

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, April 20, 2017***

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

#### **Red Sox bullpen in dire need of some relief**

Nick Cafardo

TORONTO — Rick Porcello's seven innings of work even in defeat finally helped the Red Sox' overworked bullpen.

Let's face it, other than Chris Sale's consistent work deep into games the 9-6 Red Sox' biggest issue has been the lack of innings from their starting rotation, placing a strain on the bullpen.

Although Brian Johnson's first major league win Tuesday night was a feel-good story after he missed most of 2016 with anxiety issues, the reality is that he went five innings and allowed four runs. The bullpen had to work overtime. If this keeps up, Matt Barnes, who showed signs of wear and tear on Tuesday, will be washed out by late May.

Porcello deserved a better fate, with two errors accounting for three unearned runs in the Sox' 3-0 loss to the Blue Jays. It was the first time Porcello has really looked like the reigning Cy Young winner this season.

We figured Porcello would take a downturn from last season, just a natural and predictable occurrence. To win a Cy Young, everything has to go just about perfect for you. He not only pitched consistently outstanding all last season, he got plenty of run support.

Porcello finally got back to being that sinker-ball guy, inducing 14 ground-ball outs.

Overall, the Red Sox bullpen has been better than expected, but overuse can quickly alter the results. They have amassed more relief innings (49) than any team in the American League East, and second overall in the AL only to the Los Angeles Angels.

It's not a sustainable pace, and one the Red Sox need to slow down. If it does slow down it means their starting pitchers are doing their job. If not, they obviously have a starting pitcher issue.

Steven Wright is a key guy in that respect. Last season he pitched deep into games. He pitched well in his last outing, picking up the win in a 4-3 victory over Tampa Bay on Marathon Monday. It came on the heels of a disastrous outing in a 12-5 loss to Baltimore last Wednesday in which he couldn't get out of the second inning. Wright, a bullpen saver last season, proved to be a detriment to the bullpen that time.

Drew Pomeranz also needs to pitch deeper into games by reducing his pitch count and pitching more to contact. It was impressive that Pomeranz struck out 10 in his last outing, but it came over 4 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings after he had thrown 103 pitches.

Suffice to say, the Sox will need more than Sale to get them deep into games.

Eduardo Rodriguez, who missed Tuesday's start while on paternity leave, must also get deeper into games. Rodriguez returned to the team Wednesday and was available out of the bullpen for a maximum of four innings.

This "dream rotation" was supposed to alleviate the problem of bullpen overuse, with three guys who could get them at least seven innings every time out. Well, that hasn't occurred yet. In fact, the Red Sox put the

brakes on David Price's throwing program for 48 hours. So it appears Price's debut will be delayed even longer, which will put even more stress on the pen and, certainly, on a guy like Pomeranz.

Pomeranz could either be the bullpen's best friend or worst enemy. Even if he becomes more economical, will the Red Sox seek to curtail his innings later in the season? They don't know the answer to that question. Pomeranz has had elbow issues and we saw him fade over the second half of last season after he was traded from the Padres.

The potential good news is that both Tyler Thornburg, who was acquired from the Milwaukee Brewers in the offseason, and Carson Smith (rehabbing from Tommy John surgery), who was acquired from the Mariners two years ago, could be a part of the Sox bullpen by June. That will create some roster decisions, or it could be the right guys at the right time — if anyone among the Joe Kelly-Heath Hembree-Barnes group gets hurt.

By then, who knows?

Red Sox manager John Farrell thinks if he can get 900 innings out of his starters, then the bullpen will be preserved. He says he is concerned about the early workload, which is why he planned on having Rodriguez available for bullpen duty.

Ideally, the Red Sox would like to duplicate last season in terms of innings pitched. The Sox were 28th in bullpen innings last year with 470 $\frac{1}{3}$  and a 1.29 WHIP. They won the East title with those numbers. In 2013, they were 27th in innings pitched with 470 innings and miniscule 1.31 WHIP. In 2007 they threw 447 bullpen innings for a 1.21 WHIP.

So those are the areas they'd like to stay within. To have thrown 48 innings in 14 games takes them beyond their comfort zone. They are on pace for 555 innings, which would be a major problem.

"We've leaned on our bullpen quite a bit," said pitching coach Carl Willis. "We're going to right the ship soon because our starters will start getting us deeper into games. Our guys have a track record and history of doing so. Our bullpen has been tremendous where we've been able to hold things steady while our offense comes back to win games. Hopefully, our starters can give them a rest.

"We can't continue to get the number of innings out of our guys and we all know that," Willis said.

It's funny how The Plan never seems to work out, or takes a while to develop. When the Sox acquired Sale, it meant this was going to be a team dominated by starters and the bullpen wouldn't have to work too hard. That may still happen, but it's taken longer than expected and the bullpen could soon be feeling it.

### **Rick Porcello receives no help as Red Sox get blanked in Toronto**

Peter Abraham

TORONTO — Rick Porcello kept his sinker down, threw strikes and got the Toronto Blue Jays to hit a series of groundballs on Wednesday night.

That reliable formula led to his winning the Cy Young Award last season. This time it produced a disappointing loss. Consecutive errors in the second inning led to three unearned runs, enough for the Blue Jays to beat the Red Sox, 3-0.

Facing a last-place team that had won two games, the Red Sox couldn't advance a runner beyond second base and snapped a four-game win streak. It was the first time they were shut out this season.

Porcello (1-2) allowed six singles over seven innings, struck out five with one walk and threw 76 of 110 pitches for strikes. It wasn't close to enough.

“I thought he deserved better fate than the way this one turned out,” Sox manager John Farrell said. “He got his sinker back down at the bottom of the strike zone.”

Porcello has relied on a sinker throughout his career and has come to accept that groundballs find holes, sometimes in bunches.

“It’s part of the game,” Porcello said. “You pitch to contact, those sort of things are going to happen. You can’t predict where they’re going to hit the ball.”

Porcello didn’t do anything wrong in the second inning but found himself in a hole.

Troy Tulowitzki led off with a routine groundball to third base. Pablo Sandoval gloved the ball then fired it over the head of first baseman Mitch Moreland.

It was Sandoval’s third error in 12 games.

“It put too much on the ball,” he said. “I should have made that play.”

Sandoval has started to hit — he’s 6 of 11 the last three games — but his fielding remains unpredictable.

“I think there’s been at times better range,” Farrell said. “There’s been times where there’s been some plays that, quite frankly, should be made. Tonight was an example of that.”

Russell Martin followed with a groundball to first base that got through Moreland and rolled down the line. Tulowitzki went to third and Martin to second.

Farrell thought Moreland, who won a Gold Glove last season, got an “odd bounce” off the artificial turf.

Porcello struck out Justin Smoak but Darwin Barney grounded a ball up the middle, driving in two runs. Shortstop Xander Bogaerts made a diving attempt at the ball but it was out of his reach.

With two outs, groundball singles by Kevin Pillar and Ezequiel Carrera scored Barney.

“You give a team extra outs, we’re probably going to pay for it and we did,” Farrell said.

As Porcello labored trying to correct the mistakes of his teammates, Blue Jays starter Francisco Liriano eased his way through a Red Sox lineup that produced 15 hits on Tuesday.

The Sox had one hit and struck out six times in the first four innings. One of the strikeout victims was Mookie Betts, which represented a bit of news.

It was the first regular-season strikeout for Betts in 129 plate appearances dating back to Sept. 12. Liriano got him swinging at a slider on the outside corner in the fourth inning.

It was the longest streak of plate appearances without a strikeout for a major league player since Juan Pierre had 147 in a row in 2004 and the longest streak for a Red Sox player going back to 1975 when Denny Doyle went 159 plate appearances.

Betts wasn’t remotely upset his streak ended.

“It’s just an out for me,” he said.

The Red Sox threatened in the sixth inning when Andrew Benintendi and Betts had one-out singles off Liriano. Blue Jays manager John Gibbons didn’t take any further risks with Liriano. He went to righthander Joe Biagini and Hanley Ramirez grounded into a double play on the second pitch.

Porcello was at 101 pitches when he started the seventh inning. Kevin Pillar (6 of 9 in the series) singled with one out and stole second. But Porcello got Carrera on a fly ball to right field and struck out struggling Jose Bautista to end the inning and his night.

“That was a typical performance that Rick delivered so many times last year,” Farrell said. “From his performance, good to see him get back on track.”

Porcello allowed 14 earned runs on 25 hits over 16⅔ innings in his first three starts. That made the loss somewhat of a positive sign.

“It was much, much better today,” Porcello said. “I had a lot better command of the sinker. It was a good step in the right direction.”

The Sox got two runners on in the eighth inning against Jason Grilli. Sandoval singled before Benintendi drew a walk with two outs. But Betts grounded out to shortstop.

The Sox will have Chris Sale on the mound Thursday afternoon with a chance to win the series. He is 1-1 with a 1.25 earned run average in three starts. Sale will oppose Aaron Sanchez.

### **Jon Lester not scheduled to pitch against Red Sox**

Peter Abraham

TORONTO — For the first time since the Red Sox traded him in 2014, Jon Lester will be back at Fenway Park later this month. But he won't be pitching.

The Chicago Cubs made a change to their rotation on Wednesday that will keep Lester out of the series against the Red Sox April 28-30.

Lester is now scheduled to start against the Cincinnati Reds on Friday, then in Pittsburgh on April 26.

Lester has not faced the Red Sox since he was traded to the Oakland Athletics on July 31, 2014. His last game at Fenway Park was six days prior to the deal.

The Cubs are off on Thursday and again on April 27. That allowed manager Joe Maddon to reconfigure the rotation.

“If you don't have the off days, you cannot do it,” Maddon told reporters in Chicago. “Things can be changed once again. We don't know that. For now, you just make your best guesses.”

Lester is 36-21 with a 2.74 earned run average in 78 starts since the Red Sox traded him to the Athletics for outfielder Yoenis Cespedes. The lefthander was 19-5 with a 2.44 ERA last season, helping lead the Cubs to their first World Series championship since 1908.

Through three starts this season, Lester has given up two earned runs over 18 innings.

Jake Arrieta and John Lackey are lined up to start the first two games for the Cubs at Fenway. The starter for April 30 could be Brett Anderson or Kyle Hendricks.

The Red Sox have a day off Monday but will not change their rotation, according to manager John Farrell. That would have Steven Wright, Eduardo Rodriguez, and Rick Porcello facing the Cubs.

The Red Sox could skip one of their starters and pitch Chris Sale in the final game of the series. But Farrell said his preference would be to keep the rotation in order.

“I think it’s important that we give our guys the extra day of rest at various points. If something happens to make us go in a different direction, we’ll address it at that point,” the manager said. “It’s a long season . . . we have to take advantage of those days when available.”

#### Rodriguez returns

Rodriguez cut short his paternity leave, traveling here from Miami to be available in relief.

Rodriguez could have taken up to three days off but agreed to return and add depth to what has been an overworked bullpen. The Red Sox had discussed the possibility before Rodriguez left the team for the birth of his son.

“We appreciate him coming back,” Farrell said.

Brian Johnson, who filled in for Rodriguez on Tuesday and picked up his first major league win, was optioned back to Triple A Pawtucket.

Rodriguez remains scheduled to start in Baltimore on Sunday.

“He’s very comfortable with that,” Farrell said.

#### Price slows pace

David Price’s rehabilitation program, which was picking up speed last week, has clearly slowed.

Price played long toss again on Wednesday then threw 20 pitches with “good intensity,” according to Farrell. Price is now scheduled to throw two simulated innings in the bullpen in Baltimore on Friday.

The lefthander threw 45 pitches in the bullpen at Fenway Park last Saturday. Farrell said at the time that the next step would be for Price to face hitters, but that has been delayed for at least a week.

According to Farrell, Price did not have any setback and is “building strength” in his arm. Price said on Tuesday night that he feels fine.

Price first injured his elbow on Feb. 28. Seven weeks later, it remains unclear when he will return to the rotation.

#### Bradley gets closer

Jackie Bradley Jr., who turned 27 on Wednesday, started in center field for Triple A Pawtucket at Charlotte. He went 1 for 3 with a pair of walks and broke a scoreless tie with his solo homer in the fifth inning of the PawSox’ 4-0 win. The Sox plan to activate him off the disabled list on Friday in Baltimore. Bradley, who is out with a sprained right knee, will have a workout day on Thursday . . . Infielder Josh Rutledge was the designated hitter for Pawtucket on Wednesday. He went 0 for 3 with a walk and a run scored. His minor league rehabilitation assignment will take some time, as the Sox want him to get defensive work at first base, third base, and shortstop. Rutledge has been out all season with a strained left hamstring . . . Righthanded reliever Tyler Thornburg, who is on the DL with a shoulder injury, has yet to progress beyond long toss. Thornburg has not pitched off a mound since March 24 . . . Xander Bogaerts was 2 for 5 with a run scored batting leadoff on Tuesday. He said he had not batted first since extended spring training games in 2011 . . . Fenway Park will host the North Carolina State-Boston College game at 4 p.m. Saturday. All net proceeds will go to the Pete Frates No. 3 Fund. Frates, a former Eagles team captain, has ALS.

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

### **Blue Jays score three in second to beat Rick Porcello, Red Sox**

Jason Mastrodonato

The Red Sox were held scoreless for the first time this season last night, losing to the Blue Jays, 3-0.

If there is such a thing as productive losses, this was one of them.

None of their relievers had to throw a single pitch and last year's Cy Young winner, Rick Porcello, showed dramatic improvement in one very important measure, finally using his sinker as his go-to pitch.

The bullpen desperately needed the time off. Manager John Farrell had used 48 innings out of his 'pen through the first 14 games, a pace of 555 innings over 162 games. In comparison, the Red Sox used only 470 innings out of their 'pen last year.

The starting rotation has been too inconsistent. As overpowering as Chris Sale has been, the Red Sox still entered the day ranked 29th out of 30 teams with a 5.31 ERA from their starters. Four of the five — all but Sale — came in with ERAs over 5.00.

Call it a miracle that the team has a winning record (9-6) with a struggling rotation and an offense that's last in the majors with just seven home runs.

"We have to pitch deeper into games," Sox pitching coach Carl Willis said matter of factly.

Sale is on the bump today, and if the Sox can string together two deep outings from their starting pitchers, that's momentum they badly need.

Porcello wasn't perfect, allowing three unearned runs on six hits, one walk and two errors that led to a three-run second inning. And there were too many loud outs that center fielder Andrew Benintendi had to chase down at the warning track.

But Porcello lasted seven innings and finally had the confidence to go back to his sinker after three poor starts in which he was leaning on his four-seamer.

He recorded eight ground ball outs and eight fly ball outs, so it wasn't a perfect mix, but 33 sinkers to just 16 four-seamers was a large upgrade from his average of 35 percent four-seamers and 23 percent sinkers heading into the game.

"I had to get back to the sinker," Porcello said. "I threw a lot of four-seamers in my last start, didn't have a whole lot of command, not a good separation between my sinker and my four-seamer. So that was my primary focus."

It was the same issue he went through in 2015, his worst career season.

"I think some of the struggles he experienced in 2015, while it's tough to go through, how he came out of that is a reassurance to him that when that situation occurs, we know how to fix it," said Willis.

The offense was flat against Jays lefty Francisco Liriano, who entered the game with a 9.00 ERA. As easy as the Sox have made it look against right-handed pitching this year, they've been mostly quiet against lefties.

They scattered just four singles in 20 at-bats against Liriano, dropping their season average to .252 against lefties. They're hitting over .300 against righties.

Porcello's scoreline could've been better had Pablo Sandoval not thrown one away and Mitch Moreland botched the next play in the Jay's three-run second inning. It was the only inning anybody crossed home plate.

Porcello retired 15 of the next 17 batters.

After helping Porcello get back on track, Willis needs to do the same with Steven Wright (8.36 ERA), Drew Pomeranz (5.23) and Eduardo Rodriguez (4.76). Rodriguez returned from the paternity list last night and threw a scoreless inning of relief, though he's still expected to start on Sunday against the Baltimore Orioles.

"I think Steven Wright, there are times knuckleball pitchers go through periods where they're having trouble with the spin," Willis said. "I thought he made an adjustment and it really started to come in the third inning of the Tampa Bay game. Hopefully he can carry that into the next outing. Eddie, he's young and really pitched effectively against Pittsburgh. His pitch count got up. That's the thing with him, just managing his pitch count a little bit better but his stuff is obviously going to play.

"We feel comfortable and confident that all our starters have the ability to get us deep into games and on a consistent basis."

Somebody in the rotation other than Sale will have to step up soon. The bullpen (2.25 ERA) desperately needs it.

"They've been great," Willis said. "We've leaned on them hard. We do need to give them a blow and it was huge tonight that Rick got through that seventh inning. As good as the bullpen has been, we can't lean on them for the amount of innings we've asked them to pitch over an entire season.

"These things go in cycles at times. It'll turn around."

### **Rick Porcello's pitching compares to Cy Young campaign of 2016, but not his luck**

Michael Silverman

TORONTO — This is no time to panic about Rick Porcello.

This is a time to wish for more luck to Rick Porcello.

If you're wondering what the biggest differences are between the 2017 version of Porcello — 1-2, 5.32 ERA — and the 2016 version of Porcello — 4-0, 3.51 ERA — through four starts, it's not all that hard to figure out. While Porcello overall has not been as sharp, that does not explain the disparity.

For example, please take a look at what he did last night. He went seven innings and did not allow a single earned run. He walked only one, struck out six and gave up six hits, all singles.

That's the kind of performance that Porcello was able to repeat start after start for almost the entire season before winning the American League Cy Young Award.

And yet the Red Sox lost, 3-0, to the Toronto Blue Jays.

How did he do that?

This is where luck — where balls are hit to and what kind of night the offense is having — come into play. Or, in Porcello's case, where luck fails to show up.

The defense behind Porcello did him a disservice with back-to-back errors by third baseman Pablo Sandoval and first baseman Mitch Moreland to open the second inning, and three singles later the Blue Jays had scored three runs.

Ballgame.

For a pitcher who relies on contact, especially for a pitcher with a heavy sinker like Porcello, balls will be put in play. They sure were last night, and they have been all season. Last year, however, those balls were being hit at defenders (and the defense mostly did its job).

This year, when the defense isn't failing, balls hit off Porcello are finding more holes. He allowed 19 hits in his first four starts last year and 31 this year.

The batting average on balls put in play against Porcello was .233 through four 2016 outings, a very low rate, roughly 70 points lower than average. This year, his BABIP is .342.

So, yes, Porcello did allow three hits after the bad defense last night, so he deserves his share of blame for the single-frame scoring outburst.

In his previous start, Porcello allowed eight runs and failed to get out of the fifth inning against the Tampa Bay Rays, and that one's on him.

But not last night.

"That's part of the game, you pitch to contact, those sorts of things are going to happen, you can't predict where they're going to hit the ball," Porcello said. "The biggest thing is they had a bunch of runners on that inning, a long inning, they got three runs and that was it. That's the key right there. You're going to give up hits, they're going to find holes, it's just being able to limit the damage and keep our team in the game."

That's the mantra of every starting pitcher: Limit the damage, and allow the offense a chance to stay ahead or pull ahead.

Last year, the offense obliged for Porcello.

The Sox scored 21 runs while he was pitching in his first four games in 2016. This year, they have scored nine runs for him.

Last night, the offense put up a goose egg, with Toronto starter Francisco Liriano enjoying the sight of sharply struck balls aimed right at his defenders, and those defenders fielding those balls professionally and without drama.

The combination was too much for Porcello to overcome by himself.

"I thought (Porcello) deserved a better fate than the way this one turned out," manager John Farrell said. "He got his sinker back down in the bottom of the strike zone, a high number of ground balls unfortunately found some holes. When they put the ball on the ground, they found some holes. When we did, it turned into a couple of key double plays in the middle innings. I thought Rick tonight, that was a typical performance that Rick delivered so many times last year. From his performance, good to see him kind of get back on track to a certain extent."

Porcello has pitched two fewer innings this year compared to last. His strikeouts-per-nine innings rate (under his control) is 8.75; it was 10.5 through four starts in '16. He has given up the same amount of home runs (five) and walks (five).

He is a tic or two off his 2016 form.

What's out of control is what he can't control.

Which is why he could use a little, even a lot, more luck.

**Kendrys Morales meets back up with Chris Sale in AL East**

Michael Silverman

TORONTO — Kendrys Morales was wrong.

After spending the last three seasons with the Kansas City Royals in the AL Central, Morales thought that when he signed with the Toronto Blue Jays as a free agent, he would escape repeated exposure to Chris Sale.

Instead, Sale was traded from the Chicago White Sox to the Red Sox, an AL East rival of the Blue Jays.

This afternoon, the designated hitter and the starter resume their one-sided hostilities — Morales is 5-for-25 (.200) against Sale, with eight strikeouts — while the Blue Jays begin their acquaintance with an opposing pitcher who likely will haunt them far too frequently for their liking for at least the next three seasons.

Luck of the draw, indeed.

“It’s not just hard for me, I think it’s hard for everyone in the American League East who found out that he was coming here,” Morales said via translator Josue Peley before last night’s game. “At the same time, it’s the same for everybody, you still have to go into the batter’s box, you still have to try and beat him and he’s going to have to beat you, too.”

With his 26 career plate appearances against Sale, Morales has twice as many PA’s as any other Toronto hitter. Steve Pearce has 13, and he is the sole Blue Jay with a respectable average at .333 (4-for-12).

From the list of nine other Blue Jays who have faced Sale, no one has more than one hit, including the likes of Jose Bautista and Troy Tulowitzki. Combined, the lineup, including Pearce’s and Morales’ nine hits, is 16-for-95 (.168).

One of those who is hitless in 10 at-bats against Sale is Russell Martin.

Clearly, Russell’s an optimist, because even though his cup is bone-dry, he sees it as half-full.

“I enjoy the battle against him,” Martin said. “It’s not fun for my batting average sometimes, but I always like to compete against guys who like to compete.”

And in Sale, whom Martin does not know personally, he sees a pitcher whose presence is as unique as his delivery and stuff.

“I’ve always been a big fan, I like when someone goes out there and battles and competes,” Martin said. “What makes me think about him and his attitude a little bit is Jake Peavy early in his career. Just super tough, coming right after you in his intensity.”

By virtue of being a left-hander, Sale already distinguishes himself as a bit out of the ordinary. His long wing span and 2 o’clock arm slot make him even more unique. And his intensity only magnifies the physical attributes.

“He just looks like he never gets overwhelmed, he’s a competitor,” Martin said. “I think it’s more his attitude. Everyone has ability, right? What separates a supreme competitor to another is more what’s upstairs. I don’t know the guy but I’m assuming. He doesn’t look like he ever gets timid or shy out there. If something ever happens, it looks like he gets (ticked) off and it makes him better.”

When Morales was reminded that two of his five hits off Sale were home runs, he could not have been less impressed.

“It doesn’t mean anything — he’s a guy that’s hard to hit,” he said.

So what tips is he going to give his teammates?

“Just try to be aggressive,” Morales said. “Everybody will have a different game plan, but to make sure our game plan is at our best. We have to make sure to attack him like he’s going to do against us. He’s going to throw the ball over the plate.”

### **Red Sox notebook: Pablo Sandoval ripping liners but hardly any falling for hits**

Jason Mastrodonato

The .224 batting average is deceiving. Pablo Sandoval is crushing the ball.

Sandoval entered Wednesday ranked 15th in the majors with an average exit velocity of 93.2 mph, higher than Nelson Cruz, Bryce Harper and Yoenis Cespedes, among others, according to MLB Statcast.

He’s been spraying line drives all over the field, though most of them have been landing in the gloves of opposing outfielders. He has a .222 average on balls in play, well below his career mark of .322.

Sandoval was the only Red Sox player to get multiple hits in their 3-0 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays last night, going 2-for-3.

“I think Pablo is one of the guys who has been swinging it better than a lot of guys,” said Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts. “He just has no luck. He’s been hitting hard-hit balls at people. People don’t see that. They just focus on average. But he’s been hitting some balls, having a lot of quality at-bats.”

Sandoval’s bad luck hasn’t deterred manager John Farrell from starting him regularly, even against lefties.

“While he’s squared some balls up there hasn’t been a whole lot of base hits that would be reflected in the batting average,” Farrell said.

Sandoval was in there last night against Blue Jays southpaw Francisco Liriano just one day after recording a single off lefty Aaron Loup. It was Sandoval’s first hit as a right-handed batter against a left-handed pitcher since 2015, when he was 2-for-41 before he abandoned switch-hitting.

“I was excited,” Sandoval said. “When you see all the result from all the work that you do in the cage, it shows you’re doing it the right way.”

After going 1-for-2 off Liriano, he’s 2-for-13 against lefties this season.

“For him, I’m sure he knows what the attention he’s had when he’s facing a left-hander,” Farrell said. “But he stayed through the middle of the field, get the groundball base hit for an RBI. Hopefully that’s a boost for him as he’s going to see some left-handers.”

When Josh Rutledge (hamstring) is ready to return from a rehab assignment in Triple-A Pawtucket, Sandoval’s at-bats against lefties could be limited. But with no right-handed platoon option, he’s going to keep playing daily.

Sandoval said his bad luck hasn’t deterred him.

“Some days you get hits, some days you hit the ball hard and they catch it,” he said. “You have to keep your mind the right way. You have to keep your head up, keep swinging the right way.”

Hitting coach Chili Davis has been working with Sandoval all spring to keep him from lunging with his body. Sandoval, who leads the team with three homers and 10 RBI, feels like he’s in a good place.

"I've been working hard with Victor Rodriguez and Chili Davis," he said. "I've been putting in the work together to get in the right position and get my swing back the way I was swinging in spring training. That's what I've been doing. That's why I've been watching videos to compare swings that were working.

"I need to trust my hands. I was using my body. The last two at-bats I started using my hands, trusting my hands and I put the ball in play."

Ring him up

Mookie Betts struck out swinging on a slider from Liriano in the fourth inning to end his run of 129 consecutive regular season plate appearances without striking out. He didn't seem phased.

"It's irrelevant," he said. "It's just an out. Whatever."

No appreciation for the streak?

"No," Betts said. "It's just an out to me. It is what it is."

It was the longest streak in the majors since Juan Pierre (147 plate appearances) in 2004.

"He's a special player," Farrell said of Betts. "He punches out the one time, comes right back with a base hit the next time. We'll get more very good production out of him."

Hard at work

David Price, whose recovery from an elbow strain has slowed this week, threw from 120 feet yesterday "with good intensity," Farrell said. "Today was a good work day."

He could get back on the mound tomorrow for a bullpen session in Baltimore, but is not expected to face live hitters yet. . . .

Tyler Thornburg is still in a long-toss phase and has to get on a mound as he continues to strengthen his shoulder.

"This has been a lengthy one," Farrell said. . . .

Travis Shaw, who was one of the players traded when the Red Sox acquired Thornburg from the Milwaukee Brewers in the offseason, hit his fourth homer of the season yesterday while batting third for the Brewers. . . .

Jackie Bradley Jr. was 1-for-3 with two walks and a homer in his final rehab start with Triple-A Pawtucket. He'll work out with the PawSox today and then fly to Baltimore to join the Red Sox in time for the three-game series beginning tomorrow. . . .

Even with an off-day coming up on Monday, the Sox do not plan to adjust their rotation to keep anyone on regular rest, instead opting to give the starters an additional day of recovery time.

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

**Blue Jays 3, Red Sox 0: Defense haunts Boston as winning streak comes to an end**

Tim Britton

TORONTO — Defense is the special teams of baseball. The spotlight can be lazy, generally focusing on the pitcher on the mound and the batter in the box. What happens with the glove is less quantifiable but no less meaningful, as Rick Porcello and the Red Sox were reminded Wednesday night.

Boston saw its four game-winning streak come to an end because of its defense, as a pair of second-inning errors by Pablo Sandoval and Mitch Moreland led to every Toronto run in a 3-0 defeat at Rogers Centre.

Troy Tulowitzki led off the second with a routine ground ball to Sandoval, who airmailed the throw to first. One batter later, Moreland came up empty on Russell Martin's ground ball to first, allowing both runners to advance two bases.

"I should have made that play," Sandoval said. "When you try to do too much on the field, that's when you get into trouble."

Porcello bore down to strike out Justin Smoak, only to allow Darwin Barney a two-run single that hopped up the middle of the diamond. Ezequiel Carrera followed three batters later with his own ground-ball single to right to chase home Barney.

Porcello generated five ground balls in the inning. Three became runs, none became outs.

"It's part of the game," said Porcello. "You pitch to contact, those sorts of things are going to happen."

"He deserved a better fate," manager John Farrell said. "You give a team extra outs, you're probably going to pay for it. We did tonight."

That was enough to stain what was otherwise Porcello's best outing of the young season. Coming off his worst start in more than a year, in which an elevated fastball was pummeled for four home runs, the right-hander was the ground-ball machine he has been at his best. He picked up 14 ground balls on the night overall; his misfortune was that only six became outs.

Porcello struck out five and walked one. He finished seven innings for the first time this season, something only Chris Sale had done for the Red Sox in 2017. He didn't allow an earned run.

"I had a lot better command of my sinker," he said. "It's a good one to build off of."

"You had to know he'd get back on track quickly," said Mookie Betts.

The Red Sox yielded a .293 batting average on balls in play last season. Entering Wednesday, it was up to .302 in 2017. This is a small difference over a small sample. But for a team attempting to mitigate a downsize in its offense with improved run prevention, the quality of its defense is important to monitor.

There aren't any concerns about Moreland, who won the Gold Glove a season ago and should represent an upgrade over Hanley Ramirez's mitt at first. But the early returns on Sandoval in particular have been mixed. He has looked more agile at the hot corner than he did in 2015 or last spring. At the same time, his range is still below average, and an arm that was responsible for seven throwing errors in 2015 has two more in this young season.

On Tuesday, he was unable to come up with a sharp Kevin Pillar grounder down the line in the first; it led to a double and eventually two Toronto runs. On Wednesday, his throwing error helped open the door for three Blue Jay scores.

Sandoval should be able to at least approximate Travis Shaw's offensive output from a season ago at third. But Shaw was a surprisingly adept fielder at the position after years across the diamond, and Sandoval still looks below average.

“There’s been at times better range, there’s been times where there’s been plays that quite frankly should be made,” Farrell said of his third baseman. “Tonight was an example of that.”

Batters who hit ground balls hit to the left side of the Red Sox infield last season reached base via a hit or error about 26 percent of the time. So far this season, it’s just a shade under 30 percent, according to data at Baseball Savant.

Porcello has been victimized the most. In 2016, a ground ball to the left side allowed a runner to reach base against him 22 percent of the time. In 2017, it’s 56 percent.

An offense that had proven itself thoroughly capable of coming back in the season’s first two weeks was docile against Francisco Liriano and the Blue Jays bullpen. The Red Sox pushed only one runner to second in 5 1/3 innings against Liriano, and their last serious threat fizzled with a Mookie Betts groundout in the eighth.

Betts struck out for the first time this season earlier in the night against Liriano.

### **Why the Red Sox loved Mookie Betts’ streak without a strikeout**

Tim Britton

TORONTO — The streak is over. The mighty Mookie has struck out.

The where-were-you-when moment happened in Wednesday’s fourth inning, when Francisco Liriano pulled the string on a 2-2 changeup on the outside corner that Mookie Betts swung through. It had been 129 regular-season plate appearances since Betts had returned to the dugout making an out without putting the ball in play.

It marked the third-longest streak in baseball this century, and the only two longer both belong to Juan Pierre — a substantively different type of hitter.

It was the longest by a Red Sox hitter since Denny Doyle in 1975. Yep, even Wade Boggs never went that long between strikeouts.

But to take it from Betts, it wasn’t a big deal. And that’s what the Red Sox liked most about this streak: It wasn’t on purpose.

“It’s pretty irrelevant. An out’s an out,” he said Tuesday night. “I don’t care about that at all.”

“That’s the reason he doesn’t strike out: He doesn’t give a crap about striking out,” assistant hitting coach Victor Rodriguez said. “When you don’t care about striking out, you’re not going to strike out. When you worry about striking out, now you start chasing. Early in the count, you want to put the ball in play. With two strikes, you’re done.”

What a player says isn’t always what he’s doing at the plate, and Betts’ slugging was down over the course of the streak. In fact, even after Tuesday’s home run, Betts had a lower slugging percentage during his streak than Pierre did in either of his.

Is there a chance Betts has sacrificed power to put the ball in play?

There isn’t much evidence to suggest that. If Betts were explicitly trying to avoid strikeouts, he probably would look to put the ball in play earlier in the count. Yet, in 2017, Betts is seeing more pitches per plate appearance (3.96) than he did in 2016 (3.71).

He's also seeing a larger percentage of his plate appearances reach two strikes (46 to 44.5 in 2016), with a negligible difference in performance in those spots (a .638 OPS this season compared to .654 last; that number may seem low but is still better than the league average with two strikes).

"It's not like he's going up to look to put the first pitch in play," manager John Farrell said. "We're talking about an elite hitter that is very balanced and has great hand-eye coordination."

He also, you know, hit .353 during it.

Betts' streak was both amplified and diminished by the era in which he's playing. The proliferation of strikeouts across the game is not a new story: When Doyle went 159 plate appearances between punchouts in 1975, the average team struck out 4.98 times per game. Last season, that number was 8.15 — an increase of 64 percent.

This makes Betts a stark outlier to the rest of the game. The next best streak entering Wednesday was barely a third the length of Betts'. Since the last time Betts struck out, Minnesota's Byron Buxton has struck out 50 times, Betts' teammate Mitch Moreland 28 times.

"That streak is unheard of," Moreland said Tuesday. "I told him [my longest] is probably about six or so."

(Moreland sells himself short: He actually went 49 plate appearances between strikeouts in 2011.)

"I don't even want to talk about it," Xander Bogaerts (21 strikeouts since Betts' last one) said on Tuesday. "I don't want to jinx it. I'm not going to be that guy."

At the same time, strikeouts have surged in large part because they've become more acceptable. That's the environment that has Betts calling his streak inconsequential.

"Nowadays, striking out means nothing. The game when I played, striking out was a big deal," said Rodriguez. "That's what I try to preach: If striking out is not a big deal, don't work on striking out. You're going to strike out."

Rodriguez wants his hitters employing the same approach with two strikes that they would in other counts. He doesn't want a shorter cut to minimize damage and make sure the ball is put in play. He doesn't want a guy getting himself out by overzealously protecting the plate.

"It's never a good thing to strike out, but it's not necessarily that you struck out. It's how you struck out," said hitting coach Chili Davis. "If you take two pitches you should have swung at and you get into a count that allows the pitcher to make his out pitch, that's on you. If you battle and battle and a guy makes a pitch to strike you out, that's a quality at-bat."

That Betts could go this long between strikeouts without making explicit adjustments that shortchanged other elements of his game is what makes Boston so giddy about the hitter he already is — and the one he can still become.

"When Mookie gets hot, he's ridiculous, you know?" Bogaerts said. "He just goes on these runs that you can't get him out."

### **Pablo Sandoval gets start against lefty Francisco Liriano**

Tim Britton

TORONTO — A day after getting his first hit from the right side of the plate this season, Pablo Sandoval got the start against left-handed pitcher Francisco Liriano.

Sandoval, who memorably went 2-for-41 as a right-handed hitter in 2015 before abandoning switch-hitting, lined an RBI single to center on Tuesday night off Toronto's Aaron Loup.

"Hopefully that's a boost for him," manager John Farrell said after the game.

"I've been working hard with [hitting coaches] Victor Rodriguez and Chili Davis. I've been putting in the work together to get in the right position and get my swing back the way I was swinging in spring training," Sandoval said, saying he needed to trust his hands more.

Liriano is just the third left-handed starter the Red Sox have seen in the season's first 15 games. Sandoval started against Daniel Norris in Detroit but not against Tampa Bay's Blake Snell on Monday.

He's perhaps getting more of a chance against southpaws because of the injury to Josh Rutledge. Rutledge, who was supposed to offer a right-handed complement to Sandoval at the hot corner, started his rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket on Thursday. Farrell said the infielder would need to play a full nine innings defensively — and see time at a few different positions — before he'd be ready to be activated.

"[Rutledge's absence] has probably limited our ability to go to the bench to pinch-hit in a key spot," Farrell said Wednesday. "He's a very good complement to the rest of our roster. Looking forward to him returning."

### **Cubs' rotation shuffle means Jon Lester won't pitch at Fenway Park**

Tim Britton

TORONTO — Jon Lester's first start against the Red Sox is going to have to wait.

The Cubs shuffled their rotation, pushing Lester up in front of Jake Arrieta. The switch means Arrieta and not Lester is on tap to start the opening game of next week's three-game set between Chicago and the Red Sox at Fenway Park.

Lester has not pitched against the Red Sox since being traded from Boston in 2014.

Another former Red Sox pitcher will start in that series, as John Lackey is slated to pitch in the middle game of the series. Chicago's Brett Anderson is in line for the Sunday night finale.

Boston plans on keeping its rotation on turn through Monday's off-day, meaning it would send Steven Wright, Eduardo Rodriguez and Rick Porcello against the defending champions.

Last year, the Red Sox sometimes altered their rotation to keep a starter, usually David Price, on his regular five-day schedule. Manager John Farrell doesn't have the urge to do that this early in the season, opting instead to get his starters the extra day of rest. Chris Sale has not had an extra day in his schedule since his first start of the spring.

### **David Price could throw off a mound again by Friday**

Tim Britton

TORONTO — David Price threw out to 120 feet on Wednesday, and the Red Sox tentatively hope the left-hander will throw off a mound again on Friday in Baltimore, "provided he feels as he's been the last couple of days," manager John Farrell said.

The plan is for Price to repeat the bullpen session he threw last Saturday, when he sat down a few times between pitches to simulate inning breaks. He will not face hitters.

The Sox had previously discussed the possibility of Price facing hitters sometime this week. Price had thrown three bullpen sessions last week before taking on a lighter load this week.

Price said he continues to feel “good” while going through the long toss.

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

**Mookie Betts, Boston Red Sox star, shows his unselfish personality by calling streak 'irrelevant'**

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Mookie Betts' streak of plate appearances without a strikeout ended at 129 here Wednesday at Rogers Centre.

It marked the longest such streak by a Red Sox hitter since Denny Doyle (159 in 1975).

Betts never cared about the streak. And he still doesn't care about it now that it's over.

"It's irrelevant," he said after the Red Sox's 3-0 loss to the Blue Jays. "Just an out."

Betts also was asked if he had any appreciation at all for how long the streak went.

"Just an out to me," Betts said. "It is what it is."

How refreshing is it when a player doesn't care about a pointless streak like this one?

After all, this isn't Joe DiMaggio's historic 56 game-hitting streak.

It reminded me of all that was written about Rajon Rondo's streak of 37 straight games with double digit assists.

During that run, ESPNBoston.com's Chris Forsberg wrote Nov. 19, 2012:

"Celtics coach Doc Rivers is enduring some scrutiny because he dared to acknowledge what's already well known: NBA players care a heck of a lot about stats and streaks.

"With 98 seconds remaining in Boston's lopsided loss to the Detroit Pistons on Sunday, Rivers called a timeout and attempted to draw up a play with the goal of getting point guard Rajon Rondo his 10th assist in order to extend his lengthy double-digit assist streak."

Betts cares about winning, not stats and streaks. He doesn't like to talk about himself. He'd rather you ask him about his teammates.

He's a selfless player -- and obviously a darn good player, too. He should be a perennial MVP candidate for the next 10 years. He has that type of talent.

And him not wanting to discuss this streak sums up his personality best.

"He's a special player," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "He punches out the one time, comes right back with a base hit the next time. So we'll get more very good production out of him."

**Pablo Sandoval has 3 errors for Boston Red Sox; 'I've felt good. Nothing's bothering me'**

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Pablo Sandoval made his third error in 12 games at third base Wednesday here at Rogers Centre.

His wild throw over first baseman Mitch Moreland's head allowed Troy Tulowitzki to reach with no outs in the second inning.

Moreland, the 2016 AL Gold Glove winner at first base, then tried to backhand a grounder hit by Russell Martin. It rolled under Moreland's glove and down the right field line for a two-base error.

Both Tulowitzki and Martin came around to score on a single by Darwin Barney. The Blue Jays won 3-0, ending Boston's four-game winning streak.

Asked his thoughts on Sandoval's defense so far, Red Sox manager John Farrell said, "I think there's been at times better range. There's been times where there have been some plays that quite frankly should be made. Tonight was an example of that."

Two of his three errors have been throwing errors.

Sandoval had season-ending shoulder surgery last May but it he underwent the procedure on his left shoulder, not his throwing shoulder.

"Should have made that play," Sandoval said. "Tried to do too much on that play."

How's he feeling with his throws?

"Good, good. I've felt good. Nothing's bothering me. Like I say, when you try to do too much in the field, that's when you get in trouble."

Sandoval also struggled with two plays Tuesday. He got a glove on a double down the line but couldn't make the play. Sandoval also charged and fielded a weak grounder from Tulowitzki but he fumbled the baseball transferring it to his throwing hand. It was ruled a hit.

But he has started to hit better. He's 6-for-11 with one homer, three RBIs and one walk in his past three games. His average has increased from .132 to .224.

The switch-hitter also has two hits off left-handed pitchers the past two games after starting out 0-for-10 from the right side of the plate.

### **Rick Porcello's ERA drops but Red Sox's winning streak ends because of 2 errors, lack of offense**

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- A lack of offense and two costly errors ended the Red Sox's four-game winning streak here Wednesday at Rogers Centre.

The Blue Jays won 3-0 behind 5 1/3 scoreless innings from southpaw starter Francisco Liriano and a combined 3 2/3 shutout innings from three relievers.

The Red Sox were held to just six hits.

Boston starter Rick Porcello pitched well but the Red Sox never recovered after making two errors in the second inning.

Pablo Sandoval's wild throw over first baseman Mitch Moreland's head allowed Troy Tulowitzki to reach with no outs.

Moreland, the 2016 AL Gold Glove winner at first base, then tried to backhand a grounder hit by Russell Martin. It rolled under his glove and down the right field line for a two-base error.

That put runners at second and third with nobody out. The Blue Jays capitalized on the golden opportunity.

Porcello struck out Justin Smoak for the first out, but Darwin Barney then stroked a two-run single to center field that put Toronto ahead 2-0.

Ezequiel Carrera stroked an RBI single later in the inning to make it 3-0.

The two errors forced Porcello to throw 35 pitches during the second inning after he threw only seven pitches in the first inning.

Porcello still made it through 7 innings despite having thrown 42 pitches in the first two innings.

The righty allowed three runs, all unearned, six hits and one walk while striking out five. His ERA dropped from 7.56 to 5.32.

Porcello has had trouble at Rogers Centre throughout his career. He entered Wednesday 3-5 with a 6.23 ERA in nine outings (eight starts) here.

He went 2-0 but with a 4.58 ERA in three starts here during his 2016 AL Cy Young season.

Mookie's streak ends

Mookie Betts' streak of plate appearances without a strikeout ended at 129.

It marked the longest such streak by a Red Sox hitter since Denny Doyle (159 in 1975).

Pablo Sandoval producing vs. lefties?

Sandoval started the year 0-for-10 vs. lefties, but he stroked a hit against Blue Jays lefty reliever Aaron Loup on Tuesday, then stroked a single vs. the lefty Liriano on Wednesday.

Sandoval stroked two of Boston's six hits. Xander Bogaerts, Andrew Benintendi, Mookie Betts and Mitch Moreland each had one.

### **Jackie Bradley Jr. smashes homers during rehab game for PawSox; expected to return Friday**

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- While the Red Sox are here playing in Toronto, Jackie Bradley Jr., the birthday boy, is in Charlotte on a rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket.

Bradley, who turned 27 today, homered for the PawSox tonight. The Red Sox are expected to activate him from the disabled list (right knee sprain) Friday when they play the first of three games in Baltimore.

Bradley put the PawSox ahead 1-0 in the fifth inning.

Bradley is expected to play all nine innings today. He played five innings in center field for Pawtucket on Tuesday. Red Sox manager John Farrell said reports from Tuesday's game on Bradley were "all good."

"He went back on a ball deep into center field," Farrell said. "He came in for kind of a hard-charging shallow fly ball that he caught. Came out of it fine."

He's scheduled to work out in Charlotte tomorrow, then arrive in Baltimore on Friday.

## **Tyler Thornburg still hasn't thrown a bullpen session a week into throwing program**

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Red Sox righty Tyler Thornburg (right shoulder impingement) initiated his throwing program last Wednesday.

A week into it, he still hasn't thrown a bullpen session.

"Still at a long toss phase," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "Has yet to get on the mound. But continues to go through the throwing program back in Boston. So this has been a lengthy one, we know, to rebuild the overall condition and strength in the shoulder. So he's still continuing on that path."

Thornburg posted a 2.15 ERA, 0.94 WHIP and 13 saves in 67 outings (67 innings) for the Brewers last year.

The Red Sox acquired him Dec. 6 from the Brewers for Travis Shaw, Mauricio Dubon and Josh Pennington.

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

### **Betts' long streak without a strikeout ends**

Ian Browne

TORONTO -- It was simply striking how long Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts went between strikeouts.

In the top of the fourth inning of Wednesday's 3-0 loss to the Blue Jays, Francisco Liriano got Betts to whiff at a 2-2 slider that was on the outside black of the strike zone, about knee-high.

That ended a span of 129 regular-season plate appearances by Betts, the longest streak by a Boston hitter since Denny Doyle in 1975 (159 plate appearances).

It was also the longest such streak by any Major League hitter since Juan Pierre of the Marlins went 147 plate appearances without a strikeout in 2004.

"It seems like every at-bat, he's competing and putting the ball in play or walking and getting on base, however," said Red Sox outfielder Andrew Benintendi. "Especially nowadays where people are throwing mid-to-upper 90s all the time, with lower 90s or upper 80s offspeed, that's crazy and pretty incredible for him to go that long without striking out."

The last pitcher Betts struck out against in the regular season before Wednesday was Baltimore's Oliver Drake on Sept. 12, 2016. Betts did strike out against Cleveland's Trevor Bauer in Game 1 of last October's American League Division Series.

Another thing that made the streak so impressive for Betts is that he is a power hitter with a ferocious swing.

"We're talking about an elite hitter that is very balanced, has got great hand-eye coordination; it's not like he's going up to look to put the first pitch in play," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "I read something here today on the breakdown of the number of at-bats he got to two strikes, and the batting average inside of the streak. He's a heck of a player."

In the 29 regular-season games that Betts went without a strikeout, he slashed .360/.425/.456 with five doubles, two homers and 14 RBIs.

With two strikes during that stretch of no strikeouts, Betts hit .278 (15-for-54) with a .315 slugging percentage.

For perspective, consider that entering action on Wednesday, Major League hitters had a .172 average and a .273 slugging percentage with two strikes in 2017.

"I don't think you really realize it when you're in the midst of it until you're asked questions daily and things are made of it," said Farrell. "He's a special player. He punches out the one time, he comes right back with a base hit the next time. We'll get more very good production out of him."

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the longest streak in the Expansion Era (since 1961) for plate appearances without a strikeout is 223 plate appearances by Philadelphia's Dave Cash in 1976. Betts, who seldom likes to draw attention to any of his personal accomplishments, downplayed his streak after it ended.

"It's irrelevant. Just an out," said Betts. "It is what it is."

After a 1-for-4 performance, Betts is slashing .347/.407/.469 this season with three doubles, one homer and five RBIs.

### **Defense lets Porcello down in loss**

Gregor Chisholm and Ian Browne

TORONTO -- The Blue Jays are finally back in the win column.

Francisco Liriano tossed 5 1/3 scoreless innings while Toronto took advantage of two errors made by Boston's infield to secure a 3-0 victory on Wednesday night at Rogers Centre. That snapped the Blue Jays' mini two-game losing streak but more importantly came following a stretch in which the club went 2-11 for the worst start in franchise history.

Darwin Barney had the key two-run single in the bottom of the third while Ezequiel Carrera followed up Tuesday's pinch-hit homer with an RBI single. Kevin Pillar was the other standout on offense as he chipped in with a 3-for-4 night at the plate and also picked up Toronto's first two stolen bases of the season.

"I didn't try to do too much," said Liriano, who has a tendency to overthrow at times. "I just tried to throw strikes. The defense played really well behind me and like usual I trusted Russell [Martin] and we did a good job."

Boston right-hander Rick Porcello was saddled with the loss but he had a nice bounce-back outing after allowing eight runs over 4 1/3 innings during his last start against the Rays. The three runs against Porcello were unearned as he scattered six hits and a walk over seven innings. After some issues in the second that were not his own doing, Porcello faced three batters over the minimum the rest of his outing and finished with five strikeouts.

"I felt good," said Porcello. "Obviously, that second inning, some things happened, they got some hits with runners on base, but really for the most part the entire game I felt pretty good, I was able to control some of the momentum that they were trying to build. It was a good one to build on."

Liriano pitched into the sixth and allowed just four hits but more importantly, kept the Red Sox off the board. Setup men Joe Biagini and Jason Grilli then combined to toss 2 2/3 scoreless innings while Roberto Osuna picked up his first save of the year with a scoreless ninth.

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

The daily double: Liriano enjoyed a strong start but he left a bit of a mess for his bullpen to clean up in the top of the sixth. He departed with a pair of runners on base and just one out. Hanley Ramirez stepped to the plate representing the tying run but any momentum quickly evaporated when Biagini got him to ground into an inning-ending double play. Through six innings, Boston had just two at-bats with runners in scoring position and stranded four men. Biagini tossed a scoreless seventh as well and has allowed one earned run over 11 innings this season.

"It starts with Liriano, who was dynamite," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said. "Then you've got big Joe Biagini who comes in and gets the big double play ball. Grilli did his thing, he hadn't pitched in a while. Osuna looked like he normally looks. Just an all-around good ballgame." More >>

Booting it around: Toronto scored three runs in the second but it never would have been possible without a major assist from Boston's infield. Red Sox third baseman Pablo Sandoval got things started when his throw to first sailed well above the head of Mitch Moreland. One batter later, Moreland made a miscue of his own as he missed a slow chopper that got by his glove and rolled down the first-base line. That put runners on second and third for the Blue Jays, who eventually capitalized on a two-run single by Barney. Before the inning was over, Carrera added a single of his own.

"Panda just, the release point, he sailed one high," said Red Sox manager John Farrell. "I thought with Mitch with the turf, kind of a little bit of an odd bounce that ends up uncharacteristically getting through him. You give a team extra outs, we're probably going to pay for it and we did tonight."

#### SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

When Mookie Betts struck out in the fourth inning, it snapped a streak of 129 regular-season plate appearances without a strikeout for Boston's star right fielder. It was the longest streak in the Major Leagues since the Marlins' Juan Pierre went 147 straight plate appearances in 2004. More >>

#### WHAT'S NEXT

Red Sox: Lefty ace Chris Sale (1-1, 1.25 ERA) has lived up to all expectations and more to start his career with the Red Sox, allowing a total of three earned runs in his first three starts. He was electric last time out in a win over the Rays, striking out 12 and allowing three hits over seven innings. This time, Sale faces the Blue Jays in the finale of a three-game series, with the first pitch scheduled for 12:37 p.m. ET on Thursday.

Blue Jays: Right-hander Marco Estrada (0-1, 3.50) will take the mound when this series wraps up on Thursday afternoon. Estrada tossed seven scoreless innings during his last start against the Orioles by scattering four hits and three walks to pick up his first victory of the season. He was originally scheduled to pitch Friday but Aaron Sanchez was pushed out of the rotation because of a blister issue.

### **\* *ESPNBoston.com***

#### **Pablo Sandoval's shaky defense raises questions**

Scott Lauber

TORONTO -- As embarrassing moments go, it isn't likely to ever get any worse for Pablo Sandoval than his previous trip to Canada, when his belt buckle exploded on a swing during a game last April.

Compared to that, what happened here Wednesday night barely registers on the scale of public humiliation.

But Sandoval's errant throw on a routine grounder did open the door to a three-run second inning for the Toronto Blue Jays and a 3-0 outcome that snapped the Boston Red Sox's four-game winning streak. It marked Sandoval's third error in 12 games, tied for most in the majors among third basemen, and raised the same old questions about whether his defense is reliable enough to keep him in the lineup every day.

For all the reasons Sandoval lost his job before last season, his defense ranked high on the list. The Red Sox believed his range had been limited by his excessive weight, and his throws were less accurate than usual, leaving manager John Farrell to sit him in favor of upstart Travis Shaw, who was a more consistent defender even though he had played first base for most of the previous few seasons in the minor leagues.

Pablo Sandoval committed his third error this season Wednesday, leaving the Red Sox to wonder: Is he reliable enough to be an everyday player? Tom Szczerbowski/Getty Images  
Since then, Sandoval has had surgery to repair a torn labrum in his throwing shoulder and dropped about 40 pounds. And after the Red Sox in the offseason traded Shaw to the Milwaukee Brewers for reliever Tyler Thornburg and top prospect Yoan Moncada to the Chicago White Sox for ace Chris Sale, Sandoval reclaimed his position with a solid spring training.

Yet he has started off slowly both at the plate (11-for-49) and in the field. He made a throwing error on Opening Day and bobbled a ball in the season's second game. Asked Wednesday night to assess Sandoval's defense so far, Farrell sounded lukewarm.

"I think there's been at times better range," he said. "There's been times where there's been some plays that, quite frankly, should be made. Tonight was an example of that."

Farrell could've left Sandoval on the bench in favor of either Marco Hernandez or fellow utilityman Brock Holt. After all, Sandoval is a weaker hitter from the right side of the plate, and the Blue Jays had left-hander Francisco Liriano on the mound. But Sandoval notched three hits Tuesday night, including his first right-handed knock of the season, so Farrell elected to roll with him again.

And Sandoval did pick up two more hits, both singles, one right-handed in the fifth inning and one left-handed in the eighth. But with starter Rick Porcello throwing his sharpest sinker in four starts, the Red Sox needed their infielders to vacuum ground balls, and the miscues by Sandoval and usually sure-handed first baseman Mitch Moreland proved costly.

"I did too much with the ball. It came out," Sandoval said of his throw that sailed over Moreland's head and enabled Troy Tulowitzki to reach base. "I should have made that play. I tried to do too much on that play and made a bad throw."

Sandoval insisted "nothing's bothering me" and that his shoulder hasn't given him problems.

In time, the Red Sox will have a platoon option at third base. Right-handed-hitting Josh Rutledge is due to be activated from the disabled list after he completes his minor-league rehab assignment, and Farrell said Wednesday that Rutledge would get some time at third.

Until then, the Red Sox will have to trust Sandoval to at least make the plays he's supposed to make, plays like the one he botched Wednesday night.

## **\* *Associated Press***

### **Liriano, bullpen pitch 6-hitter, Blue Jays beat Red Sox 3-0**

TORONTO -- Even though they came up short in a ninth-inning rally attempt a night earlier, Kevin Pillar and the Toronto Blue Jays were able to carry some much-needed momentum into Wednesday night.

Francisco Liriano and three relievers combined on a six-hitter, Darwin Barney hit a two-run single and the Blue Jays beat the Boston Red Sox 3-0.

Kevin Pillar had three hits for the second straight game and stole two bases as the Blue Jays won for the third time this season and improved to 2-6 on their homestand.

"I felt like the attitude and tone in here changed a little bit from what we were able to create yesterday," Pillar said, referring to a three-run rally in the ninth inning of Tuesday's 8-7 defeat. "Guys went in there confident today and you could see it by their swings."

Toronto scored three unearned runs in the second after Troy Tulowitzki reached leading off on a throwing error by third baseman Pablo Sandoval. Tulowitzki took third and Russell Martin reached second on a fielding error by first baseman Mitch Moreland. Barney singled with one out, and Ezequiel Carrera had a two-out RBI single.

"You give a team extra outs, we're probably going to pay for it and we did tonight," Red Sox manager John Farrell said.

The shutout was Toronto's first of the season.

"Just an all-around good ballgame," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said. "It's what it takes sometimes."

AL Cy Young Award winner Rick Porcello (1-2) allowed six hits in seven innings, struck out five and walked one.

"I thought he deserved a better fate," Farrell said. "That was the typical performance that Rick delivered so many times last year."

Liriano (1-1) allowed four hits in 5 1/3 innings.

"I didn't try to do too much, I just tried to throw strikes," Liriano said through a translator. "The defense played really well behind me."

Betts said Liriano was able to keep the Red Sox off balance.

"He was mixing it up, throwing all his pitches for strikes," Betts said.

After Liriano gave up consecutive singles to Andrew Benintendi and Mookie Betts, Joe Biagini came on and got Hanley Ramirez to ground into a double play.

"When they put the ball on the ground, they found some holes," Farrell said. "When we did, it turned into a couple of key double plays in the middle innings."

Jason Grilli worked the eighth and Roberto Osuna finished for his first save.

Betts stuck out swinging in the fourth, snapping a streak of 129 plate appearances without a strikeout since he took a called third strike from Baltimore's Oliver Drake on Sept. 12.

Betts was reluctant to say much about his streak, calling it "irrelevant."

"It's just an out to me," he said.

#### STOLEN MOMENTS

Pillar swiped econd and third after singling in the seventh, Toronto's first stolen bases this season.

#### BLANKED

Boston was held scoreless for the first time since Sept. 14 against Baltimore.

#### WELCOME BACK, POPS

Boston's Eduardo Rodriguez rejoined the team from paternity leave one day ahead of schedule and pitched one inning in his first big league relief appearance. Left-hander Brian Johnson was optioned to Triple-A Pawtucket to make room for Rodriguez.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LHP David Price (strained elbow) threw at 120 feet on flat ground and is expected to throw off a mound in Baltimore on Friday. ... OF Jackie Bradley Jr. (right knee) went 1 for 3 with a homer at Pawtucket. He's expected to come off the DL Friday.

Blue Jays: LHP J.P. Howell (shoulder) is expected to make a rehab appearance at Class A Dunedin on Thursday.

#### UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Chris Sale (1-1, 1.25) went 2-0 with a 1.69 ERA in two starts against the Blue Jays last year, striking out 13 in 16 innings.

Blue Jays: RHP Marco Estrada (0-1, 3.50) pitched seven shutout innings against Baltimore in his last start. He is 4-4 with a 3.91 ERA in 10 games against Boston.

## **\* *The Toronto Star***

### **Blue Jays' Liriano, bullpen combine to shut out Red Sox**

Laura Armstrong

The question of the game was simple heading into Wednesday night: which Francisco Liriano would show up to pitch against the Boston Red Sox?

The Toronto Blue Jays had seen two versions of the left-hander this season. The first was a shell of the player it hopes Liriano will be this year, one who gave up five runs in a third of an inning during his 2017 debut in Tampa Bay. Then there was the Liriano who stood tall against Baltimore a week ago, allowing two runs and two walks while striking out 10 in 6 2/3 innings.

Toronto needed the latter after days of bad news for its pitching staff: the injuries to Aaron Sanchez (blister) and J.A. Happ (elbow inflammation) and the ineffectiveness of Marcus Stroman on Tuesday. Plus, Liriano was lining up against Rick Porcello, the reigning American League Cy Young winner.

The lefty didn't disappoint on the night, allowing just four hits and a walk while shutting out Boston for 5 1/3 innings. And when the Jays offence and Red Sox defence came together in the second inning to create three runs, Toronto had all the offence it needed. Porcello allowed just the three unearned runs over seven innings, but the Jays bullpen picked up where Liriano left off for a 3-0 win.

Improving to 3-11 isn't much to celebrate, but the Jays will take it.

Manager John Gibbons lauded his team for playing an "all-around good ballgame."

"It starts with Liriano, who was dynamite," he said. "He had that blip, that opening day start, but you look back on the past couple starts, he's been really, really good. That's what he can do."

Liriano kept his game plan simple during his first win of the year.

“I didn’t try to do too much,” he said. “I just tried to throw strikes. I had the defence play really well behind me and, like usual, just trusted Russell (Martin). We did a good job.”

Shortstop Troy Tulowitzki and Martin capitalized on a pair of Boston errors to get on base in the second inning and, after first baseman Justin Smoak struck out, Darwin Barney delivered a two-run single. The third baseman scored later on an Ezequiel Carrera single to right field.

Liriano added the title of streak-ender to his resume in the fourth when he struck out Boston right fielder Mookie Betts, who had not gone down swinging in 128 consecutive regular-season plate appearances.

Liriano handed the ball over to Joe Biagini in the top of the sixth, in a rare jam with just one out and two runners on base. But the reliever swiftly forced Red Sox’s designated hitter Hanley Ramirez to ground into a double play, keeping Liriano’s record spotless.

Jason Grilli and closer Roberto Osuna then got their first action in five and four days respectively.

Bringing that 1-2 punch in to finish the job was the plan regardless, manager John Gibbons said earlier in the day. It was important to keep them ready for the moment Toronto needed a save. Osuna recorded his first of the season.

“You don’t want to use those guys unless you absolutely have to, because we’re planning on — when things are going good — to use them a lot anyways,” Gibbons said.

Wednesday was one of those good days; Toronto will hope it’s the first of many.

## **\* *The Toronto Sun***

### **Liriano solid in Blue Jays' win over Red Sox**

Steve Buffery

The Blue Jays’ left-hander put things right for the struggling club on Wednesday night at the Rogers Centre.

The Jays rode a solid start by Francisco Liriano, defeating the Boston Red Sox 3-0, Toronto’s third victory in 14 games this season and their first shutout win.

“Just an all around great ball game,” said Blue Jays manager John Gibbons. “That’s what it takes sometimes. We got some key hits and our defence was really good and of course it starts with Liriano, who was dynamite. He had that bloop opening start but the last couple of starts he’s been really, really good. But that’s what he can do.”

Boston and Toronto are tied 1-1 in the series with the rubber match to played on Thursday afternoon before the Jays embark on a seven-game road trip to L.A. and St. Louis. The Jays are trying to start the season by not losing five consecutive series, something they have never done in the history of the franchise.

The Jays scored all their runs in the second inning when Darwin Barney smacked a Porcello offering up the middle to score Troy Tulowitzki from third and Russell Martin from second, with one out. With Barney at third and Kevin Pillar at first, Ezequiel Carrera hit a single to right to score Barney, putting Toronto ahead 3-0. Tulowitzki and Martin both got on via errors. All three runs were unearned. Porcello settled down nicely after the second, going seven innings, giving up six hits, one walk while striking out five.

Jays’ slugger Jose Bautista continued to struggle, and has gone 51 at-bats this season without hitting a home run. After striking out to end the seventh, some of the fans at the Rogers Centre let Bautista have it.

The Jays played some great defence behind Liriano, starting with a nice catch by Pillar on Hanley Ramirez in the second on a hard hit ball over Pillar's head that the centre fielder managed to pull in. In the fourth, Tulowitzki made a nice back-handed stab on a high-hopper to get Andrew Benintendi at first although later in the inning he booted a grounder by Ramirez to allow the Boston DH get on base with two out. Barney, playing for the injured Josh Donaldson at third, made a nice sliding grab on a Chris Young grounder to get Young out in the seventh, ending the inning.

Liriano was pulled in the sixth inning with the Jays ahead 3-0 after putting Benintendi and Mookie Betts on base with one out. He was replaced by Joe Biagini who promptly ended the inning by getting Ramirez to hit into a double play. Liriano pitched 5.1 innings, walked one and struck out six Red Sox, including Betts in the fourth inning, the first strike out by the Boston outfielder in 129 regular-season at-bats — the longest by a Red Sox hitter since Denny Doyle in 1975. It was the second solid start by the Jays' left-hander since his disastrous first start of the season on April 7 at Tampa Bay when he lasted 0.1 innings, allowing five earned runs.

"I didn't try to do too much," said Liriano, who clicked with Martin behind the plate. "I just tried to throw strikes, the defence played really well behind me and like usual, just trusted Russell, and we did a good job."

Liriano was probably the Jays' best starter in spring training and Gibbons knew he'd bounce back from his April 7 start.

"He goes through those little ruts where he'll lose his strikes," said the manager. "He (sometimes) falls to the right and that can kind of throw him a little bit out of whack. He's got a great slider and a great change up and he'll throw that at any time. But the key is, when he gets a little bit out whack, usually you'll see Russ go out there and he gets right back on line. But his stuff is really good, still dominating for a guy who's been around for so long. But I think the fact he can throw anything at anytime and if he keeps that ball down he can spike some balls and get some strikeouts because coming in the zone, it disappears on ya."

Jason Grilli took over from Biagini in the eighth and managed to get Betts to ground out to short for the third out with two on.

Toronto closer Roberto Osuna pitched the ninth, giving up a one-out single by Mitch Moreland to left, which Carrera played perfectly to prevent Moreland from getting to second on the hit. Osuna then struck out Xander Bogaerts and got Young to ground out for the win, picking up his first save of the season.

#### PILLAR MAKING THE MOST OUT OF HITTING LEAD-OFF

Blue Jays centre fielder Kevin Pillar is reminding everyone that he can do damage with his bat, as well as his glove.

Pillar went 3-for-4 against the Boston Red Sox on Wednesday night with two stolen bases as the lead-off hitter, extending his hitting streak to seven games. He now has hits in 12 of 14 games and is batting .345. The three hits off Boston starter Rick Porcello marked the fourth time in the last five games that he posted a multi-hit game. When batting lead off this season he is 11-for-22.

He also picked up a pair of stolen bases, the Jays' first two stolen bags of the season. He also made a great catch on Hanley Ramirez in the second, almost all the way in centre field. Pillar vowed in spring training that he would be aggressive early and more selective late in the count to avoid striking out. And he's certainly done that.

"You've got to go up there and expect that first pitch to be there. A lot of times you go up there and you try to guess and you get a good pitch and you're not ready to hit. I saw it (Wednesday) with a lot of guys, we went up there and we were aggressive, guys were looking for their pitch early and were aggressive. That was the biggest difference here."

The West Hills, Calif., native loves batting lead-off, and hopes to remain in that slot.

“It’s something I got the opportunity to do in spring training and feel comfortable doing it. More than anything, I just like getting involved early,” he said. “I feel like I have the opportunity to go out there and set the tone.”

“He said he always wanted to be the lead off hitter and he’s doing some kind of job right now,” said Jays manager John Gibbons. “But I think the key this year, he’s tightened up his strike zone, he’s still aggressive, he can be overly aggressive, and you can still see him when they get ahead in the count with him, they’ll try to expand with their pitches. But now he’s laying off, where in the past he would chase that for a strike out. That’s the biggest thing.”