STADIUM & STREET

THE 2027 ROSTER PROJECT / KANSAS CITY ROYALS

Rebuild the Royals' pitching floor

Protect the young lineup. Rebuild the pitching.

69	-120	3
WINS	RUN MARGIN	COSTED PATHS

An independent review of the roster, defense, pitching, farm system and financial choices.

A preferred plan. Two tested alternatives.
A clear account of what could go wrong.

Richard Brown | November 3, 2026

Completed 2026 regular season. Roster and market checks November 3.

Independent analysis. Proposed prices and workloads are scenarios.

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READING GUIDE

Start with the decision. Then test the evidence.

The opening brief states the recommendation and its price. The main analysis tests the roster and the alternatives. The back of the report preserves the player register, definitions and sources.

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A single public edition is suitable for forwarding. The analysis makes no claim of club affiliation or access to private baseball information.

ANALYSIS / 01

The decision

Kansas City allowed 810 runs in 2026, 173 more than the previous year. The offense improved by 39 runs, but that gain could not absorb the damage on the other side. A 69-win team with Bobby Witt Jr., Carter Jensen and Jac Caglianone does not need to start by replacing its young hitters. It needs enough credible pitching to keep those hitters in games. [1]

The preferred plan buys a dependable starter, two relievers with different jobs and a measured offensive upgrade in center field. Nick Martinez, Taylor Clarke, Steven Okert and Trent Grisham are the proposed purchases. Their annual allocations, plus a $6-8 million reserve, total $40-50 million. The resulting roster envelope is approximately $165.09-179.09 million. These are S&S negotiating ceilings, not market quotes or evidence of an owner-approved budget.

There is a less expensive alternative: Tyler Mahle, the same two relief purchases and an internal center-field competition. It sacrifices the external batting addition and reduces the starter workload. The no-acquisition branch also balances the innings, but exposes why a roster can be numerically complete and still be thin.

ANALYSIS / 02

Where the season changed

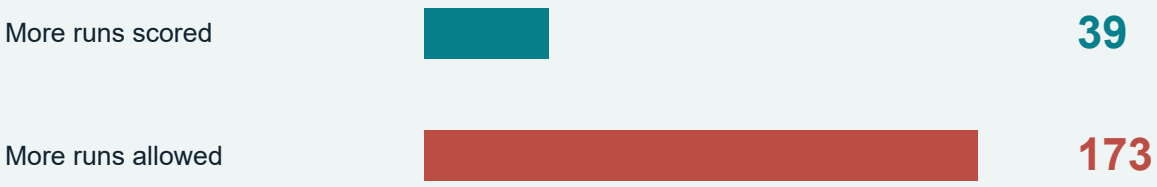
The three-year record isolates the immediate problem. Kansas City scored 735 runs in 2024, 651 in 2025 and 690 in 2026. Runs allowed moved from 644 to 637 to 810. The latest season erased a narrow positive run margin and replaced it with a deficit of 120. The year-to-year deterioration in the margin was 134 runs. [1]

Season	Record	Runs for / against	Margin	OPS / ERA
2024	86-76	735 / 644	+91	.709 / 3.76
2025	82-80	651 / 637	+14	.706 / 3.73
2026	69-93	690 / 810	-120	.718 / 4.77

A return to the 2025 level of run prevention would be a large improvement, not a reasonable default. Several pitchers who supplied earlier innings are injured, departed or performing differently. The offseason plan should identify who can supply the next 1,440 innings before assigning a familiar ERA to the team.

39 MORE RUNS, 173 MORE ALLOWED

2025 margin: +14 / 2026 margin: -120



The run margin fell by 134; the win total fell by 13.

Source: MLB regular seasons. November 3, 2026 edition.

ANALYSIS / 03

The roster that actually remains

The dated official roster feed lists 37 players, including injured-list entries. Steven Cruz is a separate restricted-status case and receives no innings in the principal plan. An offseason administrative recall does not resolve an elbow recovery or establish readiness for spring training. [2,3]

Gonsolin's $2.5 million option was exercised. Estevez's $13 million option was declined, with a $2 million buyout. [8] Those decisions belong in the financial model immediately. Earlier reports describing the Gonsolin decision as likely have been superseded.

Player / MLB ID	Raw official roster status	Planning note
Anthony Gose / 543238	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Beck Way / 694360	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Ben Kudrna / 695667	Active	Recovery gate; zero main-plan IP
Bobby Witt Jr. / 677951	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Carlos Duran / 679922	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Carter Jensen / 695600	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Cole Ragans / 666142	Injured 60-Day	Recovery gate; zero main-plan IP
Connor Thomas / 671162	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Daniel Lynch IV / 663738	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Isaac Collins / 686555	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Jac Caglianone / 695506	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
James McArthur / 663704	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
John Rave / 670231	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Jose Cuas / 621016	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Kyle Isbel / 664728	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Lucas Erceg / 668674	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Luinder Avila / 679883	Injured 60-Day	Recovery gate; zero main-plan IP
Maikel Garcia / 672580	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Matthew Lugo / 683090	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Michael Massey / 686681	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Michael Wacha / 608379	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Mitch Spence / 687765	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Nate Pearson / 663878	Active	Role and health evaluated separately

Player / MLB ID	Raw official roster status	Planning note
Nick Loftin / 679845	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Nick Mears / 683232	Injured 60-Day	Recovery gate; zero main-plan IP
Noah Cameron / 702070	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Nolan Hoffman / 676510	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Randy Dobnak / 677976	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Ryan Bergert / 686701	Active	Recovery gate; zero main-plan IP
Salvador Perez / 521692	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Seth Lugo / 607625	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Spencer Bivens / 702352	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Stephen Kolek / 663568	Injured 60-Day	Recovery gate; zero main-plan IP
Steven Zobac / 686632	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Tony Gonsolin / 664062	Active	Exercised option; recovery gate
Tyler Tolbert / 686475	Active	Role and health evaluated separately
Vinnie Pasquantino / 686469	Active	Role and health evaluated separately

ANALYSIS / 04

Departures cannot fill next year's jobs

The 2026 contribution table and the 2027 roster answer different questions. Bubic's Kansas City innings remain part of the season record. His later Dodgers affiliation and subsequent free agency mean those innings cannot simply be retained. Schreiber's Yankees waiver claim likewise separates his useful Royals work from the current bullpen. [3,4]

The same discipline applies to the outrighted pitchers. Removing Lange and Marsh from the major-roster arbitration subtotal is not a claim that either has disappeared from baseball or that a future minor-league agreement would cost nothing. Any new contract would require a fresh cost and role decision.

Player / MLB ID	Reconciliation	Treatment
Kris Bubic / 663460	Dodgers trade; free agency October 29	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Lane Thomas / 657041	Atlanta trade	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
John Schreiber / 670167	Yankees waiver claim; free agency October 29	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Matt Strahm / 621381	Released August 8	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary

Player / MLB ID	Reconciliation	Treatment
Alex Lange / 656638	Outright October 22	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Alec Marsh / 679525	Outright October 22	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Jonathan India / 663697	Free agency October 29	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Luke Maile / 571912	Free agency October 29	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Josh Rojas / 668942	Free agency October 29	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary
Carlos Estévez / 608032	Free agency October 30	No retained major-league workload or duplicate salary

ANALYSIS / 05

Keep the young offense moving

Caglianone's .834 OPS and Jensen's 27 home runs are central to the case for improving the roster around them. Witt remained the lineup's most complete player, while Pasquantino supplied another useful middle-order bat. Kansas City has enough established and emerging offense to justify a pitching investment without assuming every young hitter improves simultaneously. [1,5]

Player / MLB ID	KC PA	AVG / OBP / SLG	HR	BB / K
Bobby Witt Jr. / 677951	632	.281 / .359 / .441	18	67 / 109
Maikel Garcia / 672580	344	.268 / .334 / .381	3	32 / 50
Carter Jensen / 695600	603	.239 / .323 / .467	27	65 / 170
Jac Caglianone / 695506	553	.289 / .340 / .494	23	33 / 144
Vinnie Pasquantino / 686469	481	.249 / .333 / .428	17	51 / 76
Salvador Perez / 521692	627	.229 / .274 / .383	21	25 / 119
Michael Massey / 686681	452	.274 / .305 / .430	13	21 / 75
Nick Loftin / 679845	426	.240 / .322 / .388	8	41 / 73
Isaac Collins / 686555	519	.213 / .320 / .321	6	64 / 120
Kyle Isbel / 664728	323	.224 / .268 / .323	6	15 / 74
John Rave / 670231	161	.232 / .314 / .430	6	17 / 38
Tyler Tolbert / 686475	148	.285 / .347 / .392	3	12 / 31

Perez's 627 plate appearances produced a .657 OPS. The plan reduces his allocation to 400 and gives Jensen the larger catching share. That is a workload and performance decision, not a prediction about Perez's intentions. Keeping a respected veteran in a defined role is more coherent than budgeting another full season of everyday offense at his previous level.

ANALYSIS / 06

Test the contact behind the batting line

Witt's .345 wOBA came with a .378 expected wOBA. Caglianone's .360 and .357 were nearly aligned. Jensen's .341 exceeded his .318 expected mark. Those differences support different questions: whether Witt can regain impact, whether Caglianone can preserve his contact quality, and whether Jensen can reduce the cost of his 170 strikeouts. [6]

Batter	wOBA	xwOBA	SLG / xSLG
Bobby Witt Jr.	0.345	0.378	0.441 / 0.504
Maikel Garcia	0.318	0.318	0.381 / 0.367
Carter Jensen	0.341	0.318	0.467 / 0.423
Jac Caglianone	0.360	0.357	0.494 / 0.500
Vinnie Pasquantino	0.331	0.338	0.428 / 0.441
Salvador Perez	0.285	0.316	0.383 / 0.439
Michael Massey	0.318	0.307	0.430 / 0.414
Nick Loftin	0.315	0.293	0.388 / 0.335
Isaac Collins	0.293	0.295	0.321 / 0.308
Kyle Isbel	0.262	0.255	0.323 / 0.303
John Rave	0.326	0.315	0.430 / 0.391
Tyler Tolbert	0.329	0.287	0.392 / 0.307

Expected statistics describe the contact and strikeout-walk record through a model. They are not guaranteed future batting averages or an instruction to subtract a fixed number of runs from a player. Jensen's actual production counts. The gap makes a conservative workload and a development plan more important.

ANALYSIS / 07

History changes the confidence level

A three-year comparison helps separate a durable skill from a promising season. Witt has an established major-league base. Jensen and Caglianone have shorter records and more room for both improvement and regression. Collins, Loftin and Massey should be evaluated as distinct players, not grouped under an assumed collective rebound. [5]

Hitter	2024 MLB PA / OPS	2025 MLB PA / OPS	2026 MLB PA / OPS
Bobby Witt Jr.	709 / .977	687 / .852	632 / .800
Maikel Garcia	626 / .613	666 / .800	344 / .715
Carter Jensen	No MLB season	69 / .941	603 / .790
Jac Caglianone	No MLB season	232 / .532	553 / .834
Vinnie Pasquantino	554 / .761	682 / .798	481 / .761
Salvador Perez	652 / .786	641 / .730	627 / .657
Michael Massey	356 / .743	277 / .581	452 / .735
Nick Loftin	171 / .518	188 / .635	426 / .710
Isaac Collins	19 / .329	441 / .779	519 / .641
Kyle Isbel	426 / .654	409 / .654	323 / .591
John Rave	No MLB season	175 / .590	161 / .744
Tyler Tolbert	No MLB season	57 / .701	148 / .739

The budget does not purchase an entire new lineup because the largest recent loss occurred in pitching. It also does not require the existing lineup to become elite. Modest gains from clearer roles and healthier availability would help; financing those gains as if they were certain would weaken the plan.

ANALYSIS / 08

Platoons need real opportunities

The full-season split table is a starting point for lineup choices. Small samples can exaggerate a hitter's apparent advantage against one side. A proposed platoon must also fit the positions available, rather than occupying first base, designated hitter and a corner outfield spot at the same time. [7]

Batter / full MLB season	LHP PA / OPS	RHP PA / OPS
Bobby Witt Jr.	171 / .845	461 / .783
Maikel Garcia	82 / .927	262 / .650
Carter Jensen	170 / .674	433 / .837
Jac Caglianone	170 / .730	383 / .882
Vinnie Pasquantino	133 / .593	348 / .826
Salvador Perez	176 / .730	451 / .628
Michael Massey	101 / .786	351 / .721
Nick Loftin	168 / .750	258 / .685
Isaac Collins	155 / .597	364 / .660
Kyle Isbel	78 / .398	245 / .652
John Rave	39 / .614	122 / .785
Tyler Tolbert	85 / .679	63 / .817

Grichuk is a possible alternative to a corner-field batting role at $6-8 million for one year. He would not replace Grisham's center-field assignment. A Grichuk branch would require more center-field work from Isbel and Roccaforte, with an explicit reduction in the corner and designated-hitter opportunities now assigned elsewhere.

ANALYSIS / 09

Preserve the defense already working

Witt's 24 outs above average and Massey's 11 are important strengths. Isbel added seven, while Caglianone finished at minus-10. Those are range results within the model's measured opportunities, not complete defensive valuations or automatic future run totals. Position, playing time and repeated evidence matter. [9]

Fielder	2024 OAA	2025 OAA	2026 OAA	2026 opportunities
Bobby Witt Jr.	+16	+24	+24	468
Maikel Garcia	+2	+17	+5	267
Carter Jensen	No row	No row	No row	No row
Jac Caglianone	No row	-7	-10	329
Vinnie Pasquantino	+2	-7	+1	263
Salvador Perez	+5	+0	-3	67
Michael Massey	+4	+1	+11	435
Nick Loftin	+2	+2	-3	370
Isaac Collins	+0	+4	-2	319
Kyle Isbel	+9	+12	+7	275
John Rave	No row	+3	+3	96
Tyler Tolbert	No row	-1	+1	118
Trent Grisham	+2	-2	-6	280
Daulton Varsho	+15	+9	+7	345

Grisham's minus-six result in 2026 is a real cost in the preferred plan. His acquisition is proposed for offense and on-base potential, with Isbel retaining meaningful center-field time. Calling Grisham an all-purpose defensive upgrade would misstate the evidence. Varsho offers a different profile, with seven OAA but a .636 OPS and .283 expected wOBA.

ANALYSIS / 10

Catching has a measurable tradeoff

Jensen's framing contribution was approximately plus-3.1 runs, while Perez's was minus-6.4. Overall catching values were approximately minus-0.7 and minus-5.8 respectively. Framing is one component of catching, and should not be added again to a total that already includes it. [10,11]

Catcher	2026 KC catching IP	Framing runs	Overall catching value
Carter Jensen	868.0	+3.1	-0.7 runs
Salvador Perez	377.1	-6.4	-5.8 runs

The main allocation gives Jensen 110 catching starts and Perez 52. Jensen also has designated-hitter work, while Perez has limited first-base duty. If Perez cannot supply his share, Luca Tresh is a conditional organizational alternative after roster selection and defensive review. His minor-league batting line is evidence to assess, not proof that replacement catching is solved.

ANALYSIS / 11

Three retained starters are not a rotation

Wacha supplied 200.2 innings with a 3.32 ERA. Cameron added 177.1 innings at 4.11. Lugo threw 172.1 innings at 5.17. Those three workloads helped prevent an even larger collapse, but Wacha's 4.01 expected ERA and Lugo's 5.09 expected ERA argue against simply copying the best-looking results into next season. [1,6]

Pitcher / MLB ID	GS / KC IP	ERA / full MLB xERA	K / BB / HR	Planning treatment
Michael Wacha / 608379	32 / 200.2	3.32 / 4.01	158 / 54 / 30	Retain; reduce 200.2-IP burden
Noah Cameron / 702070	30 / 177.1	4.11 / 4.12	158 / 58 / 21	Retain
Seth Lugo / 607625	32 / 172.1	5.17 / 5.09	134 / 54 / 23	Retain; no automatic rebound
Daniel Lynch IV / 663738	10 / 86.0	4.08 / 4.63	56 / 26 / 11	Prefer relief in main plan
Randy Dobnak / 677976	13 / 74.1	3.51 / 4.86	49 / 26 / 7	Depth; xERA cautions against ERA extrapolation
Cole Ragans / 666142	8 / 35.1	4.84 / 5.12	45 / 23 / 10	Recovery branch only
Luinder Avila / 679883	12 / 70.0	5.53 / 4.95	61 / 42 / 7	TJ recovery; no main-plan innings
Stephen Kolek / 663568	10 / 54.0	4.50 / 3.87	34 / 12 / 8	TJ recovery; no main-plan innings
Kris Bubic / 663460	9 / 50.1	4.11 / 4.21	51 / 26 / 4	Traded to LAD; now free agent

Pitcher / MLB ID	GS / KC IP	ERA / full MLB xERA	K / BB / HR	Planning treatment
Tony Gonsolin / 664062	0 / 2.2	16.88 / 5.88	5 / 3 / 1	Exercised option; conditional recovery workload

The plan reduces Wacha to 175 innings and Lugo to 150, with Cameron at 165. Martinez is assigned 165. Gonsolin receives a conditional 75, and three internal depth pitchers supply the remainder. This distributes the burden instead of asking a few veterans to replace every injured teammate.

ANALYSIS / 12

Recovery belongs in a separate branch

Ragans underwent a UCL repair in July and was given a 10-12 month return-to-play timeline. [12] His main-plan workload is zero. A separate return branch permits 60 innings only after actual clearance, replacing named innings from Gonsolin, Dobnak and Braun.

Bergert underwent Tommy John surgery, while Kudrna had an elbow stress-fracture repair. [13] Neither receives main-plan innings. Kolek, Avila and Mears also remain recovery cases. The November 3 medical review preserves these recovery conditions after the administrative roster actions. A place on a roster is not a medical clearance.

Gonsolin's option makes his cost certain enough to include; it does not make his workload certain. The no-Gonsolin branch replaces 16 starts and 75 innings with Dobnak, Braun and Spence. If more than one recovery assumption fails, that branch must be rebuilt rather than stacked mechanically.

ANALYSIS / 13

The bullpen requires new leverage options

Kansas City relievers threw 573.1 innings with a 5.07 ERA, 482 strikeouts and 284 walks. The principal repair is not another large set of innings assigned to the same pitchers. It is a more credible sequence of pitchers who can enter important innings without compounding traffic. [1]

Pitcher	KC IP	ERA / full MLB xERA	K / BB	Treatment
Lucas Erceg	48.1	5.59 / 4.66	34 / 32	Command repair before leverage expansion
Nate Pearson	26.0	4.50 / 4.38	25 / 14	Retained; command review
Jose Cuas	23.1	2.31 / 5.40	25 / 15	Good ERA; walks limit certainty
Connor Thomas	19.1	2.33 / 4.51	14 / 3	Small sample
Anthony Gose	13.2	0.66 / 3.57	7 / 2	13.2-IP ERA is not a projection
Beck Way	23.1	3.86 / 5.02	21 / 10	Recovery and workload review

Pitcher	KC IP	ERA / full MLB xERA	K / BB	Treatment
James McArthur	0	No sample / No row	0 / 0	Health review
Nick Mears	19.1	5.12 / 6.56	15 / 11	Thoracic outlet recovery; zero main-plan IP
Steven Cruz	58.2	4.30 / 4.06	65 / 20	Restricted-list status unresolved; zero main-plan IP
John Schreiber	49.1	3.65 / 4.03	36 / 22	Yankees waiver claim, then free agency
Matt Strahm	35.2	7.32 / 4.24	30 / 14	Released; no automatic KC innings

Erceg walked 32 and struck out 34 in 48.1 innings. His 4.66 expected ERA was better than his 5.59 ERA, but that does not erase the command problem. Cuas and Thomas had encouraging ERAs in smaller samples. Their jobs should expand only with supporting command and availability, while Lynch is kept primarily in relief in the preferred plan.

ANALYSIS / 14

Two relief purchases, two tests

Clarke's 73 innings, 14 walks and 45 strikeouts support a bulk and middle-to-late relief role. His 4.42 expected ERA is a warning against paying for a repeat of his 2.96 ERA. The proposed one-year ceiling is $4-6 million, with 65 innings planned. [5,6]

Okert's 67.2 innings included 68 strikeouts and 14 walks. His 2.13 ERA and 3.13 expected ERA support a stronger leverage case than the other low-cost options evaluated here. The proposed ceiling is $8-10 million for one year, with 60 innings. That is a different job and price from Clarke, not two interchangeable bullpen names.

Candidate / MLB ID	Full 2026 MLB evidence	S&S ceiling / decision
Nick Martinez / 607259	180.0 IP, 3.10 ERA, 3.98 xERA; 109 K / 26 BB	A: 2 years / $26-30M; 30 GS, 165 IP
Tyler Mahle / 641816	149.0 IP, 3.99 ERA, 3.95 xERA; 137 K / 46 BB	B: 2 years / $28-32M; 28 GS, 150 IP
Foster Griffin / 656492	172.2 IP, 3.60 ERA, 4.35 xERA; 158 K / 45 BB	Alternative: maximum 3 years / $45-51M; 30 GS, 165 IP
Taylor Clarke / 664199	73.0 IP, 2.96 ERA, 4.42 xERA; 45 K / 14 BB	A/B: 1 year / $4-6M; 65 relief IP
Steven Okert / 595345	67.2 IP, 2.13 ERA, 3.13 xERA; 68 K / 14 BB	A/B: 1 year / $8-10M; 60 relief IP
Trent Grisham / 663757	484 PA, .703 OPS, 18 HR; 0.311/0.337 wOBA/xwOBA	A: 2 years / $18-22M; 500 PA; defense tradeoff
Daulton Varsho / 662139	526 PA, .636 OPS, 12 HR; 0.281/0.283 wOBA/xwOBA	Different CF profile; no funded acquisition
Randal Grichuk / 545341	280 PA, .880 OPS, 15 HR; 0.370/0.335 wOBA/xwOBA	Corner alternative; 1 year / $6-8M

Candidate / MLB ID	Full 2026 MLB evidence	S&S ceiling / decision
Kris Bubic / 663460	55.0 IP, 3.76 ERA, 4.21 xERA; 56 K / 26 BB	Medical inquiry, no funded innings
Michael Soroka / 647336	116.0 IP, 3.41 ERA, 4.12 xERA; 114 K / 29 BB	Free agent; alternative at 1 year / $8-10M, limited workload
John Schreiber / 670167	60.1 IP, 3.28 ERA, 4.03 xERA; 40 K / 26 BB	Free agent; command limits lead-reliever case
Matt Strahm / 621381	35.2 IP, 7.32 ERA, 4.24 xERA; 30 K / 14 BB	Released; rehabilitation inquiry only

ANALYSIS / 15

The farm is a source of competition

Roccaforte's Double-A power and subsequent Triple-A production justify a real center-field competition. His 181 combined strikeouts across those two stops also matter. The preferred plan budgets 200 plate appearances, while the less expensive alternative expands the opportunity after promotion and roster-selection checks. [14,19,20,21]

Player / MLB ID	2026 level and sample	Readiness decision
Lucas Braun / 814351	AAA: 37.2 IP, 5.73 ERA; 38 K / 13 BB	AAA depth, not a guaranteed rotation solution
Steven Zobac / 686632	AA: 42.2 IP, 4.85 ERA; 41 K / 17 BB	Limited innings; conservative main-plan workload
Ben Kudrna / 695667	AAA: 2.0 IP, 9.00 ERA; 2 K / 4 BB	Two AAA innings; no projected starter workload
Ryan Ramsey / 687547	AAA: 115.2 IP, 6.07 ERA; 110 K / 65 BB	Command and run prevention need improvement
Henry Williams / 689275	AAA: 97.2 IP, 6.08 ERA; 96 K / 51 BB	Do not promote solely to fill a numerical gap
Ben Sears / 700786	AAA: 69.0 IP, 3.91 ERA; 56 K / 28 BB	Possible relief depth after selection
Carson Roccaforte / 811287	AA: 504 PA, .856 OPS, 30 HR; 52 BB / 144 K	30 AA HR; contact risk remains
Carson Roccaforte / 811287	AAA: 118 PA, .862 OPS, 5 HR; 13 BB / 37 K	118 PA at AAA; competition, not proven MLB bat
Gavin Cross / 688457	AAA: 472 PA, .740 OPS, 17 HR; 32 BB / 149 K	149 K in 472 PA; conditional corner role
Luca Tresh / 681123	AAA: 385 PA, .714 OPS, 10 HR; 23 BB / 113 K	Catching contingency after selection
John Rave / 670231	AAA: 355 PA, .877 OPS, 13 HR; 54 BB / 65 K	Existing depth; stronger AAA than MLB evidence
Matthew Lugo / 683090	AAA: 245 PA, .838 OPS, 12 HR; 16 BB / 63 K	Conditional corner/utility work

Braun's Kansas City organizational Triple-A record was 37.2 innings with a 5.73 ERA. Zobac's Double-A sample was only 42.2 innings. Their main-plan assignments are modest. Asking them to cover substantially

more in the no-acquisition branch is possible as an allocation, but is precisely the risk that makes an external starter valuable.

ANALYSIS / 16

What is already committed

Seven existing contracts account for approximately $89.39 million on the salary-plus-allocated-bonus basis used here. Gonsolin adds $2.5 million through his exercised option. Perez's deferrals affect when cash is paid, while allocated signing bonuses differ from the cash paid in a particular year. [8,15]

Player / MLB ID	2027 allocation	Basis
Bobby Witt Jr. / 677951	$19.707071M	Salary plus allocated bonus
Seth Lugo / 607625	$21.500000M	2027 salary allocation
Michael Wacha / 608379	$14.000000M	2027 salary
Maikel Garcia / 672580	$7.200000M	Salary plus allocated bonus
Salvador Perez / 521692	$12.500000M	Earned salary; deferrals affect cash timing
Vinnie Pasquantino / 686469	$6.900000M	2027 salary
Cole Ragans / 666142	$7.583333M	Salary plus allocated bonus; recovery does not erase cost
TOTAL	$89.390404M	Seven commitments; option reserve separate

No attempt is made to turn this table into official competitive-balance-tax payroll. Player benefits, taxes and other club operating costs are not included. The purpose is a consistent comparison of roster choices, with actual liabilities retained even when a player's projected innings are zero.

ANALYSIS / 17

Arbitration and the remaining pool

Nine retained arbitration cases total $19.2 million in published estimates. Mears remains in that financial subtotal even though the main pitching plan assigns him no innings. A medical uncertainty is not permission to book non-tender savings before the club has made a decision. [16]

Player	Estimate, $M	Treatment
Kyle Isbel	3.50	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Nate Pearson	2.00	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Nick Mears	2.20	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Daniel Lynch IV	1.80	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Michael Massey	3.20	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Anthony Gose	1.10	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings

Player	Estimate, $M	Treatment
James McArthur	0.80	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Randy Dobnak	2.30	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
Lucas Erceg	2.30	Unsigned estimate; no assumed non-tender savings
TOTAL	19.20	Lange and Marsh excluded after outright assignments

Adding the Estevez buyout and a $12-16 million allowance for pre-arbitration players, minor-league coverage and callups produces a starting envelope of $125.09-129.09 million. The prior-year Houston payment associated with Pearson is not carried into 2027 without evidence of another obligation.

Component	Annual allocation	Definition
Seven commitments	$89.390404M	Allocated bonus basis, not cash or CBT
Gonsolin exercised option	$2.50M	Official October 29 decision
Nine arbitration estimates	$19.20M	Mears retained financially despite no assigned innings
Estevez buyout	$2.00M	Declined option; $13M option excluded
Pre-arb, minors and callups	$12-16M	Roster pool; no repeat of departed veteran salaries
Existing-roster envelope	$125.09-129.09M	No 2026 Astros Pearson credit carried forward

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Three plans and their actual prices

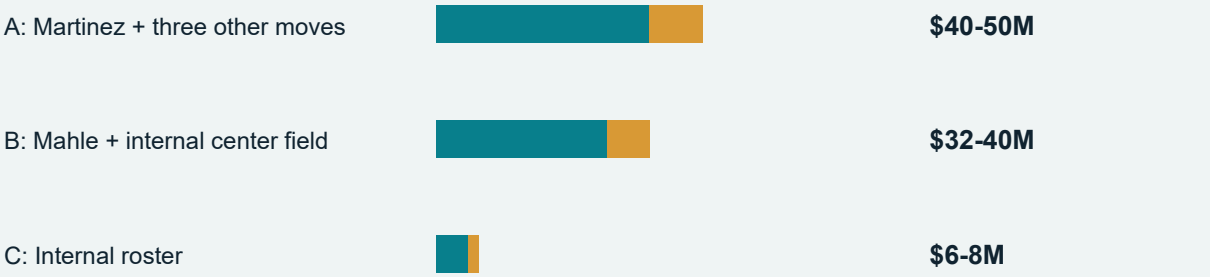
Plan A proposes Martinez at two years and $26-30 million, Clarke at one year and $4-6 million, Okert at one year and $8-10 million, and Grisham at two years and $18-22 million. With the reserve, annual additions total $40-50 million. New commitments total $62-76 million, because two proposed contracts span two seasons.

Plan	Annual additions	Total allocation	New commitment
A: Martinez / Clarke / Okert / Grisham	$40-50M	$165.09-179.09M	$62-76M
B: Mahle; internal center field	$32-40M	$157.09-169.09M	$46-56M
C: Internal roster	$6-8M	$131.09-137.09M	$6-8M

Plan B replaces Martinez with Mahle at two years and $28-32 million and uses an internal center-field competition. Its annual additions are $32-40 million and its new commitments $46-56 million. Mahle receives 150 innings rather than Martinez's 165, with Dobnak absorbing the difference. The cheaper total comes from foregoing the external hitter, not from assigning the same work to a cheaper imaginary roster.

Plan C adds only the $6-8 million reserve. It preserves flexibility and prospect capital, but exposes the team to a much larger volume of unproven or recently inconsistent pitching. It is a defensible spending choice only if the organization accepts that baseball consequence.

THREE ANNUAL SPENDING PLANS



S&S annual additions. Each includes a $6-8M depth reserve.

Proposed ceilings and reserve. No signing, health or performance guarantee.

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Allocate the lineup before buying it

The 6,200-plate-appearance model is a season-long allocation. It includes replacements and promotions that would occur at different times, not a proposal to carry every name on one active roster. Witt and Garcia receive the largest shares, Jensen and Caglianone retain major jobs, and Perez's role becomes smaller.

Hitter	PA	Condition
Bobby Witt Jr.	700	Health, performance and role gates
Maikel Garcia	650	Health, performance and role gates
Carter Jensen	550	Health, performance and role gates
Jac Caglianone	600	Health, performance and role gates
Vinnie Pasquantino	600	Health, performance and role gates
Salvador Perez	400	Health, performance and role gates
Michael Massey	450	Health, performance and role gates
Nick Loftin	400	Health, performance and role gates
Trent Grisham	500	Proposed acquisition
Isaac Collins	350	Health, performance and role gates
Kyle Isbel	200	Health, performance and role gates
John Rave	250	Health, performance and role gates
Carson Roccaforte	200	Promotion and roster selection required
Gavin Cross	100	Promotion and roster selection required

Hitter	PA	Condition
Tyler Tolbert	100	Health, performance and role gates
Matthew Lugo	150	Health, performance and role gates
TOTAL	6200	Season allocation, not simultaneous active roster

The fielding-start model covers all nine positions for 162 games. No hitter exceeds 162 total starts. This is a check against double-booking first base, designated hitter and the outfield, where several of the Royals' best offensive options overlap.

Pos.	162-start allocation	Condition
C	Jensen 110; Perez 52	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
1B	Pasquantino 125; Caglianone 25; Perez 12	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
2B	Massey 110; Loftin 42; Garcia 10	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
3B	Garcia 130; Loftin 22; Tolbert 10	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
SS	Witt 145; Loftin 17	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
LF	Collins 65; Rave 40; Cross 20; Roccaforte 20; M.Lugo 17	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
CF	Grisham 110; Isbel 42; Roccaforte 10	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
RF	Caglianone 100; Grisham 10; Rave 20; Roccaforte 10; M.Lugo 12; Tolbert 10	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts
DH	Pasquantino 25; Caglianone 30; Perez 40; Jensen 20; Witt 10; Garcia 10; Massey 10; Loftin 10; Grisham 5; Rave 2	Seasonal rotation; no player exceeds 162 total starts

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Allocate the innings and the failures

The principal pitching budget is 870 starter innings and 570 relief innings. It covers 162 starts and 1,440 total innings. Actual innings vary with walk-offs, shortened games and extra innings; this is a planning denominator used consistently across the alternatives.

Pitcher	GS / IP	Condition
Michael Wacha	30 / 175	Selection, health and performance review
Noah Cameron	30 / 165	Selection, health and performance review
Seth Lugo	28 / 150	Selection, health and performance review
Nick Martinez	30 / 165	Proposed acquisition
Tony Gonsolin	16 / 75	Clinical clearance required
Randy Dobnak	14 / 70	Selection, health and performance review
Lucas Braun	8 / 40	Selection, health and performance review
Steven Zobac	6 / 30	Selection, health and performance review
TOTAL	162 / 870	Ragans, Kolek, Avila and Bergert excluded from main workload

Lynch's 70 relief innings are an intentional choice. Giving him a large starter workload at the same time would double-count one of the more useful internal bullpen options. The relief allocation also keeps injured pitchers and the unresolved Cruz case out of the main total.

Pitcher	IP	Condition
Daniel Lynch IV	70	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Taylor Clarke	65	Proposed acquisition
Steven Okert	60	Proposed acquisition
Lucas Erceg	45	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Nate Pearson	45	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Jose Cuas	40	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Connor Thomas	50	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Nolan Hoffman	45	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Anthony Gose	30	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
James McArthur	25	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Beck Way	20	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Carlos Duran	20	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Spencer Bivens	20	Health, roster-selection and performance gate

Pitcher	IP	Condition
Mitch Spence	20	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
Steven Zobac	15	Health, roster-selection and performance gate
TOTAL	570	870 starter innings plus relief = 1,440

The replacement table makes the cost of each failed purchase visible. In Plan C, 165 starter innings and 125 relief innings move to named internal pitchers. That places additional pressure on Dobnak, Braun, Zobac and the command-sensitive bullpen. The totals balance; the quality risk rises.

Change from A	Removed workload	Named replacement
B: Mahle replaces Martinez	30 GS / 165 IP	Mahle 28/150; Dobnak +2/15
B/C: no Grisham	500 PA	Isbel +150, Roccaforte +200, Rave +100, Cross +50; CF110 to Isbel65/Rocc45; RF10 to Rave; DH5 to Cross
C: no Martinez	30 GS / 165 IP	Dobnak +10/55, Braun +10/55, Zobac +10/55
C: no Clarke or Okert	125 relief IP	Lynch +10, Erceg +15, Pearson +15, Cuas +15, Thomas +20, Hoffman +15, Gose +10, McArthur +10, Way +15
No Gonsolin	16 GS / 75 IP	Dobnak +4/20; Braun +6/30; Spence +6/25
Ragans cleared for return	Add 12 GS / 60 IP	Gonsolin -6/25; Dobnak -4/25; Braun -2/10; conditional return only
No Perez	400 PA	Jensen +100, Pasquantino +50, Caglianone +50, Tresh +200 after selection; C52 to Jensen20/Tresh32; 1B12 to Pasquantino; DH40 to Tresh20/Caglianone10/Jensen10
No acquisitions plus another starter loss	Rebuild branch	Do not stack replacements until every workload and role is checked

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Compare the repeated targets honestly

Martinez is a plausible fit for several clubs in this series seeking rotation volume. Kansas City's proposed price is the same two-year $26-30 million ceiling used for the comparable rotation job. Here he replaces 30 starts and 165 innings that otherwise fall to Dobnak, Braun and Zobac. No outgoing talent is assumed because the proposal is a free-agent purchase. [17]

Foster Griffin is a different candidate. His 172.2 innings and 3.60 ERA warrant consideration, but the 4.35 expected ERA makes a larger commitment less obviously attractive. A three-year $45-51 million ceiling would add $2 million annually and $19-21 million in total guarantee relative to Martinez's proposed deal. It does not buy a demonstrated improvement in every underlying measure.

Mahle offers another route at one additional million dollars annually, with 15 fewer planned innings. Clarke's proposed price matches the comparable Arizona alternative, while the Royals' larger need gives him a clearer 65-inning job. Okert receives the more expensive leverage assignment because the strikeout and walk evidence is stronger. Grichuk is a corner alternative, and the fully specified internal center-field route remains available.

These are competing team-specific scenarios for one market. Martinez cannot sign with every club that would benefit from him. If another club acquires him or the price exceeds the ceiling, Kansas City must choose the alternative or reallocate the innings. The report does not credit production to an unfilled budget line.

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How much improvement is required

Even preventing 60 runs with no offensive change leaves Kansas City with 690 scored and 750 allowed, a negative margin of 60. Adding 30 offensive runs and preventing 60 produces a margin of minus-30. The scale of the 2026 deficit matters when judging what one starter and two relievers can accomplish.

Illustrative change from 2026	RS / RA	Margin	162-game simple run-ratio wins
Unchanged runs	690 / 810	-120	68.1
Prevent 60; same offense	690 / 750	-60	74.3
Score 30 more; prevent 60	720 / 750	-30	77.7
Score 30 more; prevent 90	720 / 720	+0	81.0
Score 30 fewer; allow 30 more	660 / 840	-180	61.8

The simple squared-run-ratio model is 162 multiplied by runs scored squared, divided by the sum of runs scored squared and runs allowed squared. It is a sensitivity display, not a forecast or a claim that a purchased player creates a specified number of wins. Sequencing, health, defense, schedule and the distribution of playing time can change the actual record.

The strongest countercase to Plan A is its price. A team coming off 69 wins could retain flexibility, give Roccaforte a larger trial and spend primarily on pitching. Plan B does exactly that. The case for Plan A is that Witt's prime and the emergence of Jensen and Caglianone create a reason to improve the major-league roster now, provided the club can fund the full plan.

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Recommendation and sources

Start with the rotation purchase and the two bullpen jobs. Pursue Grisham only if his offensive value, current medical status and price justify the defensive tradeoff with Isbel. If that case does not clear, use the internal center-field competition and preserve the pitching investment. Do not finance an additional bat by assuming the injured starters will return on an exact date.

Kansas City's route forward is specific: protect the young lineup, reduce the burden on Wacha and Lugo, rebuild the leverage sequence, and keep the recovery cases outside the principal innings budget. Every purchase has a ceiling, every missing player has a replacement, and every alternative exposes the additional risk it transfers to the organization.

Definitions: MLB statistics are regular season unless identified otherwise. KC contributions are separated from full-season MLB player results. Innings use baseball notation, so .1 and .2 represent one and two outs. OAA measures modeled range outcomes; catching components and total catching value overlap and are not added twice. All proposed prices, workloads and run scenarios are editorial assumptions. The edition uses November 3 research and requires fresh roster, transaction, medical and market checks on the actual release date.

[1] MLB: Kansas City team and player regular-season statistics, 2024-26

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[2] MLB: dated Royals 40-man roster

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[3] MLB: Royals transaction history

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[4] MLB: player histories and current affiliations

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[5] MLB: individual regular-season statistics

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[6] Baseball Savant: expected statistics, 2024-26

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[7] MLB: player handedness splits, 2026

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[8] MLB: Estevez and Gonsolin option decisions, October 29

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[9] Baseball Savant: Outs Above Average, 2024-26

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[10] Baseball Savant: catcher framing, 2026

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[11] Baseball Savant: fielding run value, 2026

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[12] MLB: dated Royals medical updates

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[13] MLB: Bergert and Kudrna procedures, April 30

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[14] MLB: Omaha batting statistics, 2026

AAA club-specific season samples; checked November 3.

Open source

[15] FanGraphs RosterResource: Royals payroll detail

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[16] MLB Trade Rumors: 2027 arbitration estimates

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[17] MLB: 2027 options and opt-outs

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[18] MLBPA: free-agent register

Checked November 3, 2026. Statistical periods and dated transaction decisions are identified in the analysis.

Open source

[19] MLB: Omaha pitching statistics, 2026

AAA club-specific season samples; checked November 3.

Open source

[20] MLB: Northwest Arkansas batting statistics, 2026

AA club-specific samples; checked November 3.

Open source

[21] MLB: Northwest Arkansas pitching statistics, 2026

AA club-specific samples; checked November 3.

Open source

Research, roster and candidate checks were completed November 3, 2026. Individual source dates and statistical periods are preserved above.