

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, March 18, 2017

*** *The Boston Globe***

Bullpen can't pick up where Rodriguez left off

Peter Abraham

SCORE: Astros (ss) 6, Red Sox 2

RECORD: 9-11-2

BREAKDOWN: The Sox had a 1-0 lead after five innings. Their bullpen allowed six runs on seven hits and two walks in the two innings that followed. The Sox finished with only five hits.

THUMBS UP: Projected No. 3 starter Eduardo Rodriguez was impressive again, working four scoreless innings. He allowed two singles, walked two, and struck out six. The lefty has a 2.08 ERA in four spring starts. "You throw every pitch you want, you know you'll be ready for the season," Rodriguez said . . . Dustin Pedroia made a diving stop of a hard-hit ball by Tony Kemp in the first inning then popped to his feet and threw him out . . . Robby Scott struck out righthanded-hitting Evan Gattis with the bases loaded in the fifth inning. Scott, who is competing for a roster spot, got Gattis flailing at a breaking pitch.

THUMBS DOWN: Joe Kelly, who cruised through his first five outings, allowed two runs on two hits and a walk in the sixth inning . . . Noe Ramirez was hit hard in the seventh, giving up four runs on five hits and a walk. Ramirez didn't get much help from Rusney Castillo, who lost a fly ball in the sun. Castillo later struck out swinging.

MEDICAL REPORT: David Price (left elbow) had a day off from his throwing program, which will continue on Saturday.

AROUND THE BASES: Astros right fielder Josh Reddick, who was in the Red Sox organization from 2006-11, played his first game at JetBlue Park. He has not been in Fort Myers since spring training in 2011. He was traded that August. "Beautiful park," Reddick said. "But outside of Dustin I don't think I know anybody here anymore." . . . The Sox wore green jerseys and caps on St. Patrick's Day. The Astros has green caps. For the Sox, that tradition started in 1990 when Roger Clemens purchased green caps and stirrup socks for his teammates . . . Chris Young and Christian Vazquez got some at-bats in two minor league games. Young was 2 for 4 with a double, a home run and a walk. Vazquez was 1 for 3.

NEXT GAME: The Sox play the Minnesota Twins at 1:05 p.m. on Saturday at Hammond Stadium in Fort Myers. Rick Porcello and Steven Wright are scheduled to pitch for the Sox. Ryan Vogelsong starts for Minnesota. NESN and WEEI AM (850) have the game.

Sam Travis gives the Red Sox a lot to consider

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The Red Sox signed Mitch Moreland for one year and \$5.5 million. Their intention is to have him play first base against righthanded pitchers.

That will have Hanley Ramirez replace David Ortiz as designated hitter, with regular starts at first base against lefthanders.

The Red Sox theoretically should improve their infield defense, keep Ramirez fresh and productive, and benefit from Moreland's lefthanded swing at Fenway Park.

That leaves Sam Travis at Triple A Pawtucket to start the season. But for how long?

The 23-year-old first baseman seems intent on tearing up those well-made plans. In the 15 games he has played in spring training this year, Travis is 11 of 32 (.344) with three doubles, three home runs, and 10 RBIs. He also has drawn four walks.

A second-round draft pick in 2014, Travis has yet to make his major league debut. But in 37 career spring training games with the Sox, he has hit .400 with 11 extra-base hits and 23 RBIs.

That's hard to ignore.

"It just speaks to the advanced stage he is at as a young hitter," said manager John Farrell. "It's the ability to make an impact to the baseball pretty routinely."

What makes this particular spring all the more impressive is that Travis played only 47 games in 2016 because of season-ending knee surgery in May. The Sox coaches thought he would spend spring training regaining his skills, not mashing the way he has. He also has run the bases well and showed range at first base.

"I really haven't thought about my knee," Travis said Friday before going 1 for 3 with an RBI against the Houston Astros. "I feel great and I'm going out there and having fun. I didn't know what to expect. I just wanted to crush rehab and get back out there. So far it's been feeling good."

Travis pays little attention to his statistics in spring training. His no-nonsense mind-set has little room for such frivolities.

"It's spring training," Travis said. "You're here to get on your feet, get moving, and get ready for the season. I'm trying to hit the ball hard and see what happens."

To get Travis extra at-bats, Farrell has used him as a late-inning replacement in games. Travis drove in the tying run and scored the winning run against the Pirates Thursday.

Those opportunities give the Sox a window into how Travis could be used later in the season if he is called up.

"To sit around for a couple hours and still come up with some good swings on low- to mid-90s type stuff tells you not only his bat speed but his intention or attention during the game to stay prepared," Farrell said.

Defense is what could ultimately determine Travis's readiness for the majors as an everyday player. He has worked with infield coach Brian Butterfield on improving at first base, particularly his footwork.

"Could he play there right now? Yes," said Farrell. "Would we like to see further development? For sure."

There are no plans to try Travis at other positions. The Sox have ample depth in the outfield and at third base. The last time he played somewhere other than first base was his freshman year of high school in Illinois, when he played third.

"Defense is obviously a priority and it's been a priority," Travis said. "I have to keep doing what I'm doing and get better every day. It's all aspects of the game, really. If you're not trying to get better, that means you're satisfied and I'm never satisfied."

Travis believes he has gained a lot working with Butterfield and the other coaches on the major league staff.

“Absolutely,” he said. “We get work in every day. But you can also learn a lot watching the guys who are playing first. It’s awesome to see if you pay attention.

“[Moreland] is somebody I talk to all the time and get a lot of pointers from. He’s a great guy and a great teammate. He obviously knows what he’s doing over there. Every piece of information I get from him, I listen.”

Travis isn’t breaking down the roster to see if he fits. He understands he needs more Triple A development after his abbreviated 2016 season. It’s up to others to make decisions.

“You have to look at it and realize it’s out of your control,” he said. “You have to get better at your game and at the same time be a team player.

Once the opportunity comes, these spring training days should make the transition a little easier.

“One hundred percent,” Travis said. “I’m comfortable around this team. The better you feel, you can be yourself and just play. It’s great to be around these guys and if I get the chance, I’ll be ready to help them.”

Red Sox have a few questions left to answer

Alex Speier

With just under two weeks remaining in spring training, here’s a look at the areas of the Red Sox’ roster that continue to gain definition:

QUESTIONS BEHIND THE DISH: The Red Sox are determining their division of catching labor. It’s hard to imagine that, barring injury, the team would compromise its depth at the position by opening with Blake Swihart in the big leagues at a time when neither Sandy Leon nor Christian Vazquez has options remaining.

Spring training results, of course, often represent little more than an optical illusion, but Leon has made poor contact thus far this spring. He’s 2-for-14 with a walk, four strikeouts, and no extra-base hits in big league games, and he’s also hit mostly groundballs on the back fields in minor league games.

Given the enormous disparity between his pre-2016 performance and his out-of-nowhere emergence as one of the best offensive catchers in baseball for a meaningful chunk of last summer, it’s hard to know what Leon might provide – if he will have the bat to justify primary catching duties.

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

Christian Vazquez’s 2016 arc criss-crossed Leon’s. In his return from Tommy John surgery, he had a terrible offensive season for most of 2016 but finished strong in Pawtucket, and the Sox have seen more regular contact and less swing-and-miss from him in the early stages of spring. He’s 5-for-20 with two walks and three strikeouts.

Swihart has hit well (.318/.400/.409) and has shown greater comfort behind the plate this spring, but given the likely need for him to refine further his defensive skills and the fact that he has options, he is likely on the outside looking in.

Farrell said he’s still working to figure out the right formula for his catching mix and is unlikely to base his season-opening playing time decisions on spring training offense. Instead, he suggested that past pitcher-catcher relationships could provide a guide.

If so, based on the history of the starters, it seems easy to imagine the Sox will open the year with Leon catching Rick Porcello and, when he’s healthy, David Price. Steven Wright has enjoyed far more success

with Vazquez than Leon, and Drew Pomeranz struggled with Leon behind the dish last year, resulting in either Bryan Holaday or Ryan Hanigan catching most of the lefthander's starts. Vazquez would appear a favorable partner for both.

Eduardo Rodriguez, meanwhile, showed no real performance disparity regardless of the catcher. Chris Sale has thrown to both Leon (two Grapefruit League starts) and Vazquez (one start) this spring.

Pitchers and catchers

How each of the Red Sox' potential starters has fared pitching to the primary catcher options.

Pitcher	Sandy Leon	Christian Vazquez	Blake Swihart
Rick Porcello	133 IP, 3.57 ERA, 7.7 K/BB	94 IP, 3.64 ERA, 4.1 K/BB	112 IP, 4.55 ERA, 4.2 K/BB
David Price	108 IP, 3.23 ERA, 5.1 K/BB	97 IP, 4.62 ERA, 4.9 K/BB	11 IP, 5.73 ERA, 4.5 K/BB
Drew Pomeranz	20 IP, 5.85 ERA, 3.0 K/BB	N/A	N/A
Eduardo Rodriguez	86 IP, 4.60 ERA, 2.6 K/BB	22 IP, 4.50 ERA, 2.5 K/BB	70 IP, 4.08 ERA, 2.9 K/BB
Steven Wright	23 IP, 6.46 ERA, 1.5 K/BB	36 IP, 2.72 ERA, 2.2 K/BB	6 IP, 1.35 ERA, 1.7 K/BB
Chris Sale	N/A	N/A	N/A

SOURCE: Baseball-Reference.com

LOOKING LEFT: The Red Sox are still deciding on a second lefthanded option in the bullpen who can complement Robbie Ross Jr. Fernando Abad, Robby Scott, and non-roster invitee Edgar Olmos are being considered.

Olmos has followed his strong 2016 Triple A season in the Orioles system with an impressive camp (11 strikeouts, 2 walks in 7 2/3 innings), though given that he's not on the 40-man roster, the lefty may have a hard time leapfrogging Abad and Scott (the latter of whom has minor league options remaining) on the depth chart.

PABLO'S PARTNER AND THE SHAPE OF THE BENCH: The team is still determining the shape of its bench, specifically its final utility infield reserve spot. While that had been viewed as a likely choice between Josh Rutledge and Marco Hernandez, with Rutledge possessing the inside track because he is righthanded, Deven Marrero has impressed Sox officials with more solid contact at the plate this spring.

His dreadful 2016 season in Triple A Pawtucket – his .587 OPS was the worst among all qualifying full-season minor leaguers – led most evaluators to conclude that his ceiling was capped as a glove-first (and perhaps glove-only) utility player, but as Peter Abraham writes, Marrero is intent on improving that he can be an everyday big leaguer.

At the least, he remains in big league camp. In all likelihood, Marrero will open the year in Pawtucket, but if he sustains some of the swing improvements he's shown, he has a chance to recalibrate his prospect profile.

While Rutledge hitting righthanded plays to his benefit in finding a potential Sandoval partner at third, Hernandez has turned in one of the best camps of any member of the Red Sox, demonstrating improved timing in the field and a steady ability to drive fastballs at the plate. The Sox may have a depth vs. upside decision as they choose between Rutledge and Hernandez.

Hernandez still has minor league options. Rutledge, who was taken from the Rockies in the Rule 5 draft, would have to be offered back to Colorado if he isn't kept on the roster. However, his departure could be made more palatable if Steve Selsky (hitting .276/.364/.517 in an impressive spring) shows the ability to add third base to his first base/outfield profile. Farrell praised the acquisition of Selsky as a potentially valuable piece on Friday.

New DL rules change the equation for MLB teams

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — When Major League Baseball negotiated a new collective bargaining agreement with the Players Association, one of the changes included shortening the 15-day disabled list to 10 days.

According to Red Sox manager John Farrell, MLB will require teams to provide more extensive proof of injuries to ensure the rules are not being abused to manipulate the roster.

“With it just being 10 days, I think the DL will be scrutinized even greater to try and control that,” Farrell said Friday. “I think there’s going to be doctor documentation required for every move that’s made to the DL.”

With a 10-day DL, a team could drop a starting pitcher from its roster knowing he would miss only one game, particularly if there is a scheduled day off for the team during those 10 days.

To use the Red Sox as an example, they will want to control the innings of No. 5 starter Drew Pomeranz, who has never worked more than 170 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings in a season and ended last season with elbow pain.

Putting Pomeranz on the disabled list around a day off would allow the Sox to add a relief pitcher or position player for the short term.

A shorter DL also could encourage teams with a tired bullpen to make a move, particularly if it lacks relievers with minor league options.

Teams also will be able to backdate a disabled list stint by only three days — instead of back to the last game a player appeared in. In previous years, the Red Sox often waited 5-7 days before making a DL decision, particularly for prominent players.

“It’s another way of minimizing the manipulation, or the potential of it,” Farrell said.

Three cuts made

Righthander Kyle Martin and lefthander Luis Ysla were optioned to Triple A Pawtucket. Righthander Marcus Walden was reassigned to minor league camp. All three are relievers. The Sox now have 49 players in camp.

Martin will be an option when the Sox need relief help during the season.

“Like the way he attacks lefthanders,” Farrell said. “His changeup is his second-best pitch, so that gives him the equipment to attack lefties.”

Farrell also mentioned righthanders Jamie Callahan and Ben Taylor as relievers who have made a positive impression on the coaching staff.

They’re needed

Farrell called the development of Triple A lefthanders Brian Johnson and Henry Owens “paramount,” given the lack of starter depth in the highest levels of the minor leagues.

Owens, who was optioned to Pawtucket Tuesday, is working on a simplified delivery that starts with a smaller step. The hope is that will aid in his command.

“I wouldn’t think this is a huge adjustment,” Farrell said.

Owens averaged 5.7 walks per nine innings last season, counting his time in the majors. He walked 12 over 7 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings in four spring training games.

Infield options

The coaching staff has been impressed with Steve Selsky, a 27-year-old outfielder and first baseman claimed off waivers from the Cincinnati Reds in January. The plan is to introduce him to third base and increase his versatility.

Selsky, a righthanded hitter, has a career .838 OPS in the minors and last season had an .810 OPS for the Reds in 24 games.

Brock Holt is the team's primary backup at second base, third base, and shortstop. But he's not the only solution. Marco Hernandez and Deven Marrero have played well in camp.

"It probably starts there," said Farrell. "But there would be discussion that would surround it. If [Xander Bogaerts] were to be missed for any length of time, the discussion is going to center around Marrero and Hernandez.

"If something unforeseen happens at third base, Marco Hernandez is swinging the bat very good. He continues to grow. You can make the claim that he could be an everyday player. We're fortunate we have options to discuss rather than just default to one."

Abad is not bad

Lefthanded reliever Fernando Abad picked up three big outs for the Dominican Republic in its 3-0 victory against Venezuela Thursday night in the World Baseball Classic. With two on and one out in a scoreless game, Abad relieved Edinson Volquez in the fifth inning and got Ender Inciarte to ground into a double play. He then struck out Rougned Odor to start the sixth inning before coming out. Abad has appeared in three WBC games, throwing 2½ scoreless innings . . . Bogaerts and the Netherlands have a game against the Diamondbacks Saturday. The Dutch play their next WBC game Monday at Dodger Stadium.

More and more players practicing what Ted Williams preached

Alex Speier

FORT MYERS, Fla. – Ted Williams wrote "The Science of Hitting" with John Underwood in 1970. Almost 50 years later, concepts articulated in that tome are getting a new audience that is embracing ever-more scientific demonstrations of its tenets.

The Red Sox great believed that players should have a slight upper cut at the point of contact with the intention of launching the ball to the nether regions of the field. As ideas such as exit velocity and launch angle spread throughout the game, some players, hitting coaches, and even teams are starting to embrace some of Williams' views as gospel.

Pirates manager Clint Hurdle recently proclaimed, "Your OPS is in the air." The Cubs, whose hitting coach, John Mallee, espouses the view that "there is no slug on the ground," encourage their players to hit with loft. Josh Donaldson has become an outspoken enemy of trying to do anything but hit the ball in the air.

For now, the Red Sox are exercising caution about such a sweeping philosophical shift. The team believes in taking an individual approach rather than emphasizing a one-size-fits-all mantra, while some coaches are leery of asking players to alter their swings according to physics blueprints.

"To start to get into angles, lift, and launch – I mean, we've got some smart guys but they might not be going to Harvard," said Sox manager John Farrell.

Yet the case of Daniel Murphy – drafted in 2006 by the Mets out of Jacksonville University – suggests that at least some players are interested and capable of enjoying a mid-career crash course in physics.

A couple of years ago, Mets officials approached the second baseman with an observation.

“They kind of alluded to, when I pulled the ball in the air, I was much more dangerous than any other time I hit the ball,” recalled Murphy.

Murphy – who to that point in his career had performed at a level fairly characterized as slightly better than league average – worked with Mets hitting coach Kevin Long in 2015 to position his body in a way that allowed him to do just that. Toward the end of that year, he saw the fruits of those efforts with a monster postseason. Murphy carried that forward into his first year with the Nationals in 2016, when he hit .347/.390/.545 with 27 homers and became an MVP candidate.

He changed his thought process as a hitter considerably. After years trying to drive the ball up the middle while sending low liners into the left-center gap, Murphy looked to get the ball into the air with loft. He read articles on Fangraphs that helped to explain more precisely where he might find his sweet spot as a hitter, learning that a launch angle of roughly 27 degrees with an exit velocity of 98 mph or above tended to result in homers. Murphy got to those numbers more regularly by pulling the ball, by looking for a different feel of his ball off his bat than he’d ever before experienced.

“Each time I hit the ball, I’d like to try to eliminate all five people standing in front of me on my batted balls,” said Murphy. “I just work on driving the ball. If I miss, I prefer my miss to be in the air as opposed to on the ground. ... The biggest thing for me is feel. If I feel like the ball sticks to my barrel, I don’t care [about the launch angle].”

The transition is not without its challenges.

“It’s difficult because guys in this league throw really hard and they’re really, really good. It’s not necessarily the easiest league on the planet to make adjustments,” said Murphy. “It’s still taking all this information and understanding that it’s an athletic event. Guys are throwing aspirins at us.”

Yet Murphy is one of a growing number of players who are learning to take their aspirin in a different way. Other players such as reigning AL home run champ Mark Trumbo, Dodgers All-Star third baseman Justin Turner, and NL MVP Kris Bryant of the Cubs have all embraced the science of driving the ball in the air, forsaking the longtime baseball preference for a level swing and replacing it with a desire to use an uppercut approach to send the ball to distant realms.

“Not everybody has that kind of swing. ... If you’re asking a guy to hit more fly balls, you better accept that there are going to be a lot of pop-ups and a lot of swings and misses,” noted hitting coach Chili Davis. “I’ve got to look at the hitter himself and say, ‘If I suggest this to him, is it going to help him or will it be a huge adjustment?’ There are guys that have natural arc to their swing who are going to hit more fly balls, but not everyone has that. ... That worked for [Murphy], but is it going to work for someone else? I don’t know. To me, there’s no one philosophy that’s going to work for every player. I just focus on making good contact, getting through the ball, and keeping it as simple as possible.”

In 2012-14, Davis was the hitting coach for an A’s team that was viewed as one of the most dramatic examples of the success that could be achieved by focusing on fly ball contact. Players like Donaldson, Josh Reddick, Brandon Moss, and Coco Crisp become power-hitting forces.

Davis, however, says that the development was not a result of a commitment to a philosophy but rather working with those hitters to hone the swings they already had, and to attack the pitches against which they could do the most damage.

Nonetheless, others such as Murphy have enacted a more purposeful overhaul. And some in the Red Sox system are intrigued by the possibility of following suit.

For instance, Nick Longhi is one of the team’s best pure hitting prospects. But over 124 games in High A Salem in 2016, his .282/.349/.393 line included 40 doubles but just two homers – power numbers that created questions about whether he had the offensive profile to be a potential everyday corner bat.

Longhi this offseason worked with Florida International University hitting coach Jered Goodwin to lower his hands and to lengthen his stride slightly (by about three inches, he estimated) at the point of contact to create a slight upward plane in his swing. During the winter, the fruits of his approach were tracked with technology that identified the launch angle and exit velocity with which he was hitting the ball.

So far this spring, Longhi said, he's seen the slightly altered approach result in more balls driven in the air. In two at-bats in the Sox' first minor league games of the spring on Wednesday, he crushed a ball to the track in right-center (likely a homer but for a wind blowing in) and drilled a grand slam down the left field line.

It remains to be seen what kinds of results arise from Longhi's work. Moreover, it might be something of an oversimplification to suggest that the 21-year-old Longhi needed baseball's physics revolution to make the alterations, as plenty of players have grown into power as they matured physically.

Nonetheless, it will be intriguing to monitor players like Longhi to see if a trip to baseball's growing physics lab unlocks the sort of results that would make Ted Williams proud.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Eduardo Rodriguez moving upward in Red Sox rotation

Evan Drellich

FORT MYERS — We'll see how that \$30 million elbow goes. Because if David Price's arm bends the wrong way, the second best left-hander the Red Sox have behind Chris Sale in 2017 should be Eduardo Rodriguez.

There have been plenty of reasons lately to be down on the Red Sox rotation. Not because of a lack of quality — Sale and Rick Porcello may still dominate — but because of the question marks practically everywhere else.

Depth, health, repeat performances. Or a lack thereof.

Rodriguez yesterday afternoon gave reason for some optimism. So too did his late-season performance in 2016 when he had a 3.27 ERA in September.

Combine that with the progress he's made with his slider and some seemingly improved knees, maybe Rodriguez is ready for a steady season.

"In the past I just threw the slider to the back foot and not to the outside corner, but now I can throw to both sides," Rodriguez said after four scoreless innings in a 6-2 loss to the Astros. "So it's really good with that."

The slider has more depth to it now, a product of Rodriguez pulling on the ball a little more as he throws it.

"It's more of a defined pitch," manager John Farrell said. "There's better shape to it, more consistent shape. He's been able to get under some righthanded hitters' swings to finish them off with."

"From the side view, from the dugout, you have a better read that there's three distinct pitches versus maybe the changeup and the slider having little to no depth. It's that pitch that has advanced him a little bit more this spring."

Not everything can go wrong with the rotation, right? Maybe E-Rod is what goes right.

"This is the first time I can throw in spring training regularly and it feels really good," Rodriguez said.

Last spring, Rodriguez had a right patella subluxation that screwed up the first half of his season, altering his delivery as he catered to the tender knee.

The concern for the right knee as well as the left are not gone. They never will be, leaving a tiny bit of perpetual anxiety about him.

“There’s maintenance that goes on continually with him,” Farrell said. “It’s mostly the strengthening of the quad and the muscles around both top and bottom of the knee that are going to support that as best possible. He does wear a sleeve (on the right knee), the daily wearing of that, so that’s something new that wasn’t there a year ago.

“That patellar tendon rides in a groove. In his case, that groove is a little bit more shallow than quote-unquote the norm would be. The fact that this has happened to both knees over the course of his pro career, this is something we’ve got to maintain.”

But as long as those knee issues are under control, the ceiling for Rodriguez remains high.

The 23-year-old was perfect for the first eight batters yesterday before a call he didn’t like gave way to two walks. He acknowledged he let the call he didn’t like into his mind.

He’s far from a finished product. But the Red Sox made the right decision keeping Rodriguez from joining Venezuela in the World Baseball Classic, given the special care his knees need, and the potential importance Rodriguez might hold in a rotation that still has a lot of disastrous scenarios.

“I want to go, but that’s what happened,” Rodriguez said. “We take the decision to stay here because we’ve been working a lot on the knee and everything.”

New rules sure to bring more pitching changes

Evan Drellich

FORT MYERS — Relievers might appear and reappear in major league clubhouses at breakneck speed with a rule change for this year.

“You know you’re going to need probably at least 12 (relievers),” manager John Farrell said yesterday. “That includes the seven that are with you. It’s not uncommon to use upwards of 20 pitchers inside of a given year. To sit here and (list who Nos. 8) through 12 are, that’s ongoing.

“And could it be a starter in Triple A that comes up in the bullpen? Could very well be, as well.”

How those needed arms get on the roster will be something to watch closely.

Gone unchecked, the 10-day disabled list that’s starting this year could be wildly abused.

Baseball has long seen the occasional use of what’s known as the “phantom” DL: a trip to the 15-day DL when a player really isn’t hurt.

Such trips, of course, are disguised as legitimate.

It’s all about roster flexibility. Players who have minor league options — those who can easily move between the majors and minors — have to stay down in the minors for 10 days if they’ve been optioned from the big league team.

But, that’s not the case if a player heads to the DL. An optioned player can be recalled immediately in place of someone who’s hurt. Or “hurt.”

Similarly, a player who doesn't have options can be stashed on the DL. The alternative would be to try to send him to the minors by exposing him to other teams, on waivers.

Of course, in any of these scenarios, a team has to be without one of their players for 15 days.

That's why the drop from 15 days to 10 days is significant.

"Oh, I think you'll see a lot more taxi squad, quote-unquote," Farrell said. "That might be a taboo word right now, but with it just being 10 days, I think the DL will be scrutinized even greater to try to control that. I think there's going to be doctor documentation required for every move that's made to the DL. On the surface, it looks like it could be manipulated. But I think the backup evidence is going to be much more in depth."

"You have to have supporting evidence."

In the past, the Sox would usually wait at least a week before sending a player to the DL. They could do that and retroactively list the player to the day after he last played. That's no longer the case, as DL stints can be backdated only three days.

"It could be 14 days," Farrell said, noting an extreme scenario where a player could go on the DL for one day in the past. "We've used kind of the benchmark that, if it's going to be at least seven days, we'll go to the DL. But we're willing to go a player short for five or six days, depending on who the player is. That goes away."

Triple-A Pawtucket's close proximity to Fenway Park is even more valuable now.

How's that for starters

Sox aren't converting any relievers to starters to shore up their pitching depth. Not at this point, anyway.

"The starters are pretty clear," Farrell said. "We're not changing a role with, let's say, a (Jamie) Callahan or a (Chandler) Shepherd, guys who have been starters in the past who we've seen improvement as they've gone to the bullpen. We need to get (Brian) Johnson, (Henry) Owens and (Roenis) Elias back. (Hector) Velazquez is the guy that will ultimately get stretched out."

"Particularly in the case of Henry Owens and Brian Johnson, those are priorities and have been for us. Their improvement is, honestly, it's paramount for our depth."

Selsky adds new depth

Steve Selsky, an outfielder and first baseman who has minor league options, is going to get a look at third base too as the Sox add another potential layer of depth, with Matt Dominguez and Rafael Devers looking like they're headed to the minors.

All quiet on Price front

David Price did not throw yesterday, Farrell said: "Rehab in the training room. He did not throw today. He'll stay on the program he's been on." . . .

The Sox made their second round of cuts. Left-hander Luis Ysla and right-hander Kyle Martin were optioned to Triple A. Righty Marcus Walden was reassigned to minor league camp.

There are 49 players in big league camp now, 35 from the 40-man roster.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Robby Scott escapes jam, buoying bid for roster spot with Red Sox

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- If Robby Scott beats out Fernando Abad for an Opening Day roster spot, moments like his strikeout of Evan Gattis in the fifth inning Friday at JetBlue Park will be why.

A lengthy battle between Scott and Gattis ended with Scott throwing a back-door breaking ball Gattis swung at and missed. The strikeout ended the inning, stranding three runners on base. The sidearming lefty had triumphed over the power-hitting righty with John Farrell and Dave Dombrowski watching.

"That's probably as good a challenge as he's going to face early in camp," Farrell said.

Scott inherited a runner on first when he came into the game Friday. Houston put two more runners on with an infield single by Reid Brignac and a four-pitch walk to Jake Marisnick -- a walk that saw Scott rush with his lower half and lose his release point. He made the adjustment in time to get a ground ball from Tony Kemp and a pop-up by Josh Reddick, both lefthanded hitters.

That brought up Gattis, a righty-swinging slugger who John Farrell might not have even allowed Scott to face had the outcome meant anything. Gattis hit 32 home runs for the Astros last season. Scott had walked him when the two faced each other in an exhibition game two weeks ago.

Scott worked Gattis mostly in on the hands with fastballs. Gattis spoiled several of them, fouling them back. Scott set Gattis up for a 2-2 changeup but didn't quite execute the pitch, and Gattis took it to run the count full.

"I cut it a little bit," he said. "I didn't really get out in front of it. But you could tell he was wanting to swing at it."

When catcher Sandy Leon called for a back-door curveball, Scott obliged. He executed it. Gattis swung through it. Scott and the Red Sox were out of the jam.

"I'm going to have to face righties to get to lefties," he said. "I'm going to have to be able to attack righthanded hitters. That's part of learning and paying attention to swings and paying attention to takes, studying hitters like they're studying me. I'm trying to figure out what plays best with them."

Eduardo Rodriguez struck out six hitters and walked three in four-plus scoreless innings against Houston on Friday. Two of the walks came immediately after Rodriguez thought he'd struck out Astros shortstop Reid Brignac but didn't get the ball.

"I didn't get the call from the umpire and let that get in my mind," he said.

"Those are things that in spring training you're trying to hone in on and tighten up," Farrell said. "Still, from just a pitch-execution standpoint and the stuff overall, another quality day for him."

Of the six hitters Rodriguez struck out, four came on his fastball and two on his slider. Rodriguez struck out Houston's Jon Kemmer with back-to-back sliders -- one on the inner half that Kemmer fouled off, one down and away that Kemmer swung over.

Rodriguez has worked this spring to add depth to his slider, to make it more of a true slider than the cutter-slider he threw. That depth gives the slider more separation in its movement from his fastball and changeup.

"I just pull a little more," he said. "Now it goes more to the back foot and goes for a strike on the outside corner. It's working pretty good."

Houston tagged Boston reliever Noe Ramirez for four runs in the seventh inning and rolled to a 6-2 win at JetBlue Park.

Farrell: MLB to crack down on DL manipulation

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- As welcome as was the shift to a 10-day minimum for stints on the disabled list, the loophole it opened was cavernous. A team with a depleted bullpen could stash a starting pitcher on the disabled list with a phantom injury in order to summon a reliever and only have to skip one start with that starting pitcher -- an especially easy move to make with an off-day or two coming up on the schedule.

No official word has come down, but Red Sox manager John Farrell said his understanding is that Major League Baseball plans to crack down on the so-called "phantom DL" and require increased documentation for injuries requiring DL stints. That would make it more difficult for teams to manipulate roster rules by abusing the disabled list.

"With it just being 10 days, I think the DL will be scrutinized even greater to try to control that," Farrell said. "I think there's going to be doctor documentation required for every move that's made to the DL. On the surface, it looks like it could be manipulated. But I think the backup evidence is going to be much more in-depth."

For teams with relievers they can option to Triple-A and recall with little restriction, the crackdown on disabled-list manipulation would have few consequences.

The Red Sox, however, don't have the same obvious taxi squad. Three projected members of the Opening Day bullpen have minor-league options, but none of the three -- Matt Barnes, Joe Kelly and Robbie Ross Jr. -- are pitchers the team will want to keep around at all times, not send to Triple-A to alleviate a roster crunch.

One could imagine it being tempting for the Red Sox to stash a pitcher like Drew Pomeranz on the DL if a need arose, fulfilling the dual purpose of opening a spot for a reliever and skipping a start for a pitcher still adapting to a 30-start workload. They could bring up a reliever for four days, swap him out for a starter for one day, and then bring up another reliever for the next four days -- and then Pomeranz could make his next start on schedule.

"For a starter, now you'd be missing one start," Farrell said. "With the 15-day DL, you're missing that guy - - and it's likely that previously, with the 15-day DL you're probably looking at one rehab start, so it extends even further. Now, you drop it back to 10 days, if there's an off-day in those 10 days, you're missing one start."

What Farrell has heard, however, is that Major League Baseball will be stricter in its requirements for players who go on the shelf.

*** *The Springfield Republican***

Fernando Abad earns win for Team Dominican over Venezuela

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox left-handed reliever Fernando Abad earned the win in Team Dominican's 3-0 victory over Venezuela in the World Baseball Classic on Thursday.

He replaced starter Edinson Volquez with one out in the fifth inning in a 0-0 game and got Ender Inciarte to ground into a double play to end the inning.

The Dominican Republic took a 1-0 lead in the bottom of the fifth. Abad then struck out Rougned Odor to begin the sixth before being relieved by Hansel Robles.

Fernando threw 13 pitches, nine for strikes.

Abad left Red Sox spring training camp to pitch for Team Dominican despite being in a competition with both Robby Scott and Edgar Olmos for the secondary left-handed reliever role in Boston's bullpen.

He made \$2 million in salary arbitration but his salary isn't guaranteed unless he makes the Red Sox roster out of spring training.

Kyle Martin, Luis Ysla (both on 40-man roster) optioned to Pawtucket

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have optioned relievers Kyle Martin and Luis Ysla to Triple-A Pawtucket.

Martin, a righty, and Ysla, a lefty, both were added to the 40-man roster in November.

Martin pitched 5 1/3 innings in Grapefruit League action, allowing three runs, two earned runs, on five hits (one homer) and two walks while striking out six.

Ysla pitched 6 1/3 innings and allowed four runs, three earned, on four hits (one homer) and six walks while striking out six.

Both have a chance to make their major league debuts this season.

The Red Sox also reassigned Marcus Walden to minor league camp.

*** *RedSox.com***

E-Rod throws 4 scoreless, 'pen struggles vs. Astros

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Francis Martes, the top-ranked Astros prospect by MLB Pipeline.com, fired three dominant innings in relief en route to Friday's 6-2 victory over the Red Sox at JetBlue Park.

The right-hander retired all nine batters he faced, striking out three of them.

"That's a big arm," Red Sox manager John Farrell said of Martes. "He's powerful. He's got some quality secondary stuff. He's consistently in the mid-90s. He's a good-looking power pitcher."

Left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez turned in another solid start for the Red Sox, giving up two hits and no runs over four-plus innings. Rodriguez walked three and struck out six.

"Every pitch felt good," said Rodriguez, who lowered his Grapefruit League ERA to 2.09. "I felt under control most of the time."

Brad Peacock, who is out of Minor League options, made the start for the Astros, giving up four hits and a run in three innings.

"I felt good," Peacock said. "It's the best I've felt all spring. Offspeed is still coming along. It's still not as sharp as I want it to be. But still working on it."

Evan Gattis had two hits, including a double, for the Astros. Sam Travis, Boston's No. 4 prospect, went 1-for-3 and is hitting .344 this spring.

Astros Up Next: The Astros host the Nationals on Saturday at 1:05 p.m. ET on Gameday Audio. Right-hander Charlie Morton is scheduled to make his fourth Grapefruit League start. In his three previous outings, spanning nine innings, he has allowed two runs on four hits with three walks and six strikeouts.

Red Sox Up Next: Rick Porcello will start Saturday's 1:05 p.m. ET road contest against the Twins on MLB.TV, the righty's first outing since manager John Farrell announced that he will get the ball on Opening Day. Knuckleballer Steven Wright will piggyback Porcello in relief as he continues to get stretched out. The Red Sox will have a solid contingent of position players in the lineup, including Dustin Pedroia, Pablo Sandoval, Andrew Benintendi, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts.

Bradley aims to cut down K's, be less streaky

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Jackie Bradley Jr. isn't one to fuss about numbers, but 143 is the one he'd love to reduce.

That is how many times the Red Sox's center fielder struck out last season, even as he became an All-Star for the first time.

Bradley's defense is his unquestioned strength. However, his bat is also a pretty good weapon that still has room for growth.

What are his goals for 2017?

"Strikeout percentage go down and just more consistency offensively," said Bradley. "That means just consistent contact, hard contact. I want to impact the baseball and be a good situational hitter, as well. Swing at good pitches and make more contact."

In this relatively early portion of his career, Bradley has developed the reputation of being a streak hitter. During his coming-out party down the stretch in 2015, Bradley hit .443 with a 1.443 OPS over an 83-at-bat stretch that included seven homers. And who could forget the 29-game hitting streak from April 24-May 25 of last season when Bradley slashed .415/.488/.783 with eight homers?

Bradley's wish for '17 is a third straight year with a torrid streak without the accompanying downturn.

"I'll take the streaky part," said Bradley. "I'll take that. I think it just all boils down to I want more peaks than valleys. I love the streaks. Give 'em to me. I don't want the equal opposite. I want the opposite to just kind of slow down a little bit."

Still a month from his 27th birthday, and with 394 Major League games under his belt, Bradley will likely gain some of the improvements he is looking for just by the benefit of experience.

After Friday's 0-for-3 performance against the Astros that included two hard outs, Bradley is hitting .172 this spring. In the past, that might have been a concern. But not this spring. He has proved his ability to play at the highest level.

"I think there's going to be some streakiness in Jackie," said Red Sox manager John Farrell. "That's not to be critical. But that's what his track record is starting to show a little bit. We still want to see him in counts

where he's down maybe to give in to the power a little bit and think more contact, particularly the other way."

Bradley will think more about impact than which side of the field he's hitting the ball to.

"You can't force the ball the other way," Bradley said. "Well, I guess you can, but I'd rather impact the baseball no matter where I hit it. I just want to hit it hard. I don't care if I pull it, hit it up the middle, hit it the other way."

With 17 days to go before the Red Sox open the season against the Pirates at Fenway Park, the man who will patrol center field is in a good place.

"I feel really good," said Bradley. "I feel strong. I'm in the best shape of my life right now. Mentally I'm stronger than ever."

Coach Butterfield hopes to be ready for opener

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Red Sox third-base coach Brian Butterfield knows he is in a time crunch to be able to run to his familiar post at Fenway Park on Opening Day.

He also knows that he can't push it.

Butterfield underwent right knee replacement surgery in December after having his left knee replaced in 2015. During camp, first-base coach Ruben Amaro has filled in for Butterfield at third.

However, Butterfield has done his usual high volume of other activities, including leading every infield drill and helping out with baserunning.

"I'm so hopeful," Butterfield said when asked if he would coach third on April 3 against the Pirates. "I expect to be. But you know what the great thing is? [Manager] John [Farrell] and [president of baseball operations] Dave Dombrowski have been very understanding, and they want me to take my time, whatever it takes.

"We have a great coaching staff, so it's not like I feel like I'm missed. Those guys are phenomenal. Ruben has done a fantastic job at third base, and Gary DiSarcina is an outstanding third-base coach also."

Butterfield was reminded not to rush when he developed soreness after a busy Wednesday.

"I felt like two days ago, I was real close," Butterfield said. "Yesterday, I probably did a little bit too much. When it starts feeling good, I have a tendency to do too much. [Massage therapist] Russell Nua does a fantastic job. He just cautions me to keep it even. Even when you feel good, keep it even because we still have a ways to go yet."

When the Red Sox announce all uniformed personnel prior to the Fenway faithful prior to the opener, Butterfield will be thrilled to run out to the first-base line with the rest of the team. He only hopes that he can also run -- or jog -- to the other baseline for the start of the bottom of the first inning.

"If I'm not there, I'll shoot for April 4. If I'm not there April 4, I'll shoot for April 5," said Butterfield.

*** CSNNE.com**

Rodriguez Hurls Four Shutout Innings In Red Sox' 6-2 Loss To Astros

CSN Report

Worried about David Price's absence from the Red Sox starting rotation, at least temporarily? Eduardo Rodriguez may have eased some of those fears Friday.

Red Sox-Astros box score

Rodriguez pitched four shutout innings and allowed only two hits, with three walks and six strikeouts, in the Red Sox' 6-2 exhibition loss to the Astros. His ERA for the spring is now 2.08, which may speak to an overall improvement:

The Sox held a 1-0 lead when Rodriguez left the game, but they gave up the lead in the sixth as Joe Kelly allowed two runs. It completely got away from them in the seventh, when Noe Ramirez was tagged for five hits and four runs in one-third of an inning.

On the offensive side, Dustin Pedroia (now batting .381) and Sam Travis (.344) each had a hit, continuing their torrid springs.