

# ***The Boston Red Sox Friday, March 17, 2017***

## **\* *The Boston Globe***

### **Rick Porcello won't treat Opening Day start any differently**

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — There seems to be little danger of Rick Porcello pitching poorly on Opening Day because he's too excited.

The righthander was decidedly unemotional when discussing his selection to face against the Pittsburgh Pirates at Fenway Park on April 3.

"I'm treating it like I'm going to treat my other, hopefully, 33 or 34 starts," Porcello said. "It's Game 1, got Pittsburgh and ready to go. It's not anything different. I don't think it would make any sense to put more emphasis on your first start of the year as opposed to your 10th or 15th, I'm going to prepare like I always do, take everything in stride and do what I know how to do."

Porcello has known for several weeks that he would start the first game. Farrell made it official on Wednesday morning but Porcello was not made available to reporters until late Thursday afternoon.

"Obviously it's an honor to have the ball on Opening Day. I'm looking forward to it," he said.

Porcello has started three postseason games in his career and plans to treat the opener the same way in terms of handling the pregame hoopla and ceremony.

"I don't think it will be out of the ordinary to prepare for," Porcello said.

With David Price unavailable because of injury, Farrell selected Porcello ahead of Chris Sale, who will start Game 2. It was easy choice for Farrell given that Porcello won the American League Cy Young Award last season.

"It's definitely an honor, especially with the talented rotation we have," Porcello said.

Sale proud but peeved

Sale threw 74 pitches Thursday against the Pirates, added to his arm strength, and felt fine when he was finished. For an established starting pitcher, that's a successful spring training game.

But the lefthander was a bit annoyed at allowing three runs on seven hits in four innings against the Pirates. Little of the contact Pittsburgh made was impressive but it pecked away effectively.

"They all count the same, man," Sale said. "There's going to be days when I throw a fastball right down the middle and they pop it up. . . . I felt great today, I just didn't feel sharp."

Sale was most peeved about a play in the fourth inning when he failed to cover first base and Gift Ngoepe reached on a single. When Sale got the ball back, he knocked himself in the head with it. Moe Howard would have been proud.

"That's just stupid. That's what we're here for," Sale said. "We've done that 400,000 times since we've been here, covering first base. Ball hit over there, cover first base. That's just a stupid mistake on my part."

Trying to fit in

With two weeks left before the team breaks camp, there is competition for several spots.

Farrell is not yet prepared to name Pablo Sandoval his third baseman, so ostensibly that position is up for grabs. But the primary battles are for the last spot on the bench and the second lefthander in the bullpen.

Marco Hernandez, Deven Marrero, and Josh Rutledge are competing for the bench spot. Because Rutledge bats righthanded, he has an advantage there. The Sox also would have to offer the Rule 5 pick back to the Colorado Rockies if he does not make the team.

In the bullpen, lefthanders Fernando Abad, Edgar Olmos, and Robby Scott are vying for one spot.

Olmos, a 26-year-old minor league free agent with 11 games of major league experience, has been a surprise. He has struck out 11 in  $7\frac{2}{3}$  innings and shown a sharp curveball.

“He has impressed so far,” Farrell said.

Scott also has pitched well, working six scoreless innings despite putting 11 men on base. Abad is with the Dominican Republic for the World Baseball Classic.

Olmos pulled his right hamstring on Monday but should be ready for a game within a few days.

**Thornburg on deadline**

Righthanded reliever Tyler Thornburg, who has not appeared in a game since March 1 because of shoulder weakness, should be back soon. But it’s uncertain whether he has enough time to be ready for the season. Thornburg had a bullpen session on Wednesday and is scheduled for another on Saturday. From there, Thornburg could get into a game. Farrell said Thornburg’s status for Opening Day is contingent on how soon he gets into a game . . . Porcello and projected No. 4 starter Steven Wright are both scheduled to pitch against Minnesota on Saturday. They will be split up over the next two weeks. When the Sox break camp on March 30, Wright and Drew Pomeranz will stay behind and pitch in intrasquad games before rejoining the team in Boston for Opening Day.

### **Red Sox rally to beat Pirates**

Peter Abraham

SCORE: Red Sox 4, Pirates 3

RECORD: 9-10-2

**BREAKDOWN:** The Sox, trailing 3-1 after five innings, got a run in the sixth when Brock Holt tripled and scored on a wild pitch. Minor league call-up Eddie Rosario tripled with two outs in the eighth inning and scored on an infield single by spring training terror Sam Travis. Travis then scored on an infield single by Tzu-Wei Lin, another minor leaguer.

**THUMBS UP:** Craig Kimbrel worked a perfect fifth inning, striking out two . . . Heath Hembree continued what has been an impressive camp with another scoreless inning. His line so far: 5 IP, 3 H, 0 R, 1 BB, 6 K . . . Christian Vazquez was 2 for 3.

**THUMBS DOWN:** Chris Sale had a weird game. He only gave up a few hard-hit balls but was touched for three runs on seven hits over four innings and 74 pitches.

**MEDICAL REPORT:** David Price played catch from 60 feet, the latest step in his comeback from an elbow injury. He is working up to playing long toss.

**AROUND THE BASES:** As he did last season, motivational speaker David Rutherford addressed the team. Rutherford, who preaches teamwork, is a former Navy Seal . . . Hanley Ramirez hit a sizzling line drive to

center field in the fourth inning that was tracked down at the wall by Eury Perez. As he jogged back to the dugout, Pirates pitcher Ivan Nova gave Ramirez a pat on the back in sympathy . . . In Sarasota, Orioles manager Buck Showalter indicated to reporters that Rule 5 pick Aneury Tavarez, an outfielder from the Red Sox, would have a hard time making the team.

**NEXT GAME:** The Red Sox host an Astros split squad at 1:05 p.m. on Friday. Eduardo Rodriguez will face Brad Peacock. WEEI-AM (850) will have the game.

### **Deven Marrero showing improved approach at plate**

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Deven Marrero was a three-year starter at Arizona State before the Red Sox selected him with the 24th overall selection of the 2012 draft.

He made his major league debut in 2015 and has since appeared in 38 games. The 26-year-old shortstop already has accomplished more in baseball than most players can imagine.

But if that's all there is, Marrero will be disappointed.

"I feel like I can be an everyday player," Marrero said prior to the Sox playing the Pittsburgh Pirates on Thursday night. "I know my time is going to come and I have to be prepared for that."

Marrero is a gifted defensive player, one of the best in the organization. But his path in Boston is blocked by Xander Bogaerts, a shortstop two years younger who already has helped win a World Series. The best Marrero can hope for with the Sox is a role off the bench.

His chance for more than that rests on being traded to another team. In the meantime, Marrero does his best to stay positive.

"I want to be part of this team right now because everybody can sense how special this team could be," Marrero said. "Whatever it takes to be part of a special team, that is what I want to do."

"The personal stuff, that comes second. It will happen when it happens. I want to live in the now and help this team."

Bogaerts, he said, has no greater fan.

"I love watching him play. He gets better every year he has been in the big leagues," Marrero said. "It's not frustrating for me. I admire what kind of player and person he is. I hope I can be that kind of player someday."

Defensively, Marrero is major league ready. Sox manager John Farrell said Marrero's instincts in the field are as good as any player in camp.

Offensively, he leaves you wondering what the Red Sox were thinking when they took him in the first round.

Marrero has one extra-base hit in 65 major league at-bats and has struck out 24 times. That's a small sample size spread out over two seasons and easily can be dismissed.

What's troubling is that Marrero has hit .246 in five minor league seasons with a modest .645 OPS. In 248 games and nearly 1,000 at-bats for Triple A Pawtucket, Marrero has a .292 slugging percentage. He hit .198 in 96 games for the PawSox last season.

“[Defensively] he has not disappointed. That’s been there. And yet there has to be enough offense to manipulate the bottom of the order,” Farrell said. “Whether that’s moving runners or that type of thing.”

Marrero didn’t swing a bat for two months after last season, the break serving as a reset. When he started up again, Marrero turned to his cousins, Chris and Christian, for advice.

Chris Marrero is a first baseman with 11 seasons of professional experience. He is now with the San Francisco Giants after playing for Pawtucket last season. Christian Marrero is an outfielder with 12 years of experience in the minors. He is with the Philadelphia Phillies.

“I looked at videos with them and they helped me fix what was wrong,” Deven Marrero said. “My bat path was all messed up.”

Marrero’s swing was too severe, a V-shaped chop that left him with only a small chance of making good contact. His timing had to be perfect. His cousins worked with him on keeping the bat longer in the strike zone.

“I had to give myself a chance,” Marrero said. “Chris is a baseball nut and he’s always looking at swings. We did a lot of work.”

In 15 spring training games, Marrero has hit .313 with a much healthier .759 OPS. He has three doubles.

“I feel pretty good, like I’m headed in the right direction. It’s a work in progress but I feel good about what I’m doing,” Marrero said. “My confidence right now is as good as it has been in a while.”

Farrell said Thursday that Marrero is competing with Marco Hernandez and Josh Rutledge for a spot on the bench. Considering his struggles in 2016, that’s progress.

“The thing that we’ve seen is when he’s been in this environment, he’s maintained a consistent approach at the plate,” Farrell said. “He’s been one over the course of his minor league career where he’s tinkered a lot. By staying with one consistent setup at the plate, it’s put him at a better position to hit.”

Marrero hopes it’s the start of something.

“I need to make the most of any chance,” he said. “I know I’m a good player. Like I tell people, my time will come and I want to make sure I’m ready.”

### **Rick Porcello’s Opening Day nod suggests he’s moved out of the shadows**

Alex Speier

A smile cracked across David Price’s face when he heard that John Farrell had arrived at an unavoidable conclusion, making the formal announcement that Rick Porcello — coming off an American League Cy Young Award in 2016 — would start for the Red Sox on Opening Day.

“Awesome,” beamed Price.

Price could appreciate the distance implied by such an assignment. The Red Sox have as decorated a front three as there is in baseball, with two Cy Young winners, Porcello and Price himself, along with a pitcher who has started All-Star games and received considerable Cy Young consideration in his own right, Chris Sale.

Porcello and Price have been part of such staffs before. In the middle of 2014, Detroit traded for Price, thus putting three Cy Young winners — Price, Justin Verlander, Max Scherzer — and another pitcher who’d finished fourth in AL Cy Young balloting in the previous season, Anibal Sanchez.

At the time, Porcello was amidst something of a coming-of-age in Detroit, with the 2014 season representing his best as a big leaguer to that point — 3.43 ERA, career-high 204 2/3 innings. In that group, at that time, it was easy for Porcello's achievements to be overlooked, at least by those outside of his teammates.

"He's been on some pretty good staffs: Anibal Sanchez led the league in ERA; Verlander winning MVP and the Cy Young; Scherzer winning the Cy Young. He was on some good staffs," said Price. "I don't think he was overlooked by his opponents or anybody in baseball. Maybe it was more so by the media just because he wasn't Justin Verlander or Max Scherzer. But he's been doing this for a long time now."

Still, the 2016 breakthrough with the Red Sox and the hardware that came along with it elevated Porcello's stature in the game. Even on a staff of other elite pitchers, the Opening Day assignment suggests that Porcello has moved out of the shadows. Price believes he is poised to remain comfortable in his exposure to the spotlight.

"He's at a very good age," Price said of his 28-year-old teammate. "When you're at the age he's at, he's done this for as long as he's done it, that's when you start to figure out a lot about yourself and the type of pitcher you want to be and that you're going to be."

## **\* *The Boston Herald***

### **Red Sox set to give Sandy Leon chance to repeat 2016 success**

Evan Drellich

FORT MYERS — Sandy Leon needs a substantial chance to show he can repeat. The Red Sox seem set on giving it to him.

Leon was always known as a defense-first catcher prior to last year's breakout.

But as Leon tells it, he had a different reputation when the Washington Nationals scooped him up as a teenager, in January 2007.

"When I signed, I signed because I could hit," Leon said.

He was playing third base and shortstop back then. By the time Leon debuted in the Gulf Coast League in June 2007, he was a backstop.

"When I started catching ... I was more focused on that more than my defense, just trying to learn how to catch, how to call the games," Leon said. "I probably forgot how to hit."

He remembered last year. Leon batted .310 in 283 plate appearances during a surprise season.

Now, it's the Red Sox who must make sure they don't forget.

A 2-for-14 performance in Grapefruit League play shouldn't outweigh the potential Leon showed last season.

"Catching is the hardest thing to get a read on as far as their timing," manager John Farrell said. "We've been in a situation where we have rotated three guys in a starting role, so guys have been getting two at-bats every third day. With games having started (Wednesday) on the minor league side, we'll start getting catchers over there to get three or four at-bats on days they aren't catching here."

“The offensive evaluation can be a little unfair. Blake (Swihart) has swung the bat very well, no denying it. So if you start to look at batting average as the comparable, that’s something, personally, I don’t think you can do at that position.”

A month or two months of at least semi-regular playing time split between Christian Vazquez — whose arm looks like it’s all the way back after Tommy John surgery in 2015 — should be afforded Leon before anything more drastic.

That’s if Leon in fact reverts back to his prior light-hitting form.

Now 28 years old, Leon hit .187 in 235 previous plate appearances in the majors.

“Some of the book that was thrown at him last year late in the season probably sticks out in people’s minds about how to attack him,” Farrell said. “There’s going to be a counter-adjustment that’s going to be required. The biggest thing, as long as he stays with a disciplined strike zone, he’ll have a much better chance than if he expands or is below on soft stuff.

“Time is going to tell if (2016 was an) outlier or if that’s more the trend of a guy in his later-20s. . . . I guess that’s a long-winded answer to, ‘It’s hard to project.’”

It’s clear the Sox aren’t going to be swayed by anything this spring.

“There’s so much more to the position,” Farrell said. “There’s so much more to the organization depth needs. So it would be extremely short-sighted to say we are going to declare who is the catching tandem based on (spring) batting average.”

Farrell moved away from Swihart almost immediately last year, and that’s because Swihart wasn’t showing enough as a receiver. He’s the only one of the three catchers with options remaining, and time spent at Triple A will be valuable.

Leon didn’t play winter ball this year to better handle the load of a full season. He went 4-for-44 (.091) to end the regular season, after finishing play on Sept. 12 batting a whopping .356.

“I feel like it was really long,” Leon said of his downtime, which he split between the United States, Venezuela and his wife’s home country, Colombia.

He feels like he can repeat at the plate, too.

“I think when you play every day, you get a chance, I think it’s going to help,” Leon said.

### **Fired-up Chris Sale socks self after fielding gaffe**

Evan Drellich

FORT MYERS — Chris Sale had the strongest reaction last night not to his pitching, but his fielding.

Sale failed to cover first base in the fourth inning, his last in a 4-3 Red Sox win over the Pirates at JetBlue Park.

“That’s stupid,” said Sale, who punched himself on the head with the ball afterward. “That’s what we’re here for. We’ve done that 400,000 times since we’ve been here, covering first base. A ball hit over there, cover first base. That’s just a stupid mistake on my part. I’ve got to be better than that, even here. There’s no excuse for that, at all.”

The lefty worked up to 74 pitches, 48 strikes, while allowing seven hits and three runs in four innings.

“I didn’t feel sharp today. I felt great, just not sharp,” Sale said. “I wasn’t able to locate when I needed to.”

Sale struck out three and walked none, and still looks like a force.

No knee-d to worry

Dustin Pedroia is small to begin with. After offseason knee surgery, he might be a little smaller, but that doesn’t seem to be a bother.

“Have seen range to be fine,” manager John Farrell said. “As a matter of fact, there was a couple of balls that I thought off the bat he was going to end up back-handing, and yet he squares them up.

“It’s a testament to his agility work. He went from a power offseason, a power workout offseason, to more agility and quickness. And you look at his body type, even for him, he’s a little bit more lean. So the only thing we look at in spring training is what’s the gradual and best buildup for him. And I think to date, it’s been manageable and he’s responded favorably to it.”

Competitions in name only

The competitions don’t really feel like competitions.

Start with lefty relief.

Even with Fernando Abad away from the Red Sox, pitching with the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic. Even with his bad performance since joining the Sox at last year’s trade deadline, it’d be bold to simply dump him.

If a pitcher they can retain in the minors, like Robby Scott, makes the Sox a better team, there’s an argument to be made to cut Abad. Typically, organizational depth wins out in these situations, though, and Abad has a pre-Boston track record of success.

Farrell suggested the situation was an open question, but that can be viewed with a bit of skepticism.

“The same situations exist — left-handed relief, the bench and third-base situation, who’s going to be in that tandem behind the plate,” Farrell said when asked what competitions remain. “We’re starting to get a little more information on the rotation, just by virtue of the physical ailment to David Price, to who’s pitching currently.”

Third base isn’t too hard to predict either.

Josh Rutledge bats right-handed. Pablo Sandoval technically does, but he might not do it well.

Sandoval, in a tiny way, is the gate-keeper to the final spot on the roster. If the Sox feel they need a platoon, Rutledge — who’s also a Rule 5 draft pick, meaning the Sox must keep him on the 25-man roster or risk losing him — is the guy. But Marco Hernandez has had a very impressive spring. He bats left-handed, which doesn’t complement Sandoval, and has minor league options. He looks liable to wait in the wings, just as Scott does.

Opening in stride

Rick Porcello knew he was the Opening Day starter when he got to spring training, but the public found out only on Wednesday. He didn’t have anything interesting to say about the selection, however, calling it an honor.

“I’m treating it like I’m going to treat my other, hopefully, 33, 34, whatever it is starts,” Porcello said. . . .

Price (left elbow) is still throwing, but his situation hasn't changed much.

"He will throw out to 60 feet today with a throwing partner," Farrell said.

"The number of throws is going to be based upon his feel and how he progresses through it, but the distance will remain limited to 60 feet."

Thornburg looking better

Tyler Thornburg's bullpen on Wednesday after a shoulder strengthening effort went fine, Farrell said. Thornburg is to throw another tomorrow, and the Sox are to decide what's next from there — likely a crucial moment in determining whether he's ready for Opening Day.

## **\* *The Providence Journal***

### **Big data is making its way into Red Sox player development**

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Little by little, big data is coming to baseball at the minor-league level.

As much as ever, however, the extent to which minor-league players develop will depend on the way coaches interpret and impart the information at their fingertips.

"You have more information coming in, both from the data perspective and from a scouting and evaluation standpoint," Red Sox farm director Ben Crockett said. "It gives you a better starting point with how to help players improve."

"You'd better know what to look for," Triple-A Pawtucket manager Kevin Boles said. "It's one thing to have the information. If you don't know what you're looking at or what to key on -- and how to match it with the individual -- it doesn't matter."

Player development takes on increased importance at a time when the Red Sox have decimated their farm system with trades for Chris Sale, Craig Kimbrel and other complementary parts. They've dealt away many of the young players who might have sailed through the minor leagues on talent alone. The quest of Crockett and his minor-league coaches now is to cultivate what is left, to develop youngsters who don't show up on prospect lists into big-league regulars.

To hit or miss with a prospect, after all, is to swing the balance sheet by enormous sums of money.

Had Will Middlebrooks or Garin Cecchini panned out at third base, for example, the Red Sox might never have given Pablo Sandoval \$95 million. Had Henry Owens or Anthony Ranaudo panned out as starting pitchers, the Red Sox might not have given David Price \$217 million or traded Anderson Espinoza for Drew Pomeranz. Had Jackie Bradley Jr. established himself a year or two earlier than he did, the \$72.5 million Rusney Castillo disaster might have been avoided.

On the flip side, it was the development of youngsters Travis Shaw and Mauricio Dubon from lightly regarded prospects into legitimate assets that allowed the Red Sox to swing a trade for Tyler Thornburg rather than paying market value for a free-agent reliever.

The development of Rafael Devers or Jason Groome, two of the best prospects left in the Boston system, could have the same cost or savings. So too could the emergence of a young player who might be considered a more fringy talent.

Like the other 29 teams, the Red Sox now are working to determine how best to use the reservoir of data now at their disposal.

Pitch-tracking technology has been part of minor-league evaluation for years. His spin rate is what separated soft-tossing lefty Robby Scott from his peers, for example. Analysts at the recent Sloan Sports Analytics Conference in Boston forecast that it won't be long until Statcast-type systems show up in minor-league stadiums as well. Only cost stands in the way.

"It may not be next year or in five years, but eventually we'll see player-tracking technology become affordable enough where it's down in the minors," said Harry Pavlidis, the founder of Pitch Info. "Then you start getting into the situation where it's not longer just for the major-league coaching staff, it's for lower-level player development and you're implementing the data at the Double-A level to help pitchers and hitters change and adapt."

Scott represents a triumph of modern evaluation, a pitcher signed from the independent North American League whose upper-80s fastball seems to play at the big-league level. The development of a prospect like Scott allows the Red Sox to avoid spending \$19 million on a pedestrian lefty reliever to do the same job, as the Colorado Rockies did with Mike Dunn.

But while Crockett and Boles might discuss spin rate about pitchers -- and soon might discuss launch angle for hitters -- it's still rare that they discuss such concepts with players. The youth of the players with whom they're working leads minor-league coaches to simplify their terminology as much as they can. Even minor-league coaches don't actually see Pitch F/x data all that much.

"I could say 'launch angle' to one player, and they'd be just fine with it," Boles said. "Then you say 'launch angle' to another player, and they're screwing themselves into the ground with a max-effort swing."

What minor-league coaches want to do is utilize the information available to help players optimize strengths and address weaknesses.

That starts with video study, an endeavor that has become increasingly sophisticated over time. Coaches can utilize video both to spot mechanical flaws and to ensure fixes aren't lost to the adrenaline of games. A secondary goal at the minor-league level is to ensure players are ready to digest the endless video that will be available to them once they get to the major-league level.

As time passes and information becomes more accessible, after all, the ability of players to absorb the information has to evolve -- even if their discussions don't get as granular as those in the front office.

"You have to be careful with the terminology you use with players," Boles said. "We have to deal with the human element. We are on the field with these guys. If you start using big terminology, there are some guys who can handle it, but there are other guys where you have to watch it a little bit. Keeping it simple is not a bad thing."

### **Curveball gives Edgar Olmos a chance to win Opening Day roster spot**

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- For Edgar Olmos, acceptance was the first step.

Olmos began his career in the Miami Marlins organization as a starting pitcher throwing a fastball, changeup and slider. Even a year or two ago, after he'd bounced to Seattle and Baltimore and moved to the bullpen, he still was pitching off his mid-90s fastball with his slider as his primary secondary pitch.

What Olmos came to realize last season at Triple-A Norfolk was that he needed to devote himself to his curveball. He threw his curveball like Rich Hill does now. He threw his curveball like Barry Zito did when

Olmos watched him as a kid in California. He didn't pitch off his mid-90s fastball with his curveball or slider anymore, more conventional curveball use. He made his curveball his primary pitch.

"That's my bread and butter," he said. "I'll throw it the majority of the time. I'll throw it in any count. I'll throw it whenever. If I need a strike, I'll throw it. Last year was the first year where I accepted that that needs to be me. Instead of being a flamethrower like I used to be, I accepted the fact that I needed to be able to use my curveball the way I do."

"One of the reasons we pursued him is the curveball," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "We feel like it's a pitch that can have consistent success at the big-league level."

That curveball has given Olmos an outside shot at winning a spot in the Red Sox bullpen out of spring training. The 26-year-old minor-league free agent has struck out 11 hitters and walked just two while compiling a 1.17 ERA in six relief appearances.

Farrell specifically mentioned Olmos when asked about the competition among lefty relievers for a spot in the Boston bullpen. Fernando Abad has the inside track but is absent, pitching for the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic. Robby Scott burst onto the scene last September, pitching six scoreless innings in the major leagues, but he has walked four hitters in six innings pitched this spring.

In 68 2/3 innings pitched in Triple-A last season, Olmos struck out 76 -- more than 26 percent of the batters he faced. He was almost as effective against righties as he was against lefties. He could get swings and misses on his curveball against any hitter he faced.

"The hitters will tell you what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong," he said. "When I threw a lot of fastballs, I got hit. When I threw a lot of curveballs, I didn't."

## **\* *The Springfield Republican***

### **Christian Vazquez or Sandy Leon: Who will be Boston Red Sox's Opening Day catcher?**

Christopher Smith

Sandy Leon or Christian Vazquez on Opening Day 2017?

The Red Sox opener (April 3 vs. the Pirates at Fenway Park) is 17 days away and the No. 1 catcher job still is up for grabs.

Both are strong defenders but both haven't hit well so far in spring training.

Vazquez went 2-for-3 with one run in the Red Sox's 4-3 win over Pittsburgh last night to increase his average to .250 (5-for-20, one double, one RBI).

Leon is 2-for-14 (.143) with no extra-base hits and no RBIs.

Blake Swihart -- the only catcher with minor league options -- is 7-for-22 (.318) with a triple and RBI. But Swihart almost certainly will start the year at Triple-A Pawtucket because Leon and Vazquez would never clear waivers (and the Red Sox wouldn't take that risk).

"Catching is the hardest thing to get a read on as far as their timing," Red Sox manager John Farrell told reporters yesterday, per WEEI.com. "We've been in a situation where we have rotated three guys in a starting role. So guys have been getting two at-bats every third day. With games having started yesterday on the minor league side, we'll start getting catchers over there to get three or four at-bats on days they aren't catching here. The offensive evaluation can be a little unfair. Blake has swung the bat very well, no

denying it. So if you start to look at batting average as the comparable, that's something, personally, I don't think you can do at that position.

"There's so much more to the position. There's so much more to the organization depth needs. So it would be extremely short-sighted to say we are going to declare who is the catching tandem based on batting average."

Rick Porcello will start the opener. And so could the Opening Day catcher be determined solely on who works best with him?

Potentially.

Porcello's ERA with each catcher last year:

Sandy Leon: 107 1/3 innings, 2.52 ERA.

Christian Vazquez: 94 innings, 3.64 ERA.

Ryan Hanigan: 15 2/3 innings, 3.45 ERA.

Leon still seems to have the lead on the No. 1 catcher job.

Farrell though might pair one of the catchers with three starters and the other catcher with two starters. We saw how well Vazquez worked with Eduardo Rodriguez late last season.

Of course more goes into the decision than offense (defense and maintaining depth).

Vazquez, who's known for his cannon arm, has thrown out 3-for-4 of base stealers. Swihart is 0-for-8. Leon, who is 0-for-1, showed off his strong arm last year when he threw out 41 percent of base stealers.

### **Chris Sale, Boston Red Sox ace, struggles vs. Pirates 20 days before he'll face them in regular season**

Christopher Smith

Chris Sale will make his first regular season start for the Boston Red Sox in exactly 20 days against the Pittsburgh Pirates at Fenway Park.

He had a test run against the Pirates on Thursday at JetBlue Park.

It didn't go as well as his previous Grapefruit League start did. The lefty -- who the Red Sox acquired Dec. 6 from the White Sox -- allowed three runs, all earned, on seven hits and no walks while striking out three. The White Sox lead 3-1 in the sixth.

Sale pitched 4 scoreless innings against the Rays last Saturday, inducing seven groundball outs and striking out five.

In addition to his three strikeouts vs. the Pirates on Thursday, he allowed two groundouts and five flyouts. So he wasn't as effective in keeping the ball down in the strike zone.

Sale surrendered a double to Jordan Luplow. All six other Pittsburgh hits were singles.

Sale's spring training lines:

March 6 at Houston: 2 IP, 4 H, 2 R, 1 ER, 0 BB, 2 Ks.

March 11 vs. Tampa Bay: 4 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 1 BB, 5 Ks.

March 16 vs. Pittsburgh: 4 IP, 7 H, 3 R, 3 ER, 0 BB, 3 Ks.

Sox's Sale favorite to win Cy Young; How about Porcello, Price?

Sox's Sale favorite to win Cy Young; How about Porcello, Price?

Boston Red Sox lefty David Price was the favorite to win the 2016 AL Cy Young when Bovada released its odds last March 11. He's at 16-to-1 odds to start 2017.

Bovada.lv released its 2017 preseason AL Cy Young odds earlier today. Sale is the favorite (7-to-2 odds) followed by Cleveland Indians' Corey Kluber (9-to-2).

Sale -- who has finished in the top five of the AL Cy Young voting each of the past four years and in the top six each of the past five years -- is scheduled to start the Red Sox's second game of regular season April 5 at Fenway Park vs. the Pirates. Rick Porcello will be Boston's Opening Day starter.

Sale went 17-10 with a 3.34 ERA in 32 starts for the White Sox last year. Bovada has him at 7-to-2 odds to win the award.

### **Could Edgar Olmos win second lefty reliever job over Robby Scott, Fernando Abad?**

Christopher Smith

Edgar Olmos has a chance to win a spot in the Boston Red Sox bullpen during the final two and a half weeks of spring training.

Boston Red Sox manager John Farrell told reporters today that Olmos is competing for the second left-handed reliever job along with Robby Scott and Fernando Abad.

Robbie Ross Jr. has the first spot locked up.

The Red Sox signed the 26-year-old Olmos to a minor league deal this offseason. He's a non-roster invitee to camp. But he has impressed. The 6-foot-4, 221-pounder has allowed just one run on nine hits and two walks while striking out 11 in 7 2/3 innings in Grapefruit League action.

The Marlins' 2008 third-round draft pick isn't on the 40-man like Scott and Abad but perhaps that doesn't put him at too much of a disadvantage.

After all, the Red Sox should have two, potentially three, available 40-man roster spots at the end of spring training camp.

~ Boston will need to designate Bryce Brentz for assignment after spring training ends because he's out of minor league options. So another team will either claim Brentz, or he'll clear waivers and be outrighted to Triple-A Pawtucket (where he'll no longer be on Boston's 40-man).

~ Right-handed reliever Carson Smith underwent Tommy John surgery May 24, 2016. He likely be unavailable to pitch in the majors until midseason at the earliest. So he'll likely begin 2017 on the 60-day DL. That opens another 40-man roster spot.

~ The Red Sox would need to designate Abad if they choose Scott or Olmos over him because Abad is out of minor league options.

As written about on MassLive.com March 5, Abad being away from the club to pitch in the WBC while competing for a Red Sox roster spot certainly doesn't help his chances. He made \$2 million in salary arbitration but his salary isn't guaranteed unless he makes the Red Sox roster out of spring training.

Abad allowed four runs, but just one earned, on two hits (one homer) and two walks while striking out five before heading off to pitch for Team Dominican in the WBC.

Scott has hurled 6 scoreless innings, scattering five hits and four walks while striking out four.

As mentioned above, Olmos has allowed one run on nine hits and two walks while striking out 11 in 7 2/3 innings.

Olmos has a 5.21 ERA in 19 innings (11 outings, two starts) during his major league career.

He posted a 2.88 ERA in 68 2/3 innings of relief for Triple-A Norfolk last year. He held left-handed batters to a .217 average.

## **\* *RedSox.com***

### **Red Sox fine tuning their Opening Day roster**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Last month, MLB.com took a first crack at projecting the Opening Day roster for the Red Sox. This seems like the right time to take another stab at it.

There has already been one major update since the last time we did this exercise. Left-hander David Price will likely start the season on the disabled list as he battles back from a left forearm injury.

That means that Eduardo Rodriguez, Steven Wright and Drew Pomeranz will all be in the rotation to start the season, leaving an additional roster spot open in the bullpen.

Here are the roster issues Farrell will be looking at in the coming weeks.

"How will our left-handed relief shake out as?" Farrell said. "How does our bench and the third-base combination thereof play out? There's been nothing determined. The same situations exist -- left-handed relief, the bench and third-base situation; who's going to be in that tandem behind the plate? We're starting to get a little more information on the rotation, just by virtue of the physical ailment to David Price."

The latest roster projection is as follows.

Catcher: Sandy Leon and Christian Vazquez

After a breakout season for Leon in 2016, Farrell isn't making much of the switch-hitter's slow start at the plate in Spring Training. Vazquez's arm is back to where it was before he had Tommy John Surgery two years ago. It still looks like Blake Swihart, who has swung the bat well in camp, will start the season at Triple-A because he is the only one of the trio who has options remaining.

Infield: Mitch Moreland, Hanley Ramirez, Dustin Pedroia, Xander Bogaerts, Pablo Sandoval, Brock Holt, Josh Rutledge

All eyes were on Sandoval when camp started, and most of the attention centered around the 40 pounds or so he lost. The more relevant thing for the Red Sox is that Sandoval looks like he can play again after missing most of 2016 following surgery on his left shoulder. Sandoval is swinging the bat well and fielding his position and looks more like the guy who played for the Giants than the one who struggled for the Red Sox in '15. Farrell hasn't named Sandoval the starting third baseman yet, but it is an increasing inevitability. Rutledge remains the favorite to win the last spot on the bench over Marco Hernandez due to his right-handed bat.

Outfield: Andrew Benintendi, Jackie Bradley Jr., Mookie Betts, Chris Young

This has been the most stable area of the team in camp, and should be a clear strength all season. The starting trio is young, exciting and well-rounded. Young is a nice luxury to have off the bench with his power against lefties.

Rotation: Rick Porcello, Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez, Steven Wright, Drew Pomeranz

Initially, Rodriguez, Wright and Pomeranz were in a battle for the final two spots. Price's injury means that all three will start the season in the rotation. Wright and Pomeranz were on a delayed program to start the spring and still need to prove they are fully healthy. There's no word yet on how much time Price will miss, but the Red Sox seem to be in decent position to weather the loss in the short term.

Bullpen: Craig Kimbrel, Tyler Thornburg, Joe Kelly, Matt Barnes, Robbie Ross Jr., Fernando Abad, Heath Hembree

The one player missing from that group of seven is Robby Scott, but the lefty is clearly in the mix for a spot. It could come at the expense of Abad, who was shaky following his acquisition from the Twins last August and missed a decent chunk of this Spring Training competing in the World Baseball Classic. Trade acquisition Thornburg struggled mightily in his first two Grapefruit League outings and is now building back some arm strength before he gets into another game.

### **Sale logs 3 K's, Vazquez rakes for Red Sox**

Ian Browne and Adam Berry

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Christian Vazquez helped his cause to win the backup catching spot for the Red Sox by logging a pair of hits in Thursday night's 4-3 win over the Pirates.

"You're seeing more consistent contact," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "[Vazquez] went through a stretch last year where coming off a season missed, he searched for who he was offensively. The time he spent in [Triple-A] Pawtucket was productive. Same with the at-bats he received this winter. You like to see him put the bat on the ball for obvious reasons. In his spot in the lineup where he could find himself, the ability to move runners ahead of him, hit and run, he's very capable of that."

Utility infielder Josh Rutledge, who is in competition to win Boston's final spot off the bench, had a triple. Marco Hernandez, Rutledge's main competition for that spot, smashed two hits. In a decisive two-run eighth inning, Sam Travis logged the tying single and Tzu-Wei Lin capped the rally with a go-ahead RBI single.

Ivan Nova, projected as the Bucs' No. 3 starter, held the Red Sox to four hits and one run over five strong innings. The Red Sox will likely see Nova again when the teams square off in a three-game series to open the regular season at Fenway Park.

The Pirates struck for some early offense against five-time All-Star Chris Sale, scoring three runs over the first three innings. Sale gave up seven hits and three runs over four innings.

"I didn't feel sharp today," Sale said. "I felt great, just not sharp. I wasn't able to locate when I needed to."

Jose Osuna, who is ranked as the Pirates' No. 29 prospect by MLB Pipeline.com, went 2-for-3 with a run scored and an RBI. Minor Leaguer Gift Ngoepe, who was signed by the Bucs out of South Africa in 2008, had three hits.

Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel was sharp in his one inning, striking out two of the three batters he faced.

Up next for Pirates: Watch live on MLB.TV as right-hander Drew Hutchison, competing for a spot in the Pirates' Opening Day rotation, will start against the Orioles at 1:05 p.m. ET on Friday at LECOM Park. Lefty relievers Felipe Rivero, Tyler Webb and Wade LeBlanc are also scheduled to pitch. The Bucs also will play a "B" game against the O's on Friday morning; Trevor Williams, Casey Sadler and Angel Sanchez are slated to pitch in the six-inning contest.

Up next for Red Sox: Left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez (2-0, 3.00 ERA) will try to continue his strong Spring Training when he starts against the Astros on Friday at 1:05 p.m. ET. Joe Kelly will get an inning in relief. Lefty Robby Scott, in competition for a bullpen spot, will also pitch. Dustin Pedroia and Pablo Sandoval should be back in the lineup after getting Thursday night off.

### **Porcello honored to receive Opening Day nod**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- In one of the first conversations Rick Porcello had with Red Sox manager John Farrell this spring, the right-hander learned he would be getting the ball on Opening Day for the first time in his career.

A day after Farrell made the news public, Porcello reflected on the honor of that assignment for a rotation that also includes Chris Sale and David Price.

Farrell made the decision to go with Porcello, last season's American League Cy Young Award winner, before Price sustained a left forearm injury that is all but certain to keep him off the 25-man roster for the start of the season.

"Yeah, I mean, those guys are incredible starting pitchers," said Porcello, who will face the Pirates on April 3 at Fenway Park. "To get the ball, I don't think it's slighting them or anything like that. It's a huge honor to have it. I think it's tradition for the pitchers, when you get the ball Opening Day, it tends to be a big deal. So I'm grateful for that opportunity and it's definitely an honor, especially with the talented rotation that we have."

Porcello earned the honor by having a breakthrough season in 2016, going 22-4 with a 3.15 ERA.

"I'm treating like I'm going to treat my other hopefully 33, 34 or however many starts it is," Porcello said. "You know it's Game 1, I've got Pittsburgh and I'll be ready to go. It's not anything different. I don't think it would make sense to put more emphasis on your first start of the year as opposed to your 10th or 15th. I'm going to prepare like I always do and take everything in stride, and do what I know how to do."

### **Sale laments defensive miscue on infield hit**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Whether it is Spring Training or a start against the Yankees in the middle of the pennant race, Red Sox starter Chris Sale doesn't think he should ever make a mental mistake.

For that reason, Sale was all over himself for not covering first base on an RBI, infield hit by Gift Ngoepe in the fourth inning of Wednesday's 4-3 win over the Pirates. It was a grounder to the right side of the infield that second baseman Josh Rutledge fielded, but there was nobody covering first.

"That's stupid," Sale said. "That's what we're here for. We've done that 400,000 times since we've been here, covering first base. A ball hit over there, cover first base. That's just a stupid mistake on my part. I've got to be better than that, even here. There's no excuse for that, at all."

Sale gave up seven hits and three runs while going four innings and stretching out to 74 pitches.

"I didn't feel sharp today," Sale said. "I felt great, just not sharp. I wasn't able to locate when I needed to.

The second inning, I got two great defensive plays behind me, and [Chris Young] there in the third inning. Those are huge even on days like today where you're just trying to piece it together. Those are added confidence boosters that helped me get back to where I needed to be."

Worth noting

- At the age of 33, Dustin Pedroia has learned to take his foot off the gas pedal when necessary with the sole goal of keeping him on the field as much as possible during the regular season. This has manifested itself in the way Pedroia works out in the offseason, and also in the way manager John Farrell utilizes

Pedroia in Spring Training.

Once again, Pedroia was not in the lineup for Thursday night's game. He has played just 23 innings in the field, compared to 59 by Pablo Sandoval, 53 by Jackie Bradley Jr., 44 from Mookie Betts and 41 by Mitch Moreland. Pedroia played 154 games last season, and Farrell would like him to get at least 145 starts in 2017.

"Pedey's got such great pride that he wants to be on the field for nine innings every day of the schedule," Farrell said. "And yet, he's done a great job of how he's revamped his offseason workouts to stay in great shape. I think bottom line is he's been very good with communicating how he feels on a given day and if a day off benefits him, I think he's more accepting of it."

- Reliever Tyler Thornburg, who has spent the last couple of weeks building up arm strength and working on mechanics, could pitch in a game by early next week. The setup man last appeared in a game on March 1.

## \* **WEEI.com**

### **Everything You Need To Know About Where Red Sox Roster Stands**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Two weeks from Monday it all starts. So, with the Red Sox taking on the team they are opening the regular season with, Pittsburgh, Thursday night at JetBlue Park, it seemed like a good time to offer what's what when it comes to the club's roster.

"Where is our left-handed relief going to shake out as, and how does our bench and the third-base combination thereof play out? There's been nothing determined," said Red Sox manager John Farrell. "The same situations exist — left-handed relief, the bench and third-base situation, who's going to be in that tandem behind the plate. We're starting to get a little more information on the rotation, just by virtue of the physical ailment to David Price, to who's pitching currently."

That lefty reliever spot would seem to be the one legitimate unknown, with Robby Scott, and maybe even Edgar Olmos, certainly making a strong case for unseating Fernando Abad.

While Abad has made three appearances for the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic, giving up two hits in 1 2/3 innings, Scott has thrown in six innings, not allowing a run over six innings. Scott does, however, have options, which isn't the case for Abad.

The Red Sox are clearly intrigued by what Abad can deliver, as is evident by their willingness to blow through the deadline (March 15, 2 p.m.) to cut the lefty and only be on the books for 1/6th of his salary. The next checkpoint will come March 29 at 2 p.m., with the Sox being on the hook for 1/4 of Abad's \$2 million deal if he is released. After that, the team will be forced to pay the reliever the whole ball of wax.

And Abad did come through in Thursday night's WBC game, coming on with runners on first and third in the fifth inning to induce a 6-4-3 double play off the bat of Venezuela's Ender Inciarte to preserve a 1-0 Dominican Republic lead.

Olmos has become the wild card.

The 26-year-old lefty isn't currently on the 40-man roster, and is working on a minor-league deal. But the fact he has struck out 11 in 7 2/3 innings thus far this spring suggests there might be something there. One of the obstacle Olmos currently faces is a hamstring injury, which forced him from his outing in Dunedin Monday.

"Edgar Olmos is throwing the ball very well," Farrell said of the southpaw, who has pitched in 11 big league games. "One of the reasons we pursued him is the curveball. We feel like it's a pitch that can have consistent success at the big league level. He's starting to build some arm strength. We're starting to see more power to his fastball to create greater separation between the two pitches. He'll get on the mound hopefully tomorrow to hopefully throw long toss out to 120 feet today, so we'll anticipate him getting back on the mound. The reason he came out of the game the other day was short-lived. He's been a guy who has impressed so far."

As for the extra infielder, it would be hard to see Josh Rutledge not having the inside edge.

Not only is Rutledge a Rule 5 draftee, meaning he has to stay on the major league roster or be returned to Colorado, but he hits right-handed. With Brock Holt serving as the left-handed-hitting option off the bench, Marco Hernandez would seem to be in an uphill battle despite a spring training that has seen him hit .355 with a 1.041 OPS.

It certainly would seem the two catchers who will break camp with the Red Sox will be Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon, who are both without options. Blake Swihart has certainly made it a more difficult decision, hitting .309 with an .819 OPS. Conversely, Vazquez entered Thursday hitting just .179 while Leon is 2-for-14 (.143)

Still, as Farrell explained, offense won't be the priority.

"Catching is the hardest thing to get a read on as far as their timing," the manager said. "We've been in a situation where we have rotated three guys in a starting role, so guys have been getting two at-bats every third day. With games having started yesterday on the minor league side, we'll start getting catchers over there to get three or four at-bats on days they aren't catching here. The offensive evaluation can be a little unfair. Blake has swung the bat very well, no denying it. So if you start to look at batting average as the comparable, that's something, personally, I don't think you can do at that position.

"There's so much more to the position. There's so much more to the organization depth needs. So it would be extremely short-sighted to say we are going to declare who is the catching tandem based on batting average."

And, finally, the starting rotation?

Right now you're looking at Rick Porcello, followed by Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez, Steven Wright and Drew Pomeranz.

"Based on the calendar, it puts Steven and Drew in games back here that weekend that we depart and head north," Farrell said. "That would be a best-case scenario. That means they've taken the ball every days and are building up to, at that point, roughly 85 pitches."

**\* CSNNE.com**

**Sale Doesn't 'Feel Sharp' In Red Sox' Exhibition Win Over Pirates**

CSN Staff

Chris Sale admitted that he "didn't feel sharp" against the Pittsburgh Pirates on Thursday night, giving up three earned runs on seven hits in four innings.

Brock Holt, Sam Travis and Tzu-Wei Lin drove in runs for the Red Sox in their 4-3 win over the Pirates. Travis, who missed a large part of the 2016 season with a torn ACL, is now hitting .345 this spring.

Pirates starter Ivan Nova held the Red Sox to one run on four hits in five innings of work.

Eduardo Rodriguez will get the start for the Sox on Friday at 1:05 p.m. when they take on the Houston Astros.