



General manager Brian Cashman and the Yankees lost out on re-signing star outfielder Juan Soto, who signed a 15-year, \$765 million deal with the Mets.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES

Yankees

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are interested.

Walker is coming off three straight Gold Glove Award seasons, posing an .813 OPS over that span with the Arizona Diamondbacks, averaging 32 homers and 94 RBI per year.

You could argue he's a better overall right-handed fit at first base than Pete Alonso, with plus defense and a better price point, at a position of need.

Trade for Cody Bellinger

This could be a one-year proposition, or not.

Bellinger holds a \$25 million player option for 2026, which allows him to take a \$5 million buyout (on top of his \$27.5 million contract for 2025) and become a free agent.

Since the Chicago Cubs are potentially on the hook for all \$52.5 million, they're open to trade discussions for Bellinger, 29, coming off a subpar season.

With Soto gone, Aaron Judge is likely moving back to right field, making Bellinger a fit in left or center field (probably left field, with Jasson Dominguez at his natural center field spot).

Bellinger might be a long way from his 2019 MVP season with the Dodgers, but his swing would play up at Yankee Stadium.

Examine third base options

Alex Bregman is the clear cut best

free agent option here, but it's complicated.

There's reportedly a lot of mutual interest in a Houston Astros reunion, and, anyway, the Yankees ought to be moving away from long, multi-year deals for players over age 30 showing some decline.

That said, Bregman would instantly improve the Yanks.

And that would require certain Yankees executives to put aside the Astros' electronic sign stealing scandal stuff, which - in a desperate time of need - shouldn't be a difficult obstacle.

Jazz Chisholm Jr. is better served moving back to second base, and the Yanks missed out on a potential third base option when Willy Adames agreed to a reported \$182 million, seven-year deal with the San Francisco Giants.

Explore wild card options

At this point, the Yankees should be open to anything that could deepen their lineup, or their pitching staff.

Inquire on free agent slugger Teoscar Hernandez, a former AL East foe who had his World Series moments against the Yanks.

Would you move Jasson Dominguez, or a couple of high-end prospects, in a trade for lefty starter Garrett Crochet?

While engaging the Chicago White Sox on that front, find out what the cost is on center fielder Luis Robert Jr.

Meanwhile, Yankees starters Nestor Cortes and Marcus Stroman should be very available in trade discussions while seeking upgrades, including free agents Walker Buehler and Sean Manaea.

Football

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2) Texas

The SEC didn't get four teams in the field, but the Longhorns only lost to one team this year (Georgia), and they've got a very reasonable path to the semifinals as the highest-ranked at-large team. Texas has a home game against the lowest-ranked team in the field (Clemson) in the CFP first round, and Big 12 champion Arizona State would await at the Peach Bowl in the CFP quarterfinals. Undefeated Oregon, Ohio State or Tennessee would be the Longhorns' opponent in the CFP semifinals.

3) Boise State

The Mountain West champions get a first-round bye and wound up as the third-highest ranked conference champion in the field ahead of both Arizona State and Clemson. That distinction gives Boise State a CFP quarterfinal game against either Penn State or SMU at the Fiesta Bowl. Georgia, Notre Dame or Indiana would loom in the CFP semifinals.

4) Penn State

The Big Ten runner-up looks to have an easier path to the championship than the Big Ten champ. Penn State has a home game against the final at-large team in the field (SMU) in the first round and Group of Five conference representative Boise State awaits the winner at the Fiesta Bowl in the CFP quarterfinals.

5) Oregon

The only undefeated team got a first-round bye, but the seeding imbalance created by requiring the top four conference champions to be the top four seeds appears to have affected the Ducks more than others. Oregon will play Ohio State or Tennessee in the Rose Bowl and then would have Arizona State, Texas or Clemson awaiting in the semifinals.

6) Arizona State

The Sun Devils had an argument to be the No. 3 seed, which would have presented a more favorable route through the bracket. Arizona State has a first-round bye but must travel across the country to play either Texas or Clemson in the quarterfinals.

Hardest path to national championship

1) Indiana

The Hoosiers would address any lingering concerns about their strength of schedule if they make it to the CFP national championship game. They've got arguably the toughest road to the title. Indiana would have to win at Notre Dame, beat Georgia in the Sugar Bowl, and then defeat Boise State, Penn State or SMU in the CFP semifinals.

2) Tennessee

The Vols just missed out on hosting a first-round home game and now must win at Ohio State and beat Oregon at the Rose Bowl just to qualify for the CFP semifinals.

3) Clemson

The Tigers were the last team to make the field as the No. 12 seed, and it would be quite the feat for them to make the national championship game. Clemson has a road game at Texas in the first round just to reach the CFP quarterfinals against Arizona State, and top-seeded Oregon would potentially be awaiting in the CFP semifinals.

4) SMU

The biggest debate in this 12-team bracket revolved around SMU's inclusion over Alabama, but the Mustangs' place in the bracket leaves some opportunity to make a run. SMU will have to beat Penn State on the road in the first round, and Boise State would be its quarterfinal opponent.

5) Ohio State

The Buckeyes are still licking their wounds after losing to Michigan to close the season, but they still have a chance to win a national championship with a first-round home game against Tennessee. The top-seeded Ducks looms as a potential quarterfinal foe.

6) Notre Dame

The Fighting Irish wound up behind Texas and Penn State but ahead of Ohio State in the CFP seeding, and its path is commensurate with that. Notre Dame hosts Indiana in an in-state rivalry game in the CFP first round, and the winner gets Georgia in the quarterfinals.

NFL

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Rams convert nearly three-quarters (11-of-15; 73%) of their third downs. L.A.'s defense opted not to spy Josh Allen, allowing him to run free for 82 yards. Allen also threw for 342 and three scores. The difference is that the Rams offer more balance, whereas the Bills often need Allen to take on an unsustainable amount of responsibility. In any case, the Rams' season may just come down to their finale against the current NFC West-leading Seattle Seahawks.

Niners dominate in much-needed win, but it comes at a cost, again

It feels like the 49ers cannot catch a break with their injuries. San Francisco snapped a three-game losing streak and throttled the Chicago Bears, racing out to a 24-point lead in a 38-13 win. This was a game without running backs Christian McCaffrey and Jordan Mason, though Isaac Guerendo flashed serious potential.

Guerendo had 17 touches for 128 yards from scrimmage and two touchdowns against Chicago before he was forced to exit. Coach Kyle Shanahan said after the game the belief was that it was a foot sprain. San Francisco (6-7) is in the 11th seed in the NFC and needs a ton of help to get into the playoffs. Edge rusher Nick Bosa and left tackle Trent Williams remained out. The Niners, frankly, will need some good luck down the stretch - and they must win the rest of the way.

The Dolphins save their season, but serious flaws need fixing

Miami, with its season on the brink, battled back late to force the New York Jets into overtime, where it dominated, scoring a first-drive touchdown to prevail 32-26. The Dolphins, however, have serious flaws that jeopardize their push down the stretch.

The rushing game has been anemic; over the last three games, it has gained just 49.3 yards per contest. Against the Jets, De'Von Achane ran 14 times for only 24 yards. The next closest rusher was rookie Jaylen Wright (two carries, 7



Rams wide receiver Puka Nacua celebrates after a touchdown against the Bills at SoFi Stadium on Sunday in Inglewood, Calif. KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

yards). The short-yardage offense, overall, has been wholly ineffective. And the defense has been gashed over the last month. The Dolphins (6-7) remain the No. 9 seed in the AFC, two games back of the seventh-seeded Broncos. But complicating matters for Miami is its Week 7 loss against the Colts (6-7), who would hold the tiebreaker. There is simply no margin for error.

The Bucs are riding their new identity to top of NFC South

Tampa Bay (7-6) has taken over first place in the NFC South on its three-game winning streak, and it's the rushing offense that's controlling games. Granted, the teams the Bucs have beaten during this stretch - the Raiders, Panthers and Giants - are three of the worst teams in the NFL at a combined 7-32 (.179).

But Tampa Bay has outrushed each of those teams by an average of 100 yards per game.

That has allowed the Bucs to control the clock, set up favorable distances on third downs and extend drives; Tampa

Bay entered the day ranked second in third-down efficiency. The Bucs have signature wins this year against the Lions - being the lone team to beat Detroit this season - and Eagles, but another test looms next week against the Chargers.

LOSERS Fringe teams and pretenders in the AFC wild-card race

With the Chargers' loss against the Chiefs last Sunday night, it's very crowded at the bottom of the playoff picture in the AFC. Four teams - including the AFC South-leading Texans - are tied at 8-5.

That puts the three teams outside of the field but currently alive for playoff contention, the Colts (6-7), Dolphins (6-7) and Bengals (4-8), in extremely tough spots.

It also means teams like the Ravens (8-5), who have an abundance of talent but massive holes, and the Broncos (8-5), who still have the Chiefs (12-1) and Chargers (8-5) on their remaining schedule, cannot afford to stumble in

the final month of the season. Even the Steelers (10-3), who are in a tough division but have the Chiefs, Eagles (11-2) and Ravens left on their schedule, should be cautious.

The real winners here are fans, who will certainly enjoy what should be a wild ride to decide the wild card.

Falcons' November nightmare continues into December

It's time to sound the alarms in Atlanta: the Falcons (6-7), losers of four consecutive, are imploding. A month ago, after their Week 9 victory over the Cowboys, the Falcons were 6-3 and sitting in the third seed in the NFC, with a two-game lead in the NFC South.

Now, Atlanta has fallen out of the playoff picture altogether (as the current No. 9 seed), has given up the lead in the division and quarterback Kirk Cousins is spiraling.

During Atlanta's four-game losing skid, Cousins has a touchdown-to-interception ratio of 0:8. Atlanta is also 4-of-13 (30.8%) in red zone conversions over the last four games. The defense, despite generating nine sacks over the last two weeks, continues to blow coverages in the secondary, yielding huge plays.

This is not winning football.

Cardinals lose season series against Seahawks, now in significant hole

In the span of three weeks, the Cardinals (6-7) lost twice to the Seahawks, putting their path to the playoffs in precarious position.

Arizona had been in first place ahead of its Week 12 showdown against Seattle. Now, the Cardinals - with the Rams' victory over the Bills - find themselves in third place in the NFC West, two games back of the division-leading Seahawks.

Quarterback Kyler Murray combined to rush for just 25 yards across both meetings against Seattle. In both matchups against the Seahawks, Arizona combined to go 7-of-24 (29.2%) on third downs and one-of-five (20%) in the red zone. The next two games of the schedule are favorable, but the Cardinals close with the Rams (7-6) and 49ers (6-7).