

## ***The Boston Red Sox Sunday, March 19, 2017***

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

#### **Red Sox pound Twins**

Peter Abraham

SCORE: Red Sox 12, Twins 5

RECORD: 10-11-2

**BREAKDOWN:** Trailing, 4-0, in the first inning after Rick Porcello was roughed up, the Sox came back with 12 runs on 15 hits, six for extra bases. Pablo Sandoval was 2 for 4 with two home runs and four RBIs. Mitch Moreland drove in four runs with a pair of opposite-field doubles.

**THUMBS UP:** Deven Marrero, playing second base, saved a run in the fifth inning. With runners on first and second, he made a diving stop on a hot shot up the middle and flipped the ball to second for a force . . . Blake Swihart was 3 for 5 with an RBI and caught eight innings.

**THUMBS DOWN:** Porcello allowed five runs on nine hits and three walks over four-plus innings. His fastball command was erratic in the first inning and improved from there.

**MEDICAL REPORT:** Hanley Ramirez had what was described as a “breakthrough” with his throwing program and could soon be ready to play first base. He has been limited to designated hitter because of right shoulder stiffness . . . David Price (left elbow) remains in a strengthening phase.

**AROUND THE BASES:** Dustin Pedroia was 2 for 2 before coming out of the game for a pinch runner in the fourth inning. He is 11 of 23 (.435). None have been extra-base hits but most have been line drives . . . Through Friday, The Red Sox were averaging 9,822 fans for home games in the Grapefruit League. The Yankees were second at 8,766.

**NEXT GAME:** The Sox play the Twins again on Sunday, this time at JetBlue Park. The 1:05 p.m. game will be on NESN and WEEL-FM (93.7). Drew Pomeranz faces Justin Haley, a Red Sox prospect the Twins selected in the Rule 5 draft.

#### **Pablo Sandoval impresses, but Red Sox still cautious**

Peter Abraham

**FORT MYERS, Fla.** — Pablo Sandoval hit two home runs on Saturday, no-doubters that nearly sailed beyond the back wall of Hammond Stadium as the Red Sox beat the Minnesota Twins, 12-5.

Through 13 spring training games, Sandoval is hitting .333 with a .965 OPS and 11 RBIs, tied for the team lead. He also has played what is at least adequate defense at third base and has run the bases with determination.

But when asked if Sandoval had earned the starting job at third base, manager John Farrell chose his words carefully.

“He’s done everything you’re looking for,” Farrell said. “Again, I don’t see any reason to say he’s the guy. Just continue to go play and we’ll put the best team on the field on a given day.”

After two seasons of being disappointed in Sandoval, the Sox aren't going to cut him any breaks based on spring training. He has two more weeks to prove he belongs on the field.

But Saturday did provide evidence that Sandoval can still generate the bat speed that once made him a feared hitter with the San Francisco Giants.

He had a two-run homer in the fourth inning against Jake Reed, a minor league reliever. Sandoval connected again in the sixth off Nick Tepesch, who has some big league experience.

"I feel good. I've been working every day in the cage on the things that I've been doing with the hitting coach," Sandoval said. "I've been working real hard to get to this point. I feel free with the swing. That's my key point."

A notorious bad-ball hitter, Sandoval needs a quick swing to make up for his lack of strike zone discipline.

"I feel good at home plate. I think I got my bat speed back. That's one of the things that I'm looking for in the cage," he said.

"It's a lot different. The pitch inside, to get to the point and put the bat on the ball, it's a good result."

Look for Sandoval in the lineup against Baltimore and lefthander Wade Miley on Monday. He has worked on his righthanded swing but not had many chances to use it in games, going 1 for 5.

"The limited number of at-bats righthanded, it's been encouraging," Farrell said. "It's been better than any time in the three years now that he's been here. I think that's a product of just being in better athletic condition."

Sandoval is even mastering public relations.

"First, I don't think about myself. I think about my fan support, my teammates, the team. That's the thing, I have to do a lot of things for them," he said.

"Up and downs in my career, you have to prove a lot of things right now. That's what I have been doing. I'm going continue doing [that] for the fans, my teammates who have respect for the game. I'm happy but I'm not satisfied."

Thorny issue

The Red Sox traded for righthander Carson Smith before the 2016 season, intending for him to pitch the eighth inning. He was injured in spring training and appeared in only three spring training games before needing elbow surgery.

Smith isn't expected back until June. That prompted the Red Sox to obtain righthander Tyler Thornburg from the Brewers to handle the eighth.

Thornburg appeared in two spring training games and was hit so hard the Sox shut him down to start a program of strengthening his shoulder.

Thornburg threw in the bullpen on Saturday and is tentatively scheduled to pitch in a minor league game on Tuesday. From there, the schedule would give him time to get in four games before the season starts.

Is that enough to avoid the disabled list?

"We'll have to take a look as he gets through those final appearances here in camp," Farrell said. "He's got to get better than he's been. He would tell you the same. Got to get him back to the mound. Got to get him comfortable in his delivery."

If Thornburg isn't ready, Farrell would turn to Joe Kelly as the primary setup man.

Farrell believes Kelly can handle that role. He's also enthused about how Heath Hembree has pitched.

#### Backup plan

At the start of spring training, the Sox intended to use left fielder Andrew Benintendi as their center fielder on the days Jackie Bradley Jr. doesn't start. But that has shifted.

Farrell is now leaning toward Chris Young as the primary backup in center.

As was the case with Mookie Betts last season, the Sox believe Benintendi will benefit at the plate by focusing on one position defensively.

"Let's face it, Andrew has had a handful of games against that wall [in left field at Fenway Park]. The more he can get adept at that . . . there are multiple factors but that's the primary one," Farrell said.

In addition to playing the wall, the Sox are working with Benintendi on having a quicker release when he throws to bases.

Young, 33, started only three games in center field last season and nine for the Yankees in 2015. But he was an everyday center fielder earlier in his career.

### **A Cubs-Red Sox World Series? It's not too early to talk about it**

Nick Cafardo

#### A Cubs-Red Sox World Series?

It's not too early to beat the drum. Both teams are favorites to win their division and league. This should have happened last season in what could have been a World Series bonanza, but the Red Sox were upset by the Indians, who had no business beating the Sox given the pitching matchups were squarely in Boston's favor.

So we'll see 1) how hungry the Red Sox are to get where they should have gone a year ago, and 2) how motivated and hungry the Cubs are to get back to the Series and win two in a row.

Theo Epstein is certainly intrigued by a matchup of the teams he's led to titles, but he's not about to join the drumbeat for the Red Sox.

Epstein knows you don't evaluate a team based on spring training record. Instead, attitude, effort, execution, and wanting to compete and win are the important barometers this time of year.

Epstein sees those things in his Cubs.

Epstein understands the difficulty in repeating. Despite his best efforts, the 2005 Red Sox won 95 games after breaking the Curse but were swept out of the Division Series by the White Sox. His 2008 Red Sox also won 95 games following a World Series title but again couldn't get back to the Series, losing a seven-game ALCS to the Rays.

"In '08, if one pitch goes the right way we'd have been back in the World Series," Epstein said from Cubs camp in Mesa, Ariz., last week. "The thing about it is, after you win you get pulled in so many different directions the following year. It's hard to keep that focus, but so far I think our team has been able to do that."

Epstein certainly has learned from those seasons. Can he repeat this time? Some things will be out of his control, but the Cubs remain a very talented team, one that will try to avoid complacency. This is where Joe

Maddon comes into play. He's considered one of the best managers in baseball, and now we'll see just how good he is.

Can we dream of a Cubs-Red Sox World Series? The oddsmakers, the analytic experts, and the media all think it's possible.

"It's a long spring training so we decided to ease guys into it," Epstein said. "I've been impressed with [our] attitude. We've given our young prospects a chance to play and they've been great. [Outfielder] Eloy Jimenez and [second baseman] Ian Happ, [third baseman] Jeimer Candelario have been the talk of camp. There's been no complacency whatsoever. They seem hungry again."

Sure, key players such as Jason Heyward, Ben Zobrist, Wade Davis, Jake Arrieta, and Brett Anderson haven't played well this spring. But does it matter? Probably not. What you don't want is guys having problems getting back into the flow.

Like with any team, change is inevitable. Epstein believes too much tinkering isn't good, but not enough tinkering could be a death sentence. The Cubs landed somewhere in the middle this offseason.

David Ross retired. He may have been the backup catcher, but he was also the team leader, Jon Lester's personal catcher, and a guy everyone loved.

"I think we have enough leadership on our team now that we can absorb David's loss in that area," Epstein said. "I think David taught other guys how to be leaders by example and we have that now."

Surely he was speaking about Anthony Rizzo, Lester, John Lackey, Kris Bryant, and Addison Russell.

Epstein also has an arsenal of younger players as trade material if he needs to upgrade the starting rotation — he could probably put together a package to land the Rays' Chris Archer, who cut his teeth under Maddon in Tampa Bay.

We know Epstein loves to make deals and he isn't shy about giving up prospects, especially redundant ones. Candelario is blocked by Bryant at third base, for instance.

There'll be reliance on Davis to close and stay healthy. There'll be pressure for Bryant to repeat his MVP season. We will see whether Zobrist, who turns 36 in May, can still perform at a high level. Ditto for Lackey, who's 38.

There's also much discussion on whether Heyward can make a difference offensively. He won a Gold Glove in right field last season and his interpersonal skills are off the charts, but he hit just .230 last season, with seven homers, 49 RBIs, and a .631 OPS, and he needs to provide much more than that with a \$28 million salary in 2017.

The Cubs, who have won 200 games over the past two seasons, could continue to dominate the NL Central. The Pirates and Cardinals will be competitive but likely not strong enough to unseat the best team in baseball.

The Cubs come to Fenway April 28-30 for an interleague series. It could be a prelude to the inevitable.

## LONG ODDS

The big thing for Clint Hurdle and Pittsburgh will be pitching.

So how do you deal with being in the same division as the monster Cubs?

It's certainly crossed Pittsburgh manager Clint Hurdle's mind.

“That’s what sport is all about,” said Hurdle, a philosopher and motivator. “The ability to go out and play on grass. You don’t play on paper. It wasn’t a ‘monster’ until two years ago. There’s a lot of stories that were written over the winter. You’re writing about different players now. It’s a different story in Boston now.

“To compare things in life is one of the most dangerous things you can ever do. Be who you are. Know who you are and like who you are. That will get us to the place where we need to go. We know what kind of market we play in.

“We know what it takes to win baseball games. We believe we can do that against anybody. They haven’t lost that edge. In fact, three [straight] trips to the playoffs and to not make it [last year] left a bitter taste in the mouths of all those men. We have to do something about it and it starts in spring training with work and commitment and this is the only sport where you use the word ‘sacrifice.’ That’s where we are.”

The healthy returns of ace Gerrit Cole and right fielder Andrew McCutchen will be a big help.

Hurdle pointed out that a “healthy Cole and McCutchen has led to pretty successful seasons in Pittsburgh.

“Look at Cole’s numbers and look what McCutchen could do in same three-year window. That’s pretty impressive. We believe in human analytics as well as analytics. We believe in our men.”

The Pirates received numerous inquiries on McCutchen this offseason, teams feeling they could get a discounted version of the hitter who had a .917 OPS between 2013-15. Last year was the first season he’s struggled.

Hurdle decided to alter his outfield alignment this season, moving McCutchen from center to right, Starling Marte from left to center, and Gregory Polanco from right to left.

But the big thing for Pittsburgh will be its pitching. It has eight starters competing for five spots, but in reality the Pirates could surely use White Sox lefty Jose Quintana and they’ve been trying to trade for him.

“We had four starters with an ERA of over 5.00, so that was an outlier for us,” Hurdle said. “I’ve said it all along, when you have to use your bullpen as opposed to using it when you want to, it changes the whole dynamic of everything.”

Apropos of nothing

1. Ivan Calderon would have turned 55 on Sunday. I remember going to Puerto Rico in February of 1993 to do a story on Calderon, who had been acquired by the Red Sox from the Expos for Terry Powers and Mike Gardiner. The Red Sox were having problems getting in touch with Calderon after the trade. When I got to his seaside condo in San Juan, we sat and chatted and the phone was ringing off the hook. I said, “Ivan, I think that might be Lou Gorman trying to reach you.” He just dismissed it like, “OK, I’ll talk to them soon.” Calderon introduced me to cockfighting, which, so gruesome and bloody, left me unable to eat chicken for years. But he was an interesting guy. Sadly, he was murdered in 2003 at age 41, when two mobsters executed him at a bar in Loiza, Puerto Rico.

2. Just a feeling, but it looks to me that Ruben Amaro Jr. is going to manage in the majors someday. That would be quite a story, considering he’s been a player, a general manager, and a coach.

3. The WBC has been a smashing success on the field, with exciting games, stellar plays, and colorful players who have made it fun. If MLB could package this type of excitement for the regular season, baseball would be king. The tournament reached record crowds for the first round with 621,851 fans, a 34 percent increase over the previous high of 463,017 in 2013. The tournament hasn’t received much media coverage, however.

4. Speaking of the WBC, there’s a complicated compensation formula for the players, coaches, and managers. Proceeds first go to cover expenses of putting on the event. Expenses include prize money that is

distributed to the participating federations. From these funds, a portion is earmarked for the players. The balance is used to pay coaches and staff, and to support the growth of the game in their countries.

5. David Ross wanted to relax a bit after baseball, but he's been pretty busy. Ross is writing a book about the Cubs' historic season, has signed up to be an analyst for ESPN, is serving as a special assistant to Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein, and is participating in the current season of "Dancing with the Stars."

6. I've had too good of a time in Fort Myers ribbing great Red Sox fan William B. Gould over his role in Red Sox history. The Boston native and former Stanford law professor headed the National Labor Relations Board for President Clinton in 1994 when he nullified the free agency system major league owners had put into place during the players' strike. Before Gould's board struck down the system and required them to go back to the system that required six years of service time before free agency, Dan Duquette had signed John Wetteland, Sammy Sosa, and Kevin Appier. How would Red Sox history have been rewritten?

Updates on nine

1. Chris Tillman, RHP, Orioles — Baltimore is hoping to get Tillman back early in the season after he had a cortisone injection in his right shoulder Wednesday. The Orioles can ill afford a prolonged DL stint for their No. 1 starter, but they also want him right. Dan Duquette said he will not fill the void with anyone from outside the organization. Logan Verrett will likely get some starts in Tillman's place.

2. Derek Norris, C, free agent — Scouts I've spoken to generally agree that Norris should stick to the AL, where he can DH a little. "His defense isn't that good, but you could get away with 30-40 games behind the plate and some at DH. He doesn't hit like he used to either, but he's a guy who really cares and works really hard. He's a good leader on a team and for that reason he's someone you have to consider if you have a backup role up for grabs." Norris was cut by the Nationals last week. The Cardinals may have some interest.

3. Anibal Sanchez, RHP, Tigers — For a while this spring it sure looked as if Sanchez was in danger of losing his rotation spot. But in his last outing (four innings, five strikeouts vs. Braves) he showed some life again and now he's back in the mix. The Tigers owe Sanchez another \$21.8 million, between his \$16.8 million salary this season and his \$5 million buyout clause for 2018.

4. Kyle Kendrick, RHP, Red Sox — Just to clarify, Kendrick, probably the most impressive starting pitcher in Sox camp, has opt-outs on June 15 and Aug. 15. If he and his agent sense a major league opportunity elsewhere, he could take advantage.

5. Jason Heyward, RF, Cubs — Ex- Red Sox outfielder Darnell McDonald is the Cubs' mental skills coordinator, and he worked with Heyward this offseason on a new swing. Heyward went back to the swing he used when he hit well with the Braves. But Heyward is hitting just .156 this spring, and it appears he will be in a right-field platoon. That eight-year, \$184 million deal keeps looking worse.

6. Rich Hill, LHP, Dodgers — Hill said the last thing to come in spring training is his "fastball conviction, because that leads to better command for me." Hill and teammate Clayton Kershaw have struck up quite a friendship, with Kershaw in awe of Hill's curveball.

7. Brett Lawrie, 2B/3B, free agent — The Marlins are looking for a third baseman after Martin Prado injured his hamstring in the WBC. Lawrie, who had been playing somewhat out of position at second base for the White Sox, is rehabbing a lower-body injury and is probably not ready to sign anywhere. Lawrie's game went downhill fast in Chicago, but the feeling is if he's back at third base and his comfort level improves, it might get his hitting back on track.

8. Trevor Rosenthal, RHP, Cardinals — It's going to be interesting to see how the Cardinals use Rosenthal. Scouts who have seen him recently have been impressed with his velocity (99 miles per hour in his first start vs. the Twins last week) and repertoire. He could wind up in a middle-relief role.

9. Yadier Molina, C, Cardinals — Molina's five-year, \$75 million deal expires after this season and there's a tricky mutual option for 2018 at \$15 million. Molina is still very good at age 34, but would the Cardinals extend him beyond 2018, and would Molina walk away if he doesn't get the extension?

#### Extra innings

From the Bill Chuck files — "58-5-9. Consider that the combination to unlock the Hall of Fame for Adrian Beltre, who needs 58 hits for 3,000, five homers for 450, and nine doubles for 600. Reaching those milestones would put him in the elite company of Stan Musial, Hank Aaron, and Carl Yastrzemski, the only other members of the club." . . . Also, "To fully appreciate Mookie Betts's 2016 year for Boston, consider this: Only two players in Sox history accrued 300-plus total bases, 30-plus homers, and 25-plus steals in a single season — Jacoby Ellsbury in 2011 (364 TB/32 HR/39 SB) and Betts last season (359 TB/31 HR/26 SB) . . . Happy birthday, David Ross (40).

#### The biggest losers

Chris Archer of the Rays and James Shields of the Padres and White Sox each lost 19 games in 2016, the most since Darrell May also lost 19 in 2004, and nearly became the first 20-game losers since Mike Maroth lost 21 for the Tigers in 2003. A list of the biggest losers since 1950 — including three 20-game losers who ended up in the Hall of Fame:

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|                |      |               |       |
|----------------|------|---------------|-------|
| 1. Jack Fisher | 1965 | New York Mets | 8-24  |
| 2. Roger Craig | 1962 | New York Mets | 10-24 |

22

|                   |      |                       |       |
|-------------------|------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. Randy Jones    | 1974 | San Diego Padres      | 8-22  |
| 2. Steve Rogers   | 1974 | Montreal Expos        | 15-22 |
| 3. Bill Bonham    | 1974 | Chicago Cubs          | 11-22 |
| 4. Denny McLain   | 1971 | Washington Senators   | 10-22 |
| 5. Dick Ellsworth | 1966 | Chicago Cubs          | 8-22  |
| 6. Roger Craig    | 1963 | New York Mets         | 5-22  |
| 7. Robin Roberts  | 1967 | Philadelphia Phillies | 10-22 |
| 8. Art Ditmar     | 1956 | Kansas City Athletics | 12-22 |

#### The art of throwing batting practice — and how it helps the Red Sox

Peter Abraham

FORT MYERS, Fla. — It's still early in the season, so Victor Rodriguez's right arm feels strong. No bags of ice or ibuprofen tablets have been needed.

It won't last.

By the time the final game is played, Rodriguez will have thrown approximately 24,000 pitches of batting practice to Red Sox hitters. It's an underappreciated and largely anonymous task, but one critical to any baseball team's success.

Rodriguez is the assistant hitting coach of the Red Sox, a position he has held since 2013. Throwing batting practice is part of the job and Rodriguez is one of the best practitioners in the game. From 45 feet away, behind an L-shaped protective screen, he can throw fastballs over the plate or just a little inside or outside. Whatever the hitter prefers, he provides.

“Vic is the best thrower in the organization — ask anybody,” said Jackie Bradley Jr., who then proved his point by polling four teammates before a recent spring training game. “He can put the ball right where you want it. We all swear by him.”

For hitters, batting practice is the centerpiece of pregame preparations. It’s a way to get into a good rhythm or correct flaws in your swing. With the hitting coaches watching closely, a player may try to go to the opposite field with every swing or focus intently on hitting line drives.

The idea is to take what you accomplished in the afternoon into the game that night.

“You want to have a good round of BP for your confidence before the game,” first baseman Mitch Moreland said. “That is huge.

“I want the ball straight and in the zone at a good pace. Not too hard and not too soft. I’m not picky; I just want strikes. But some BP pitchers have a funky release, or their ball cuts. That can mess you up.”

Hitting coach Chili Davis assigns one of the batting practice pitchers to the same group of four hitters all season. The idea is to build up familiarity and comfort.

“You want a good routine for everybody,” said Davis, who is entering his third season with the Sox. “If the same pitcher is with them, he knows what they like, what they don’t like.”

Manager John Farrell occasionally throws BP, as do most of the coaches, with varying degrees of reliability. For every manager, part of putting together a coaching staff requires making sure there are enough good arms.

Rodriguez and Davis are regular throwers. Pitching coach Carl Willis often throws during early-afternoon optional workouts. First base coach Ruben Amaro Jr. is working to get better at it.

“Trust me, that’s easier said than done sometimes,” Farrell said. “It’s a skill being able to throw BP.”

The Red Sox have a deep rotation beyond their coaches. Bullpen catchers Mani Martinez and Mike Brenly take the mound almost every day.

Martinez, as quiet and unassuming as he is hard-working, has been with the team for 11 years. Brenly, the son of former major league manager Bob Brenly, was a minor league catcher for eight seasons before retiring in 2015 and joining the major league support staff.

Former minor league pitcher and coach Laz Gutierrez, who will be with the Sox all season as their mental skills coordinator, also will help out. That he is lefthanded is a bonus.

For home games, the Sox often call in Babson head coach Matt Noone, another lefty.

“It can be hard to find lefties,” Davis said. “We’re lucky we have a few.”

Davis learned to throw BP as a player by pitching to teammates. He was a designated hitter for much of his career but enjoyed pitching. Davis actually pitched in a game in 1993 as a member of the Angels and threw two scoreless innings against the Rangers.

“The manager asked me if I could go an inning,” said Davis. “I said, ‘Heck, I can go two.’ I was used to throwing. I’m pretty good, but I could be better. My shoulder gets sore sometimes.”

Rodriguez first learned how to throw batting practice as an amateur player in Puerto Rico. It was by necessity.

“We threw to each other all the time,” he said. “I would throw BP to my teammates. We didn’t have coaches to throw to us.”

For the 55-year-old Rodriguez, baseball has been his life’s work. He signed with the Baltimore Orioles in 1977 at the age of 15 and was sent to play in West Virginia in the lowest level of the minor leagues.

An infielder, Rodriguez played for 19 years with seven organizations. There were 11 major league games with the Orioles in 1984 and six more with the Twins in 1989, but that was it.

Rodriguez retired after playing in the minors for the Red Sox in 1994 and became a coach the following season. This will be his 21st season in that role. In all, he has spent 40 years in professional baseball.

At every stop on the coaching ladder, there were hitters who needed somebody to throw batting practice, and invariably it was Rodriguez who raised his hand to volunteer.

“I always liked to throw and I became good at it,” Rodriguez said. “As a hitting coach, you can get more accomplished by throwing to a hitter than talking to him. You pick up a lot of things when you pitch to them. Sometimes players just need a good round of BP. That helps them. Good BP is important.”

The four hitters Rodriguez had last season — Bradley, Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, and David Ortiz — all made the All-Star team.

“Vic gets you ready for the game,” Betts said. “If you need to work on something, he’ll make it easy to do that. He’s the best I’ve seen.”

When the Red Sox won the World Series in 2013, Rodriguez pitched to the entire starting lineup during the postseason. The players insisted on it.

“[Dustin] Pedroia said to me, ‘Do you want to win the World Series? You need to find a way to throw to us,’ ” Rodriguez said. “His hands weren’t feeling good and he wanted the ball in a certain place. By the end of the Series, I told David they had to win Game 6 because my arm was killing me.”

Counting spring training, Rodriguez will throw almost every day for eight months. Even rainouts are taxing as the players use the indoor batting cages to stay sharp.

Rodriguez estimated he throws 100-150 pitches a day, sometimes more. Add it up and you get tens of thousands of throws at roughly 70 miles per hour, all with a purpose.

To put that in perspective, San Francisco’s Madison Bumgarner led the majors with 3,791 pitches last season.

“I enjoy it, I really do,” Rodriguez said. “But ask me again in August.”

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

### **Steven Wright continues to impress post-injury**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — Make that five Grapefruit League hitless innings for knuckleballer Steven Wright.

With three more hitless frames in relief in the Red Sox’ 12-5 win over the Twins yesterday, Wright is finally making his long and grueling comeback from shoulder bursitis look nice and easy.

It's the day after he pitches that Wright has been most worried about, but those days have also started to feel good, he said.

With David Price not expected to be ready for Opening Day, Wright appears in line to crack the first rendition of the team's starting rotation.

"The bounceback has been good," he said. "(Yesterday), throwing three innings and another 15 pitches out of the bullpen, felt good throughout the entire time. It's encouraging the work we've been doing and we continue to do. It's definitely putting us in good position to be ready for Opening Day."

Wright is still a bit behind schedule, but with two weeks to go has just enough time to prepare himself. He's on the same five-day schedule as Rick Porcello, putting him in line to start the Sox' fifth game of the season (they have an off day after Opening Day), should the Sox decide to use him that way.

"It's really encouraging to see him throw as many strikes as he did," manager John Farrell said. "He came back in some counts. He threw a 3-2 knuckleball in one scenario. Quietly he continues to build up the pitch count and the innings.

"Even in his early bullpens, as he was executing his delivery more than anything without restriction, that's continued on, so it's been good to see him make the progress he has."

First things first

Hanley Ramirez "had a very good day" of throwing as he attempts to get ready to see his first game action on defense, Farrell said.

Ramirez has yet to be seen at first base in a Grapefruit League game.

"We feel like there's been a little bit of a breakthrough here," Farrell said. "We're anticipating that throwing to continue to progress and ramp up. The goal, obviously, is still to get him games at first base while in camp, and we're moving toward that.

"We'd love to get him a handful of games before we get out of here."

Porcello problems

If there's a silver lining to Porcello's difficult afternoon, it's last season.

The right-hander finished his 2016 spring training with a 9.77 ERA before going on to have his best career season and capture the American League Cy Young Award.

This spring, after he allowed five runs and nine hits in four-plus innings yesterday, his ERA is at 8.10.

Porcello, who will start on Opening Day, said his fastball command hasn't been sharp.

"Some mechanical things that it takes time to get consistent with," he said.

"So I've just got to continue to work on it and continue to get reps whether it's dry work during the week or my bullpens and then carrying it over into the game."

Throwin' Thornburg

Tyler Thornburg, who hasn't pitched since March 1, threw a bullpen session in front of the pitching coaches yesterday. He's scheduled to pitch in a minor league game on Tuesday and the Sox are still hoping he'll get enough Grapefruit League action to be ready for Opening Day.

Farrell said Thornburg needs to prove himself healthy and effective to earn the primary set-up role in the eighth inning.

“Oh, yeah, he’s got to get better than what he’s been,” Farrell said. “He’d tell you the same. We’ve got to get him back to the mound. We’ve got to get him back comfortable in his delivery. We can’t assume what has taken place last year is automatically going to happen. He and we have work to do to get back to that level.”

If Thornburg can’t go, Joe Kelly is likely to get the ball in the eighth.

“And I think there are other options here if Joe is not available,” Farrell said. “Heath Hembree has thrown the ball outstanding this camp. We feel like there’s depth in our bullpen. Tyler’s return to us certainly would and will be a needed boost to further deepen, particularly the right-handed power group. In the interim, if it’s not Tyler, yeah, Joe Kelly is the guy.”

### **Defense appears to be a growing strength for Red Sox**

Michael Silverman

Enough about the Red Sox’ pitching.

Let’s talk about their defense.

This is, after all, the beginning of the post-David Ortiz era, an epoch in which the Red Sox realize they cannot yet replace Ortiz’ thunder at the plate. Instead, they have opted to make up the difference in run production lost with run prevention gained.

Pitching is the favored child of the run prevention equation, the field general when it comes to spearheading the battle against opponents. But they cannot do it alone. What happens after batters make contact or reach base is just as important as the overall goal.

The Red Sox’ defense actually stands up quite well when placed under the spotlight. It should be better than last year, when it ranked among the top three in the American League. Only the infield glove work of shortstop Xander Bogaerts and first baseman Hanley Ramirez were noticeable drags on the overall defense.

Measurements of team and individual defenses continue to improve, so fair warning: If you still roll your eyes when “Ultimate Zone Rating” and “Defensive Runs Saved” get brought up and if you think fielding percentage and Gold Gloves are good enough, get out now.

According to FanGraphs’ UZR and DRS, the Red Sox overall defense ranked No. 4 and No. 2 in the league in those respective categories last season, among the AL elite with the Royals, Angels, Indians and Astros. The world champion Cubs were the clear MLB leaders by both standards last year.

So, why will the Red Sox’ defense be better this year? Let’s look at their defense, position by position, ranked unscientifically from strongest to weakest, to see why it’s not only good but also why it should improve:

- 1. Second base, Dustin Pedroia — No need to dwell too long on the obvious. Pedroia had one of his best defensive seasons last year. Ranked No. 1 or tied for first among second basemen in the league in both UZR and DRS, Pedroia stood out among his peers and was the anchor to an infield defense that needed everything he gave.
- 2. Right field, Mookie Betts — It’s possible that we still underrate how good Betts is, and it’s his defense where we likely fall short. Last year was the converted infielder’s first full season as the team’s right fielder (while 2015 was his first full year as an outfielder), and he zoomed to the top at his position in the league. His Gold Glove Award validated what the advanced metrics showed. According to DRS, Betts

(a rating of 32) was the best defensive player at any position in both leagues, and by a huge margin over the next closest defender, Adam Eaton (22), now with the White Sox. By UZR, Betts was a little more mortal, ranking No. 5 overall. The point is, he's outstanding in right field.

- 3. Center field, Jackie Bradley Jr. — Last year, Bradley slipped a bit based on the defensive stats, but it's safe to say that he remains an elite center fielder. There is a good debate to be had about who's the best center fielder in the league — Kevin Kiermaier of the Rays and Kevin Pillar of the Blue Jays are the other contenders — but at least Red Sox fans have the pleasure of watching the three center fielders go at it nearly all season long within the AL East.

- 4. Catcher, Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon — Last year, the Red Sox' catching unit ranked tied with the Royals for No. 3 in the majors, a nod to Leon and Vazquez' caught-stealing success rate, framing and catching skillset. One more year removed from his Tommy John surgery, Vazquez' cannon of an arm already looks stronger and more accurate than last year. He should be even better, which will boost the team's strong standing at this critical position. Catching is most definitely a position at which the Sox can afford to slough off the weaknesses in the offense of Vazquez and Leon.

- 5. First baseman, Mitch Moreland — Ramirez redeemed himself in almost every way last season, especially at first base, where he proved to be far more capable and respectable than his disastrous tryout in left field in 2015. But let's not give him too much credit. The Sox' defense at first base placed them near the bottom of the league (11th via UZR, 14th by DRS). Ramirez produced negative UZR and DRS numbers. They weren't embarrassing or that far off from replacement level, but they weren't in the black, either. That's where Moreland comes in. The No. 1 first baseman in the league by DRS, and No. 2 by UZR in the AL last year with Texas, Moreland won a deserved Gold Glove and stands as the primary reason the Red Sox defense is going to take another step forward this season. His bat may play well in Fenway Park, it may not, but his defense makes him the poster boy for all that's good about the team's renewed emphasis on run prevention.

- 6. Left fielder, Andrew Benintendi — This ranking could be a bit high for Benintendi, who displayed misreads on both his throws and his routes to the ball last year but I'm betting big that he's the type who seldom makes the same mistake twice. He came up as a center fielder, so he still has to adjust to the different read on line drives and fly balls. I don't think it will take him long to make those adjustments. I'm probably unduly influenced by witnessing that remarkable catch he made at Tropicana Field in August, when he flipped over the left-field wall, but I'll wear that fanboy tag enthusiastically in this case.

- 7. Shortstop, Xander Bogaerts — I confess to being pretty surprised at how poorly Bogaerts ranked among his peers last year. In the AL, he placed dead last in DRS, and posted only the eighth-best UZR for shortstops. He had negative numbers for each statistic. Not good. In his brief career, he has never been ranked among the best defensively and he does not grade out to be one of the best. His play at this critical position deserves considerable scrutiny this year and in the coming years. Clearly, he's got room to improve.

- 8. Third base, Pablo Sandoval — If Sandoval can carry into the season the quick feet and hands he's been displaying this spring, there's going to be a lot of airwaves and bandwidth expended marveling over how good he is at the hot corner. He'll be almost unrecognizable when compared to how he played the position his first two seasons (as if last year even counted, which it didn't) but let's not get carried away. He was never that good in San Francisco — in six seasons with the Giants, he had just one good season defensively, while the others were below average to poor — and he's 30 years old now. He's never looked this good with the Red Sox, but he's also never been that good of a defender in his career.

A left-handed compliment

Ever wonder why manager John Farrell says a tall, gangly left-hander such as Henry Owens needs more time to blossom than other pitchers? I did. Why don't right-handers get the same leeway? Is there something anatomically different about left-handers?

The answer is all about supply and demand.

“It’s not left- or right-handed specific,” Farrell said. “The old adage is, ‘If you’re left-handed and have a heartbeat, you’ve still got a chance.’ It’s the scarcity of it, which leads to guys finding it later in their career.

“There are fewer left-handed pitchers, so they get more opportunity and a longer opportunity. The right-handers are probably already released, because there are more coming. Lefties get a longer leash. And everyone always says, ‘if he ever finds it, it’s a lefty you’ve never had.’ ”

“If they’re healthy and they have stuff, they’re going to keep getting opportunities.”

Exceptions for the elite

Another source of wonder: Do the Red Sox place new, elite starters such as David Price last year and Chris Sale this year on the same rigorous shoulder program that newbies such as Joe Kelly, Rick Porcello and Tyler Thornburg were required to follow through a long adjustment period.

The short answer is no, and for good reason.

Said Farrell: “Here’s where someone came in with a track record of performance like Sale or Price has. There was a balance there, so we say, ‘Let’s preserve what he’s done.’ ”

That still involves meeting in the middle between what worked for the pitcher in the past with how it’s done on his new team.

“You don’t want to disrupt their personal routine,” Farrell said. “You look at players physically, mentally and fundamentally and you have to find the right blend. And then it maybe becomes a little bit more of an education process to incorporate things more. The end goal is the same — keeping guys strong and on the field as much as possible.”

Besides routine, each new pitcher, no matter how established, also brings with him a personality, sometimes a strong one. It can be tricky at times to find the right balance between the old ways and the new way.

“That’s why their inclusion in the process is key,” Farrell said. “You can’t just blanket everyone and say, ‘Hey, this works for everyone here.’ You’re working with the personality of the individual pitcher.”

Moreland easing way in

Moreland is happy with how smooth his transition to the Red Sox is going. A member of the Texas Rangers organization since his draft year of 2007, Moreland is spending his first spring training in Florida after training in Arizona with the Rangers.

A native of Mississippi, Moreland has found the locale switch and humidity boost easy to take.

“Oh, yeah, this is great,” he said. “This feels like home to me.”

The new organization does not feel that much different.

“They’re pretty similar in a lot of ways — real loose, everything’s fun, you get your work in but at the same time you’re focused on that work,” Moreland said. “The whole staff, the group of guys has been great, accepting me really quick. It’s been a fun camp so far and I feel like I’ve adjusted pretty easily.”

Moreland plans to keep his left-handed swing the same, even though he moves from the short right-field porch of the Rangers’ Globe Life Park to an opposite situation at Fenway.

“We haven’t really changed anything, just try to stay on top of it and fine-tune some stuff and believe in what we’re doing,” said Moreland.

Moreland will not be more tempted to hit the ball to the opposite field and try to aim for the Green Monster, although he said, “I think it will help as far as just being comfortable going that way and sticking with that middle and other-way approach. I’ll try to stay with my approach, keep it simple and put the barrel on the ball.”

### **Two-homer game latest evidence that Pablo Sandoval could be in position to help Red Sox this year**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — The first one flew off his bat and landed somewhere over the stands in deep right-center field, but the second one left the park with even more whiplash.

“Both,” Pablo Sandoval said when asked which home run felt better off the bat.

With about two weeks to go until Opening Day, the once beleaguered Red Sox third baseman continues to look brand new — with only a few signs of rust after a nearly yearlong layoff.

“I think I got my bat speed back,” he said yesterday after lifting his Grapefruit League average to .333 with the 2-for-4 effort in a 12-5 win against the Minnesota Twins.

After starting pitcher Rick Porcello was interviewed in the visiting clubhouse at the Twins’ Hammond Field, reporters flocked to the other side of the room to wait for Sandoval. Seemingly unaware of who the reporters were waiting for, first baseman Mitch Moreland approached and said pointedly, “Pablo hit two home runs today. You guys should talk to him.”

“It’s awesome,” Porcello said of Sandoval’s rebound. “Couldn’t be happier for him. He’s really been swinging well and playing hard. He looks great.”

Sandoval has been providing his teammates plenty to root for so far this spring, spraying the ball to all parts of the outfield with a left-handed swing that looks mostly sharp and a right-handed swing that remains in question. With 13 hits, including three homers, and 11 RBI, he’s already surpassed last spring’s totals, though he has struck out 11 times in 39 at-bats, an indication that his aggressiveness at the plate has not changed.

Sandoval’s second homer came off a fastball located near eye level.

Manager John Farrell isn’t concerned by the wild approach, another indication that the Red Sox aren’t asking Sandoval to remake himself into an MVP candidate, but instead are simply hoping he can contribute.

“Given the hitter he’s been throughout the course of his big league career, we’re not looking to change him,” Farrell said. “We’re looking to have him perform at his previous levels. We know there is going to be a certain strikeout-to-walk percentage in there. And given who he has been, that’s kind of what we’re looking for. We’re not looking for him to become passive or look to walk. We’re looking for him to be aggressive within a defined (strike) zone.”

The two-homer day wasn’t enough to reward Sandoval by officially naming him the starting third baseman.

“He’s done everything you’re looking for,” Farrell said. “But I don’t see any reason to say he’s the guy. Just continue to go play and we’ll put the best team on the field on a given day.”

Sandoval, visibly slimmer and recovered from the shoulder injury that ended his 2016 season after three games, has been playing with the mobility of an energetic rookie on defense. He said his performance this spring is “a lot different” than last year, when he was slow both in the field and at the dish.

“A lot quicker in my hands,” he said.

Don’t mistake confidence for arrogance just yet. Sandoval seems to have a clear understanding that, given his disappointing numbers since signing a five-year, \$95-million contract prior to the 2015 season, he could find himself back on the bench in a heartbeat if he doesn’t perform.

“You work hard to get to this point, but I’m going to keep maintaining the work to maintain all the process you can do in the field,” he said.

Has Sandoval at least proven to himself that the reshaping of his body over the last nine months is paying dividends?

“First, I don’t think about myself,” he said. “I think about my fans and teammates. This is a team I have a lot of things to prove for them because of the up and downs in my career. You have to prove a lot of things right now. That’s what I’ve been doing and I’m going to continue doing it for the fans and my teammates who have respect for the game.”

But Sandoval’s not satisfied.

“Satisfied? I will be when we win the World Series this year,” he said. “That’s my main goal. That’s when I’ll be satisfied when all the goals I have in mind are completed. I’m happy now, but I’m not satisfied yet.”

### **For Red Sox hopeful Mike Olt, the comeback attempt is nothing compared to his mother’s**

Jason Mastrodonato

FORT MYERS — To say goodbye to his mother, Beverly — and to hear her say goodbye back — made this year’s departure for spring training a special moment for Mike Olt.

A February signing by the Red Sox, the onetime top prospect who has played 135 games over portions of three injury-marred major league seasons reported to spring training at JetBlue Park last week hoping to make a comeback that doesn’t compare in difficulty to the one made by his mother the 12 months.

Last offseason, his mother suffered a brain aneurysm, the ballooning of a blood vessel in the brain that can be life-threatening.

“She had a very slim chance of making it for a long time,” said Olt, 28, a former UConn standout and first-round draft pick by the Texas Rangers in 2010. “It was a constant battle. It brought our family a lot closer. Everyone had to come together to stay strong.”

Watching his mom lose her ability to speak, among other symptoms, left Olt wondering how he had let himself become so overwhelmed by his own comeback attempt.

For the first few years of his professional career, Olt had it easy. After hitting .318 with an 1.060 OPS and 23 homers in 64 games his junior year, the sweet-swinging third baseman dove into the Rangers organization, where he tore apart minor league pitching for three seasons, culminating with a 2012 Triple-A season in which he hit 28 homers with a .977 OPS. He made his big league debut that August, playing in 16 games.

But in the offseason, Olt was hit in the head by a pitch during winter ball in the Dominican Republic.

“I really never felt comfortable again for another two years,” he said Friday. “It was frustrating. . . . And we really kept focusing on my eyes, thinking my eyes were messed up.”

Olt had hoped to win a spot on the Rangers roster out of spring training in 2013, but his hitting suffered greatly as he tried batting with blurry vision. He hit just .213 in Triple-A before the Rangers traded him to the Cubs as part of the deal that sent Matt Garza to Texas.

“It turns out it had nothing to do with my eyes,” Olt said. “It more had to do with the concussion side effects. I talked to a lot of people and all their answers were, it took me two years to get back after a concussion. And it really did take me pretty much two full years.”

The Cubs gave Olt a chance in 2014, when he hit 12 homers in 89 games, but his .160 average and 100 strikeouts in 258 plate appearances left him feeling disappointed.

When Joe Maddon became Cubs manager in 2015, Olt earned a share of the starting gig at third base, but he broke his wrist that April, paving way for the Cubs next third baseman, Kris Bryant.

“When I first got drafted, it kind of came a little too easy,” Olt said. “It was a real smooth path to the big leagues. Not that I took that for granted, but then some injuries happened. Until I figured out really how to handle adversity like that, it was going to take me awhile to get through it.”

Olt has bounced from the Cubs to the White Sox to the Padres in the last two years, failing to catch on. But when the Red Sox caught wind that the Connecticut native was going to take some swings in Massachusetts in January, the team’s Northeast regional scout, Ray Fagnant, was excited.

“I remember seeing him in high school, in Legion (ball), following him to UConn,” Fagnant said. “I liked him a lot. We all did. The nature of the draft, we just didn’t get him.”

Fagnant hadn’t seen much of Olt the past few years. Besides the concussion, Olt also has suffered a broken collarbone, a broken wrist and plantar fasciitis. But Fagnant wasn’t sure of the specifics of Olt’s injury history. He decided not to ask him until after the workout.

“He moved around very well,” Fagnant said. “I said, ‘Mike, you’re moving as well as I’ve ever seen you. What was the most recent injury?’ Because I wanted to go in unbiased. He told me about the foot issue. I would have never guessed that. He did a really good job that day. He looked completely healthy. And he’s always been a workout fanatic.”

Olt is slated to begin the year in the minors. Without much depth at third base — Pablo Sandoval is likely to win the starting job, but the Red Sox have no sure thing behind him — there’s always the chance that Olt could push himself into position for a major league call-up at some point this season.

The Red Sox believe he has a plus-arm capable of handling the tasks at third, and they’re also considering using him in left field.

Said Fagnant: “There is still upside where he can still be in the big leagues one day. He’s always had bat speed. I’m happy we signed him.”

Olt is hopeful, but not too worried about where he plays. His mom’s battle has taught him to relax.

“It was just amazing to sit back and see her fighting that battle when I’m stressing out about little things,” he said. “It just didn’t make any sense. It made me have fun again, just enjoy every moment I have. She’s doing really well. Last offseason, I left and she still wasn’t talking. This year, she’s doing everything. She remembers everything. All the stuff the doctors said she wouldn’t be able to do, she’s been able to do. So it’s a really cool comeback for her. She can’t wait to get into the (grand)stands. It’ll be great for her.”

Beverly gave her son a hug and said goodbye to him out the door of his Branford, Conn., home last week.

Now it's his turn to make a comeback.

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

### **Proliferation of curveballs the latest evolution of cat-and-mouse game between pitchers and hitters**

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Baseball not too long ago was an east-west game. Sinkers and cutters would dart this way and that, dancing on the edges of the strike zone, moving as much from side to side as they did up and down. Pitchers like Roy Halladay and Cliff Lee could expand the strike zone beyond its outer edges, as Tom Glavine had before them, with precise location rather than exaggerated movement. Mariano Rivera pioneered the use of a cutter that broke bats rather than missing them.

The game evolved. Hitters learned to go the other way with pitches on the outside corner. The strike zone tightened on the edges and creep downward. Hitters began to launch home runs at a rate the game hadn't seen since it moved to snuff out artificial enhancers. Strikeouts became the primary means of run prevention, especially for hard-throwing relievers.

And now the curveball -- an old-fashioned pitch more about missing bats than missing barrels -- is back in fashion.

"The game has become a north-south game," Red Sox pitching coach Carl Willis said. "You're seeing more success with guys elevating fastballs, pitching at the top of the zone and above as opposed to pounding the ball down, down, down. The curveball allows you to change eye level. It creates depth in the pitch, a change of plane. The game has been cyclical over the past however many years. We're seeing a north-south type of pitching come back."

Of pitchers who threw at least 50 innings in 2011, 41 threw curveballs with at least 20 percent of their pitches. By 2016, there were 59 pitchers who threw curveballs with at least 20 percent of their pitches -- and 10 who did so with at least 35 percent of their pitches.

Ex-Red Sox lefty Rich Hill has become the archetype, a pitcher who uses his curveball first and his fastball as a secondary pitch. Drew Pomeranz went to the All-Star Game with San Diego with a curveball-heavy repertoire -- and then came to Boston in exchange for one of the game's best pitching prospects. Rick Porcello, David Price, Craig Kimbrel and Tyler Thornburg all utilize curveballs to varying degrees with the Red Sox.

A generation of hitters has grown up cultivating swings to cover the entire width of the plate. The most well-grounded hitters in the game can hit the ball the other way as easily as they can pull it.

Where those hitters can be vulnerable is when pitches change vertical planes, especially off power fastballs that stay true.

Kimbrel and Thornburg both throw power curveballs off upper-90s fastballs. A pitch that starts high might be a fastball that stays high -- or it might be a curveball that dives into the strike zone. A pitch that starts down in the strike zone might be a fastball that stays in the strike zone -- or it might be a curveball that dives into the dirt.

"Typically, if you throw low fastballs for strikes and you play curveballs off that, they have to respect the fact that you're pounding the knees," Thornburg said. "If you throw fastballs up, they have to respect the fact that you're going to try to elevate -- but they also have to respect the fact that it might be a curveball they lay off that ends up a strike."

"I'll throw high fastballs and throw (curveballs) off it," Pomeranz said. "It's hard for them to distinguish what's what. The arm speed is key. It can come in looking like a fastball, and they make up their minds -- and it breaks down."

There's also more margin for error with a pitch that moves as much as a curveball does. Even a curveball that ends up in the middle of the plate started somewhere else -- maybe even up and out of the strike zone.

Unlike a sinker or cutter, which the best pitchers can throw to a pinpoint location, a curveball only needs to change the eye level of the hitter to be effective.

"Especially with two strikes, I'm not trying to throw a curveball to a location," Thornburg said. "That's not as important as the tight spin."

And some pitchers can throw curveballs to a location. Pomeranz throws his curveball as often as he throws his fastball because he has that ability, as Hill does as well.

"I find a little spot I've picked out, back door, right over the corner of the plate, and I hook it right around that corner," he said. "When I want to go back door, I go for that. There's one little bitty spot that's hard for a hitter to get to -- and it's a strike."

A curveball pitcher still can be vulnerable when he can't disguise the pitch out of his hand. The loopyest curveballs go up before they go down, a tell-tale pop upward that betrays the intentions of the pitch almost immediately. Chris Sale ditched his curveball in favor of a slider at Florida Gulf Coast because he couldn't disguise his curveball at its release point with his sidearm delivery.

The only way to make a hitter think a curveball in the dirt is a fastball at the knees is to make the two look identical until the last possible minute. That's easier to do with a cutter or slider than with a curveball -- but it's still possible to do with a curveball.

"I'm trying to throw everything out of the same arm slot, the same release point," Porcello said. "I'm trying to make everything look like a fastball. Whatever it is, if it's a breaking ball or a fastball, in my head, all that way through my windup, all the way to the point where I'm getting ready to release the ball, I'm thinking fastball. That helps me stay close and not try to manipulate the ball too much and let my natural arm action take over."

"The ball comes out on the same plane and then the depth occurs, as opposed to it coming up out of the hand and it being more of a parabola," Willis said.

But if a pitcher can disguise the pitch, he can utilize expand the strike zone up and down the way the best pitchers of a previous generation did so side to side. Hitters trained to cover the width of the strike zone now must cover its depth as well.

### **Pablo Sandoval homers twice in Red Sox win**

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- John Farrell still doesn't want to name Pablo Sandoval his Opening Day third baseman.

With the way Sandoval is hitting, why change anything?

Sandoval hit a pair of home runs in a 12-5 win for the Red Sox over Minnesota at Hammond Stadium on Saturday, his second and third home runs of the spring. The first went to right-center field on a mid-90s fastball from Twins minor-league righty Jake Reed, the second to straightaway right field on an elevated fastball from journeyman righty Nick Tepesch.

"He's done everything you're looking for," Farrell said. "I don't see any reason to say he's the guy. We'll put the best team on the field in a given day."

Still, Farrell had to acknowledge that he was impressed. Sandoval now is slugging .615 in spring training, albeit with 11 strikeouts against just one walk.

"Today is probably as good as you're going to see from Panda," the manager said.

"I think I've got my bat speed back," Sandoval said.

Minnesota tagged Red Sox starter Rick Porcello for five runs in his four innings of work -- all in the first inning. Still, the 8.10 ERA that Porcello has compiled in his three starts this spring is lower than the 9.77 ERA he compiled last spring before he won the Cy Young Award.

Knuckleballer Steven Wright tossed three hitless innings behind Porcello. He threw 41 pitches in the game and another 15 in the bullpen after his outing, Farrell said. The aim will be to get him to 65-70 pitches in his next start and 85-90 in his start after that, which would allow him to start April 7 in Detroit as scheduled.

"I felt good the entire time," Wright said. "It's encouraging that the work that we've been doing and continue to do is putting us in a good position."

### **With reps at third base, Boston's Steve Selsky going back to his roots**

Brian MacPherson

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Steve Selsky came out of high school in Los Angeles as a third baseman. He expected he'd play third base when he got to the University of Arizona.

It didn't take long for Selsky to realize he needed a new position if he was going to get on the field. His bat allowed him to get on the field right away -- he slugged .541 as a freshman -- but he had too much traffic ahead of him at third base.

"We had three shortstops playing short, third and second -- and, actually, the guy playing first played short in high school," he said. "We had four shortstops on the infield. Our lineup was just better if I was in the outfield."

And so Selsky went to the outfield, where he spent the vast majority of his time in the Cincinnati Reds' minor-league system. The only time he got back into the infield was when he played first base -- including 68 games there at High-A Bakersfield in 2013.

What Selsky has discovered with Boston, however, is the opposite of what he saw as a 19-year-old at Arizona. The Red Sox have a crowded outfield and some question marks on the infield.

That Selsky hits from the right side only gives him a better chance to win a job as a reserve behind Mitch Moreland and Pablo Sandoval. He hit a hanging breaking ball for a double to center field in Saturday's game, improving his slugging percentage this spring to .548.

And so Boston has had Selsky start to take ground balls and make throws not just at first base but at third base, too.

"The key is just getting reps," he said. "You obviously don't get to hang out at the hot corner too much. I do get a decent amount of reps at first, so it's not foreign to be close to the hitter like that. It's just on the other side of the diamond, making the throw across the diamond, that's where the reps are going to come in handy."

Boston manager John Farrell said that he anticipates having Selsky play third base in a game in the not-too-distant future to see how he looks there.

"He's an interesting guy because of the versatility," Farrell said. "There's a quality righthanded bat there. He can do a number of things."

Selsky hit .280 with a .363 on-base percentage and a .459 slugging percentage at Triple-A Louisville last season, earning his first call-up to the major leagues with Cincinnati. He hit .317 with a .386 on-base percentage at Louisville the year before that. But the Reds designated him for assignment in January to clear space on their 40-man roster, and the Red Sox pounced.

Selsky was getting on the second of his two flights from Los Angeles to Cincinnati to take part in the Reds Caravan -- with scheduled stops in Kentucky and West Virginia -- when he got word the Red Sox had claimed him on waivers. He didn't get the call in time get off the plane he was on, but he did turn right around upon arrival in Cincinnati and head back to California.

"I left at 7 in the morning and got back at like 12 at night," he said.

The Reds Caravan proceeded without him.

Relief pitcher Tyler Thornburg threw a bullpen session Saturday, the second time he'd pitched off a mound since his last Grapefruit League appearance on March 1.

The next step for Thornburg, Farrell said, will be in a minor-league game Tuesday -- part of the process of easing him back into action. That would give the Red Sox nine games over 10 days to get the ex-Milwaukee relief pitcher the appearances he needs to be ready for the regular season to start -- probably as many as four.

"Without getting too far ahead of ourselves," Farrell said, "that's the framework of what we have right now. We'll have to take a look as he gets to the final appearances here in camp."

Boston backed off on Thornburg and focused him on his shoulder-strengthening program after an ugly start to spring training. He yielded seven earned runs while recording just four outs in his first two appearances. What the Red Sox want to see is the pitcher who compiled a 2.15 ERA with 90 strikeouts in 67 innings pitched for the Brewers last season.

Hanley Ramirez had what Farrell called "a little bit of a breakthrough" in his own shoulder work, Farrell said, but continues to be held out of games, at least as a first baseman. Ramirez has thrown on the side but has not yet been permitted to throw to bases in defensive drills.

Boston signed Mitch Moreland in order to be able to shift Ramirez more often into the vacant designated-hitter role. Ideally, however, Moreland would sit and Ramirez would play first base against lefties, allowing Chris Young to serve as the designated hitter.

Whether Ramirez plays any games at first base before the end of spring training remains to be seen. He has hit .235 with a .333 on-base percentage and a .471 slugging percentage in 34 at-bats this spring, including two doubles and two home runs.

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

**Steven Wright hurls 3 scoreless innings, Rick Porcello struggles again**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox starting pitchers Rick Porcello and Steven Wright both got work in against the Minnesota Twins today. Wright, who came out of the bullpen, pitched fantastic.

The knuckleballer hurled a scoreless and hitless sixth, seventh and eighth inning. He allowed one walk and struck out one.

Wright pitched in his first spring training game March 13. He and the Red Sox took it slow as he worked his way back from last year's shoulder injury.

He has pitched 5 scoreless and hitless innings in his two outings combined.

Wright went 13-6 with a 3.33 ERA in 24 starts last year. He suffered his shoulder injury diving back into second base as a pinch runner at Dodger Stadium on Aug. 5.

Porcello -- the reigning AL Cy Young who will start on Opening Day 2017 -- didn't fare as well Saturday. He went 4 innings, allowing five runs, all earned, on nine hits and three walks while failing to record a strikeout.

He has struggled in his past two starts and he has a 8.10 ERA in three starts this spring. But does it actually matter?

He went 0-2 with a 9.77 ERA in four starts last spring training, then had a brilliant regular season.

### **Pablo Sandoval, Boston Red Sox 3B, crushes 2 homers vs. Twins, batting .333 this spring**

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox third baseman Pablo Sandoval has blasted two home runs today vs. the Minnesota Twins and now has hit three long balls this spring training.

Both his homers today came from the left side of the plate, his strong side. The Red Sox won 12-5 on the road.

Sandoval crushed a solo home run to right-center field against Twins right-handed pitcher Jake Reed in the fourth inning:

Sandoval also hit a three-run homer off righty Nick Tepesch in the sixth inning to put Boston ahead 12-5.

Sandoval is 13-for-39 (.333 batting average) with three home runs, two doubles, 11 RBIs, six runs, one walk and 11 strikeouts this spring.

He also hasn't made an error in 25 total chances at third base.

### **Hanley Ramirez might play field in spring games in next 2 weeks after 'breakthrough'**

Christopher Smith

Hanley Ramirez is dealing with a right shoulder issue that has prevented him from appearing in any games at first base during spring training.

The slugger has appeared in 13 games at DH this spring. He's 8-for-34 (.235 batting average) with two homers, two doubles and seven RBIs.

Ramirez has said all along the shoulder problem doesn't affect his hitting, just his throwing.

Red Sox manager John Farrell told reporters today in Fort Myers that Ramirez is making progress.

"He had a very good day yesterday and again this morning with some of the manual patterns and resistance he's going through with his arm," Farrell said, via WEEI.com. "We feel like there's been a little bit of a breakthrough here. We're anticipating that throwing to continue to progress and ramp up. The goal obviously is still to get him games at first base while in camp, and we're moving towards that."

Ramirez has taken grounders at first base despite not working on his throwing.

"It's not like he's been completely absent of any work on the field," Farrell told reporters. "The throwing component to it, whether it's the front end of a double play, that's not been there. Game reactivity, game reaction, speed, we'd love to get him a handful of games before we get out of here."

The plan is for Ramirez to DH against right-handed starters and to play first base vs. left-handed starters. Mitch Moreland will start at first base vs. right-handed starters.

But if Ramirez can't play any first base at the beginning of the season, then Moreland likely will start at first base vs. both lefties and righties.

Moreland, a left-handed hitter, had reverse offensive splits in 2016. But he historically has hit better vs. right-handed pitchers than left-handed pitchers.

### **Joe Kelly to pitch 8th inning if Tyler Thornburg isn't ready for start of season**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox righty Tyler Thornburg, who hasn't pitched in a spring training game since March 1, threw a bullpen today.

The setup man, who the Red Sox acquired from the Milwaukee Brewers in the offseason for Travis Shaw and Mauricio Dubon, had difficulty adjusting to Boston's shoulder strength and conditioning program.

The Red Sox shut him down after he struggled in his first two spring training outings, allowing nine runs, seven earned, on seven hits and two walks while striking out two in 1 2/3 innings. He also hit one batter.

Thornburg has dealt with some elbow issues in his past. But he also has typically struggled during spring training throughout his career.

Red Sox manager John Farrell told reporters today in Fort Myers that Joe Kelly will pitch the eighth inning if Thornburg isn't ready for the start of the season.

Kelly has pitched 6 innings this spring, allowing two runs, both earned, on four hits and four walks while striking out six. The righty adjusted quite well to the bullpen after moving there from the starting rotation during last season when he allowed just one run in 14 innings. He struck out 20, walked three and held opponents to a .180/.226/.240/.466 slash line.

## ***\* The Portland Press Herald***

### **Relievers are waiting for a call to join the Red Sox bullpen**

Kevin Thomas

Left-hander Robby Scott entered Friday's exhibition game against Houston in the fifth inning, with no outs and a runner on first.

An infield single and a walk loaded the bases.

So the streak of impressive outings seemed over for Scott, ever-the-underdog as he tries to make the Boston Red Sox roster.

But after a force at home for the first out, Josh Reddick, the newest Astro, popped to third.

Evan Gattis, who had an .886 OPS against left-handers last year, struck out swinging on a full-count curveball, ending the threat.

Scott, 27, who pitched two seasons with the Portland Sea Dogs, is still impressing. He is your poster child for unheralded pitchers wanting to emerge from the Hadlock Field bullpen and reach Fenway.

“I got that taste of it,” Scott said in January. Scott was called up by Boston for seven games at the end of last season. He allowed no runs, six hits and two walks, and struck out five in six innings.

But no guarantees this season.

“They always talk about it being tough to get there, but it’s harder to stay,” said Scott, who in seven innings this spring has allowed no runs, six hits and five walks to go with five strikeouts.

Scott is competing with Fernando Abad for the second lefty spot in the bullpen (after Robbie Ross). Abad has been pitching for the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic.

The competition is not on a level playing field because Abad has no minor league options left and Scott does. The Red Sox easily can send Scott to Triple-A Pawtucket and summon him when needed.

That could be the case for a lot of Red Sox relievers stashed in the minors. Boston brought in several former, current and future Sea Dogs relievers to major league spring training camp.

There’s Scott, along with Kyle Martin and Luis Ysla, both promoted to the 40-man roster during the offseason. Among the nonroster invitees are Chandler Shepherd, Ben Taylor, Austin Maddox and Jamie Callaghan.

Besides Scott, Martin may be the most advanced, having spent all last season in Pawtucket. Command of his low-90s fastball is key in setting up his killer change-up.

Ysla, a lefty with a mid-90’s fastball, is on the 40-man roster because of his potential. He shouldn’t see the majors soon and even could wind up back in Portland, depending on how the bullpen shuffles shake out.

“From a raw ability standpoint, (Ysla is) really impressive,” said Ben Crockett, the Red Sox director of player development.

Shepherd mixed his pitches well in Portland (1.80 ERA) last year and hit some bumps in Triple-A (3.71). He could surprise this season.

Taylor and Maddox were midyear promotions to Portland last year, and Callaghan spent last season in Salem. They should make for a strong Sea Dogs bullpen, along with Ty Buttery (converted from a starter last year) and Williams Jerez, the Red Sox left-handed project who’s no longer on the 40-man roster.

That’s a whole lot of arms with potential of reaching the majors. Scott, the former independent league unknown, can show the way.

WHILE BULLPEN depth is building for the Red Sox, reliable arms in the rotation are another issue. Boston has five starters, not including David Price, who is likely to start the year on the disabled list. After that the next option appears to be Kyle Kendrick, 32, the former Phillies and Rockies starter signed to a minor league contract.

Three left-handed starters, expected to be reliable backups, are not so reliable – Henry Owens (15.95 ERA in four appearances this spring), Brian Johnson (5.40 in three games) and Roenis Elias (strained rib muscle). The fact Owens and Johnson were among the first players cut from major league camp was telling.

TWO FORMER Sea Dogs were selected in the Rule V draft last December and have a chance of sticking in the majors all this season. Right-hander Justin Haley was drafted by the Padres, then traded to Minnesota. He's pitched 82/3 innings in six games (10 hits, five earned runs, seven strikeouts, two walks).

Outfielder Aneury Tavarez was drafted by Baltimore and is batting .273/.636 OPS in 33 at-bats. He is 6 of 6 in stolen- base attempts ... Another former Sea Dog, infielder Sean Coyle, is on a minor league contract with Baltimore. He has only nine at-bats in major league spring training games, but has been impressive with two doubles and two home runs.

THE WHITE SOX have drawn interest locally after acquiring two of Boston's best prospects in the Chris Sale deal. Yoan Moncada is batting .265/.918 in 34 Cactus League at-bats. He has 13 strikeouts and no walks. The switch hitter continues to be impressive batting left (.292/1.080, two home runs, a triple and double) and struggles on the right side (.200/.500, one double). ... Right-hander Michael Kopech made a relief appearance Friday in a game against the Cubs. In two innings he allowed one hit and struck out five.

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

### **Comeback bid: Pablo showing pop, perseverance**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- The results are indeed impressive from Pablo Sandoval, as the third baseman walloped a couple of towering home runs in Saturday's 12-5 win over the Twins to continue his strong Spring Training.

But what is more important is the way it is happening.

Sandoval is whipping his bat through the zone with the type of force resembling what he would do during his hot streaks with the Giants.

"Today is probably as good as you're going to see from Panda," said Red Sox manager John Farrell. "Another encouraging day. I would just describe it as another building block in his Spring Training to get back to previous levels. It's just good to see him playing the game as consistently as he is."

Sandoval's first homer was a rocket off a 95-mph fastball by righty Jake Reed. He is hitting .333 with three home runs and 11 RBIs in Grapefruit League action.

"I feel good at home plate," said Sandoval. "I think I got my bat speed back. It's one of the things that I'm looking for in the cage, trying to do the work I have to do to have good at-bats in the game."

Though it seems clear that Sandoval will start at third base for the Red Sox on Opening Day, Farrell isn't ready to proclaim it just yet.

"He's done everything you're looking for," Farrell said. "I don't see any reason to say he's the guy. Just continue to go play. We'll put the best team on the field on a given day."

As Sandoval enters his third season with Boston, it looks like he is finally showing them the player they thought they were signing.

"Very different," Sandoval said of how he feels this spring. "A lot quicker in my hands. You work hard to get to this point. I'm going to keep maintaining the work to maintain all the processes of what you can do in the field."

After taking just six at-bats in 2016 due to left shoulder surgery, Sandoval is hungry to prove he can give the Red Sox some payoff on the five-year, \$95-million contract that was signed in November '14.

"First, I don't think about myself," said Sandoval. "I think about my fans and teammates. This is a team I have a lot of things to prove for, because of the ups and downs in my career. You have to prove a lot of things right now. That's what I've been doing, and I'm going to continue doing it for the fans and my teammates who have respect for the game. I want to continue doing all the things I'm doing on the field."

### **Kelly could cover for Thornburg in eighth**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- When the Red Sox acquired righty reliever Tyler Thornburg from the Brewers in December, the hope was that he would emerge as the primary option in the eighth inning.

But given the struggles Thornburg had in his two Grapefruit League appearances, and the fact that he's still building arm strength, manager John Farrell could go with Joe Kelly in the eighth to start the season.

"And I think there are other options here if Joe is not available. Heath Hembree has thrown the ball outstanding this camp," said Farrell. "We feel like there's depth in our bullpen. Tyler's return to us certainly would and will be a needed boost to further deepen the right-handed power group. In the interim, if it's not Tyler, yeah, Joe Kelly is the guy."

Kelly has made a strong transition to the bullpen, which started this past July at Triple-A Pawtucket. As for Thornburg, he threw a side session on Saturday, and Farrell hopes to get him into a Minor League game by Tuesday. A Grapefruit League game might follow in a couple days.

Thornburg pitched for the Red Sox on Feb. 25 and March 1, giving up seven earned runs over 1 1/3 innings.

"Oh, yeah, he's got to get better than what he's been. He'd tell you the same," said Farrell. "We've got to get him back to the mound. We've got to get him back comfortable in his delivery. We can't assume what has taken place last year is automatically going to happen. He and we have work to do to get back to that level."

### **Hanley close to getting reps at first base**

Ian Browne

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Hanley Ramirez hasn't played first base this Spring Training due to right shoulder woes, but he could be close to breaking out his mitt.

"He had a very good day yesterday, and again this morning with some of the manual patterns and resistance he's going through with his arm," said Red Sox manager John Farrell. "We feel like there's been a little bit of a breakthrough here. We're anticipating that throwing to continue to progress and ramp up. The goal, obviously, is still to get him games at first base while in camp, and we're moving towards that."

Ramirez is projected to start at first base against lefties this season while serving as designated hitter against righties. Mitch Moreland will play first against right-handers.

Would Farrell like to see Ramirez play a certain number of games at first base in Spring Training?

"I would love there to be the most possible, but we'll put him out when he's first-ready," said Farrell. "He still continues to do drill work and take ground balls at first base. It's not like he's been completely absent of any work on the field. The throwing component to it, whether it's the front end of a double play, that's not been there. Game reactivity, game reaction, speed, we'd love to get him a handful of games before we get out of here."

Though Ramirez was not in the lineup on Saturday, he has been getting regular at-bats at DH, batting .235 with two homers and seven RBIs.

"He feels good, physically, swinging the bat," said Farrell. "He's in a good place, offensively, but the complete player is what we're still striving to accomplish."

### **Sox rack up runs behind Sandoval, Moreland**

Rhett Bollinger

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- Pablo Sandoval hit two homers, driving in four runs, and Mitch Moreland added a pair of two-run doubles to lift the Red Sox to a 12-5 win over the Twins on Saturday at Hammond Stadium.

Sandoval hit a solo homer as part of a five-run fourth before crushing a three-run homer in the five-run sixth. The third baseman has three homers this spring.

"I feel good," said Sandoval. "I'm working every day in the cage on little things I've been doing with the hitting coach. I've been working real hard to get to this point to feel free in my swing."

Minnesota jumped out to an early lead, as right-hander Rick Porcello struggled, allowing four runs in the first before settling in. Joe Mauer had an RBI single before Max Kepler drove in two runs with a triple and scored on a wild pitch.

"I wasn't executing pitches well," said Porcello. "Settled in and definitely got better as the game went on. Overall, I'd like to be a lot more consistent with fastball command."

The Red Sox struck back with two runs in the second against right-hander Ryan Vogelsong, who is competing for the fifth spot in Minnesota's rotation. Blake Swihart and Dustin Pedroia each had RBI singles in the second.

"I feel like I made some good adjustments, but things got out of whack there a little bit with two outs in the second," said Vogelsong, who allowed two runs on four hits and two walks over three innings. "I know what I am now. I'm a command guy. I know my velocity is going to get there. It's been this way the last couple years. I'm trying to get ahead and make them put the ball in play, but today there was a bunch of foul balls."

Knuckleballer Steven Wright, who is projected to be in the rotation for the Red Sox, was impressive with three scoreless innings of relief. Boston took the lead with a five-run fourth against Minor League relievers Jake Reed and Trevor Hildenberger. Sandoval started the rally with a deep homer to right-center before top prospect Andrew Benintendi tied the game with an RBI groundout.

Hildenberger relieved Reed and promptly gave up an RBI single to Mookie Betts and a two-run double to Moreland.

Twins second baseman Brian Dozier, who homered on Friday, went 3-for-3 with a double, while Moreland, Pedroia and Swihart each had two hits for Boston. Moreland's second two-run double came in the sixth off right-hander Nick Tepesch. Tepesch also served up Sandoval's three-run homer.

Red Sox Up Next: Left-hander Drew Pomeranz makes his second start of Spring Training in Sunday afternoon's 1:05 p.m. ET home game against the Twins on MLB.TV. Closer Craig Kimbrel will get an

inning. Lefty reliever Robby Ross Jr. will also see action. Hanley Ramirez should be back in the lineup at designated hitter after getting Saturday off.

Twins Up Next: The Twins travel up the street to JetBlue Park for the 12:05 pm. CT start against the Sox on MLB.TV. Rule 5 Draft pick Justin Haley faces his former organization as he tries to compete for a spot on Minnesota's roster. Haley's most likely role will be as a reliever, but he'll continue to get stretched out so the Twins can see what they have in him.

## **\* *WEEI.com***

### **What Should We Make Of Pablo Sandoval?**

Rob Bradford

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Pablo Sandoval is hitting the stuffing out these spring training baseballs.

The third baseman's latest Grapefruit League triumph came Saturday afternoon when he notched two more hits, both home runs. He now has three round-trippers for the spring, with two of them most likely representing the furthest hits of any Red Sox player this month.

Sandoval is now hitting .333 with a .965 OPS in his 39 at-bats, while making plays on defense he would have no chance at a year ago. He's also running the bases like we haven't seen since joining the Red Sox, beating out close plays at first on a few occasions that would have been outs last spring training.

Oh, and he still weighs a lot less when getting beat out for the third base job last season.

And, guess what? He's also saying all the right things, as was evident after the Red Sox' 12-5 win over the Twins Saturday.

"First, I don't think about myself," Sandoval said. "I think my fans and teammates. This is a team I have a lot of things to prove for them because up and downs in my career. You have to prove a lot of things right now. That's what I've been doing and I'm going to continue doing it for the fans and my teammates who have respect for the game. I want to continue doing all the things I'm doing on the field."

But this whole deal is far from being punctuated. That's why when given the opportunity to hand Sandoval the starting third base job after Saturday's win, John Farrell wouldn't walk through that door.

"He's done everything you're looking for," the Red Sox manager said. "I don't see any reason to say he's the guy. Just continue to go play. We'll put the best team on the field in a given day."

Yes, Sandoval has checked off all the boxes ... except one.

Through no fault of his own, the switch-hitter still hasn't really been tested against left-handed pitching. He has been sitting at six at-bats vs. southpaws to date, notching a single hit.

And while there has been some optimism about how his swing has looked hitting righty, there really can't be any kind of leap of faith, particularly considering half of those at-bats have resulted in strikeouts.

Perhaps there will be an about-face from the 2-for-41 horror show Sandoval presented hitting righty against lefties the last time he was a full-time player, in 2015. But that is clearly one part of the resurgence we can't define.

And if you think a lack of exposure during spring training isn't a big deal, remember that Hanley Ramirez got no more than a handful of fly balls in game action during spring training before being thrown into left field during the regular season. How did that work out?

“We’ve got a lefty coming at us on Monday in Wade Miley. There’s going to be an opportunity there,” Farrell noted. “The limited number of at-bats right-handed, it’s been encouraging. It’s been better than anytime in the three years now that he’s been here. That’s a product of just being in better athletic condition.”

There doesn’t seem to be a doubt that Sandoval will start at least the first three games of the season, all of which figure to be against Pittsburgh right-handed starters. The question will come when the Pirates bring in lefty relievers to turnaround the third baseman.

In these last two weeks it will be up to Farrell to uncover if Josh Rutledge will be the better option in those situations.

“Today is probably as good as you’re going to see from Panda,” Farrell said. “Another encouraging day. I would just describe it as another building block in his spring training to get back to previous levels.”

## **\* *CSNNE.com***

### **Two HRs For Sandoval In Red Sox' 12-5 Rout Of Twins**

CSN Staff

Pablo Sandoval hit two homers and drove in four runs and Mitch Moreland had a pair of two-run doubles to lead the Red Sox to a 12-5 spring training victory over the Minnesota Twins on Saturday in Fort Myers, Fla.

Opening Day starter Rick Porcello allowed all five Twins runs on five hits and three walks in four innings as his spring training ERA rose to 8.10. Knuckleballer Steven Wright worked three hitless innings of relief in his second appearance of the spring for the Red Sox.

Sandoval, who has slimmed down and won the third base job after missing almost all of last season following left shoulder surgery, is hitting .333 and hit his second and third homers of the spring. Moreland, a left-handed hitter expected to eventually split time at first base with Hanley Ramirez, is hitting .310 with 11 RBI this spring.

Blake Swihart, competing for a catching job but expected to be start the season at Triple-A Pawtucket, went 3-for-5 and is hitting .370.

The Red Sox and Twins meet again Sunday at 1:05 at JetBlue Park. Saturday's game was at the Twins park, Hammond Stadium.

### **Hanley Back At First Base? 'Moving Towards That,' Says Farrell**

CSN Report

Hanley Ramirez has yet to play a game at first base for the Red Sox in spring training, but John Farrell hinted Saturday that could be coming soon.

Ramirez, limited to DHing because of a sore right shoulder that kept him from throwing, had what the Red Sox manager called "a little bit of a breakthrough" as he was working in drills at first base on Friday and early Saturday.

“He had a very good day yesterday and again this morning with some of the manual patterns and resistance he’s going through with his arm,” Farrell told reporters Saturday, per WEEI.com's Rob Bradford. “We feel like there’s been a little bit of a breakthrough here. We’re anticipating that throwing to continue to progress

and ramp up. The goal, obviously, is still to get him games at first base while in camp, and we're moving towards that."

With two weeks until Opening Day, time is running short to get Ramirez, who moved to first last season and handled the position surprisingly well, back up to speed at the position.

In the meantime, left-handed hitting veteran Mitch Moreland (hitting .280 this spring) and right-handed hitting prospect Sam Travis (.344, three homers, 10 RBI) are holding down the spot.

"We'll put him out when he's first ready," Farrell said. "He still continues to drill work and ground balls at first base. It's not like he's been completely absent of any work on the field. The throwing component to it, whether it's the front end of a double play, that's not been there. Game reactivity, game reaction, speed, we'd love to get him a handful of games before we get out of here."

The shoulder injury kept Ramirez from playing for the Dominican Republic in the World Baseball Classic. He is hitting .235 this spring but in the past has had better numbers as a DH (.331 career BA, 1.014 OPS) than as a position player. "I'm feeling better," Ramirez said. "It's a day-to-day thing. Day by day."

## **\* *NESN.com***

### **Pablo Sandoval, Mitch Moreland Will Be Key Parts To Red Sox's Offense**

NESN Staff

The Boston Red Sox could have a prolific offense during the 2017 season.

And that offense put on a show Saturday during a 12-5 win over the Minnesota Twins.

Third baseman Pablo Sandoval hit two home runs and notched four RBIs, while first baseman Mitch Moreland had a pair of doubles and also drove in four runs.

Hear NESN's Tom Caron and Steve Lyons break down the performance by Sandoval, Moreland and the rest of the Red Sox in the "NESN Sports Today" video above, presented by People's United Bank.