working through the growing pains that come with a rookie season, but scouts who saw him in the minors will tell you the ceiling here is real — he's simply getting that development done at the highest level instead of in Scranton.

What the Bleachers Are Expecting

Talk to fans outside the Stadium before a weekday game and the expectations sound almost reasonable, which is itself a little unusual for this fan base. Nobody is talking about 100 wins. What they want is what the front office promised in January: better health than a year ago, a lineup that doesn't need a favorable matchup to score runs, and a bullpen that holds whatever lead the rotation hands it. The Bellinger signing bought real goodwill, and the early returns from Schuemann and Weathers have quieted some of the offseason grumbling about the club standing pat at other positions. The rest of the patience in the building right now is being spent on one thing: the health of Gerrit Cole.

Here's the honest read from this seat. This isn't currently a division-winning team, and six games is a real deficit to make up against a division that isn't going to just hand it back. But it also isn't a 21-25 team on talent — it's a top-heavy rotation missing its top, playing without its presumptive shortstop and its projected middle-of-the-order power bat, and still hovering barely below .500. Get Volpe back this week, get Cole and Schmidt back before the trade deadline, and let Bellinger, Judge and a maturing Cam Schlittler carry the load in the meantime, and a Wild Card push in the second half isn't just plausible — on the roster this front office actually built, it's the expectation.

