

Headline: Pittsburgh Pirates ready to ride the ship into 2025

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Social: Staff writers Sean McQuillan and Alex Kiger preview the 2025 Pittsburgh Pirates roster in preparation for the upcoming season.

With the season upon us, all eyes are on 2025 and the young Bucs. 2024 saw moments of hope — headlined by the reigning National League Rookie of the Year and [MLB The Show 25](#) cover athlete Paul Skenes and [statcast record-breaker](#) Oneil Cruz.

While these two were in their own world, the rest of the Pirates were, well, playing mediocre baseball. But 2025 should look different. Fans will see a full season of Skenes, and expectations are high for guys like Nick Gonzales, Mitch Keller and Ke'Bryan Hayes to perform at a higher level. The team will look to leave the [second half of 2024](#) behind and focus on making Pirates baseball fun again.

This season specifically, Cruz is making the move to center field, and although moving back on the diamond may seem like a downgrade, he will look to take a step forward into the star that the Pirates have longed for in the past four seasons. He has a career 108 wRC+ and 5.3 fWAR in 244 games, so he has not exactly played badly. Even though Cruz is only 26, and every projection method predicts that he will at least play decently well again, a surprising run by the Pirates this season would likely require him to play at All-Star or MVP level.

Since the start of last season, Skenes has become a star. Whether it was headlining All-Star weekend as the NL's starting pitcher or placing as a [finalist for the NL Cy Young Award](#), the 2023 first-overall pick was as advertised. He led all NL pitchers with at least 130 innings pitched in ERA (1.96), strikeout rate (33.1% of batters and 11.5 strikeouts per nine innings), WHIP (0.95) and strikeout rate minus walk rate (26.8%) during his first full season of pro baseball. He also held hitters to a batting average of .198. In addition, Skenes' 170 strikeouts broke an 87-year-old Pirates rookie record held by Cy Blanton. In the Live Ball Era — since 1920 — Skenes' 1.96 ERA was the lowest of any rookie pitcher's with at least 20 starts.

Expectations for next season, you may ask? Well, I have two words for you — Cy Young.

The goal is an 80-win season, titled "Mission Impossible: Paul Skenes Edition." If this season is a bust once again, Skenes' contract talks will float around, and the Pirates may have trouble contending with the top bankrolls in the MLB — say the Dodgers and Yankees. Why would he want to return to an 80-win team for cheap when he can go to the Bronx or Queens and compete for a World Series Championship?

Think about it, because it's not an opinion. Remember the [worst trade in MLB history](#) a few years ago? The Pirates traded their entire young core away for a former All-Star pitcher, Chris Archer. The Pirates had three young rising stars in Tyler Glasnow, the current No. 2 pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers; Austin Meadows, an All-Star the year after; and Shane Bieber, a young rising flamethrower.

Archer was released the year after. So, if the Pirates season is a copy and paste from recent times, oh boy — buckle in and get ready to welcome in a boatload of prospects for Skenes.

As with any season that is 162 games long, injuries, promotions and demotions will occur.

For the Pirates, there are several key names that will likely wear a Pirates uniform this season, even though they didn't make the Opening Day roster.

Chief among them is Bubba Chandler, the biggest story heading into Indianapolis, the home of Pittsburgh's Triple-A affiliate. While not receiving quite as much fanfare as Paul Skenes, Chandler is the Pirates' [best prospect](#) and is widely regarded as one of the [best prospects in all of baseball](#).

The righty was promoted to Triple-A midway through last year, posting a 4-0 record and 1.83 ERA in 39.1 innings in Indianapolis. Chandler didn't make the team out of spring training, but it's only a matter of time before he arrives in Pittsburgh.

The same goes for Thomas Harrington. After Jared Jones' concerning [elbow news](#), Harrington was speculated to get the fifth spot in the rotation to open the year. The righty put up a 3.33 ERA in 46 innings in Triple-A last year. However, manager Derek Shelton [confirmed](#) on Monday that the promising Harrington would start in Triple-A.

Indianapolis' bullpen will feature Kyle Nicolas, who was a surprise cut from the major league roster before spring training concluded on Monday. The righty posted a 3.95 ERA and 55 strikeouts in 54.2 innings for the Pirates last year. Still having [minor league options](#), Nicolas was the odd man out in a crowded Pittsburgh bullpen.

If there is a bright side for Nicolas, Indianapolis is likely a place where he can get reps as the closer, something he has the potential and skill set to do at the major league level down the road.

Nick Yorke will head up the position players group at Victory Field this year. Yorke slashed an incredible .355/.431/.507 in Triple-A after a deadline trade from Boston. Almost 23 years old, Yorke played 11 major league games down the stretch last season. He is one of the organization's few exciting minor league bats, and his versatility on the field should help him get another major league chance sooner rather than later.

Another bat to keep an eye on is Henry Davis. The Louisville product has not yet stuck at the major league level, slashing .191/.283/.307 in 99 career games and narrowly losing out to Endy Rodriguez for the backup catcher's job in Pittsburgh.

Publicly, the organization has [shown faith](#) in their first overall pick from four years ago, but 2025 is really a [make-or-break year](#) for the 25-year-old Davis. He's likely on a short list of call-ups as the Pirates try to get that [Triple-A success](#) to translate to the major leagues.

Other position players like Billy Cook and Matt Gorski, as well as arms like Mike Burrows and Braxton Ashcraft who did not snag jobs in spring could also make appearances if the chips fall the right way for them.

Last season, nine total players who were on [Indianapolis' Opening Day roster](#) eventually played games for the Pirates, so there are definitely chances coming later in the year.