

The Boston Red Sox Friday, April 21, 2017

*** *The Boston Globe***

Mookie Betts lifts Red Sox in extra innings

Peter Abraham

TORONTO — All Chris Sale needed was one run on Thursday and the Red Sox got him that in the top of the ninth inning, Xander Bogaerts slapping a ball down the right-field line to score Mitch Moreland from second base with two outs.

Bogaerts went to second base and slid in awkwardly, jamming his left thumb. He was initially called safe before a video replay overturned the call.

Had Bogaerts been called out, Sale might have come back out to finish off what was one of the best starts of his career. But as the umpires waited for a decision, Red Sox manager John Farrell made his own call to bring in closer Craig Kimbrel for the final three outs.

It proved to be a mistake that was later rectified when the Red Sox won, 4-1, in 10 innings. But the clubhouse was oddly subdued afterward and the manager seemed almost angry with himself.

The Sox have won five of six but the postgame focus was more on what could have been.

Toronto's Kendrys Morales hammered Kimbrel's second pitch over the fence in center field to tie the score. But Kimbrel was able to end the inning from there and the Sox won in the 10th on a three-run double by Mookie Betts.

Watch: Mookie Betts breaks game open in 10th

Sale was at least left with that satisfaction. The lefthander allowed four singles and a walk over eight dominant innings and struck out 13. He threw a remarkable 80 of 102 pitches for strikes.

But he was not allowed to finish what he so grandly started.

"It was a tough decision," Farrell said. "We take the lead [and] we've got Craig Kimbrel, who's throwing the baseball extremely well. Has been dominant in his own right; is well rested."

The replay review contributed to Farrell deciding to bring Kimbrel in.

"The additional time, yeah, that was part of the decision," he said.

Farrell also factored in that Sale completed eight innings for the first time this season and that Kimbrel had two days of rest.

But Sale also had thrown nine fewer pitches than his previous start and will make his next start with an additional day of rest. The 102 pitches were his fewest this season.

"There'll be a time where he's going to take the mound in the ninth inning like that," Farrell said.

Had the Sox not scored, Farrell said he was likely to have gone to Kimbrel but left open the idea that he would have stayed with Sale.

For Sale, it was no decision at all. He wanted to stay in the game.

“I’m going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine,” he said.

But Sale was quick not to blame Kimbrel.

“Craig’s been pretty damn good back there,” he said.

The Sox are 3-1 in the games Sale has started but have scored only four runs when he has been on the mound. He could easily be 4-0 but is instead 1-1.

“There’s two stats that matter: win and loss. It’s not mine. You’re trying to win games, that’s it,” Sale said. “They all count for one.”

Kimbrel said he was properly warmed up.

“I just made one bad pitch. But I didn’t want to lose the game. I still had a job to do,” said Kimbrel, who had converted 25 consecutive saves dating to last season.

Facing Jason Grilli, the Sox scored three runs in the 10th inning.

Sandy Leon drew a walk before Brock Holt singled. Holt had been 1 for 14 on the season. Marco Hernandez ran for Leon.

Andrew Benintendi walked with two outs to load the bases. Betts then pulled a three-run double down the line in left.

“They came back but fortunately we found a way to score a few,” Betts said. “Chris was so great. We should have scored more runs for him and I know we will.”

Kimbrel stayed in the game and struck out the side in the bottom of the 10th.

Sale was the first pitcher to throw at least eight shutout innings with 13 or more strikeouts this season. He has accomplished that four times in his career.

In his four starts, Sale has allowed three earned runs on 15 hits over 29 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings and struck out a major-league leading 42 with only six walks. Opponents are 15 of 102 (.147) against him.

It’s a run strikingly similar to what Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez did in his first four starts for the Red Sox in 1998. Martinez allowed three runs on 16 hits over 32 innings and struck out 44.

“If I am going to pay money to go see a pitcher right now it would be Chris Sale!” wrote Martinez on Twitter after the game.

Red Sox teammates are equally impressed.

“He’s just attacking the zone and overpowering guys with all of his pitches,” Dustin Pedroia said.

Sale has a 0.91 earned run average and one win.

Toronto starter Marco Estrada threw six scoreless innings, allowing three hits. He walked two and struck out seven. The Red Sox never came close to scoring against him.

Chris Sale deserved the chance to finish the job

Nick Cafardo

TORONTO — Just a hunch, but judging by his postgame comments, John Farrell probably wanted a do-over in his decision to take Chris Sale out of a 1-0 game in the ninth in favor of Craig Kimbrel Thursday afternoon.

Sale, who pitched an incredible game with eight shutout innings, 13 strikeouts and an unbelievable 80 percent strike rate, should have finished the game and protected a 1-0 lead the offense finally gave him in the top of the ninth.

I get the logic. Sale had thrown 102 pitches in his usual, dominating, fashion and Kimbrel had saved his last 25 opportunities.

But on Kimbrel's second pitch to Kendrys Morales in the bottom of the ninth, Morales hit it a mile to center field to tie it up, 1-1, creating a no-decision for Sale.

The Red Sox were fortunate to win it in the 10th when Mookie Betts hit a bases-loaded double for a 4-1 win.

But Sale made it clear: He was ready to go out for one more.

When asked if he was upset he didn't get to finish the game, Sale said, "No, but do I want to? Absolutely. At the end of the day, check the book. I've got Kimbrel with pretty electric stuff. I like the odds there.

"I'm going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine,," Sale added. "Do I want the ball? Yes. But at the end of the day, he's the manager and he makes the calls. Like I said, check the books. Craig's been pretty damn good back there. We ended up winning."

Sale said he was asked by Farrell and pitching coach Carl Willis if he could go another inning. "I said we're rolling, let's keep it going. That's where we left it," Sale said.

Farrell defended the move, saying, "It's the first time he's gone eight this year. Every inning he's pitched, his back has been against the wall and there's been very little margin for error.

"It was a tough decision, but we took the lead and we've got Craig Kimbrel, who is throwing the ball extremely well and dominant in his own right and well rested," Farrell added. "And after a long inning we had a challenge and scored a run late in the inning. We felt it was time to turn it over to a guy who was fresh and powerful.

"Unfortunately, the second pitch went out of the ballpark."

When the Blue Jays challenged a safe call on Xander Bogaerts's slide into second base in the top of the ninth, which was overturned upon further review, Farrell felt Sale had sat too long during the 1-minute-55-second challenge delay.

"There'll come a time when he gets the ball in the ninth inning like that," Farrell said. "If Craig doesn't have the days of rest that he has or the efficiency he's had, maybe that's a different situation."

I repeat, this should have been Sale's game to win.

This is where we're getting a little crazy with pitch counts. This guy is a horse. Even if he had to go another 20 pitches to finish off the Jays in the ninth, he should have been afforded the chance.

He had struck out five of his 13 batters in the seventh and eighth innings. This didn't look like a guy who was out of gas. He seemed to have enough left to get Morales, Justin Smoak and Steve Pearce — the batters due up in the ninth — and preserve the lead.

Farrell may just have been super-cautious with the pitch count for his star lefthander, but whatever it was, you had to feel sorry for Sale and really question Farrell's decision.

After all, Red Sox hitters just watch and admire his work like the rest of us, it seems. How about swinging the bat and giving this guy some run support? It's really been ridiculous.

The Sox offense was shut down by Marco Estrada. Granted, Estrada pitched well and kept the Sox at bay for six innings, but the Blue Jays' bullpen came in and with closer Robert Osuna on the mound, Mitch Moreland doubled and Bogaerts drove him in with a single. He was thrown out trying to stretch it into a double.

When you are a pitcher of Sale's caliber, you should be able to make the call whether to continue or not, especially in that situation, where you've dominated and worked so hard to position yourself to win the game.

If he were already at 110-120 pitches, I get it. But he was at 102 pitches. So he was throwing less than 13 pitches per inning. That would bring him up to 115 for the outing. Even if he had to go to 120, what's the diff?

In his four starts, Sale has received four runs of support.

In his first start, he pitched seven innings, gave up no runs over seven innings and got a no-decision in Boston's 3-0 win. In his second start he left the game after $7\frac{2}{3}$ innings, trailing 2-1 after he allowed two runs and struck out 10 in a 2-1 loss to the Tigers. Afterward, a reader actually commented that, "Sale pitched good enough to lose."

In his third start, he beat the Rays, 2-1, and went seven innings and allowed three hits and one run, striking out 12.

What we're watching is pretty special. When the Red Sox acquired Sale there was a lot of excitement surrounding him, but I'm not sure we expected this type of dominance.

So when you take a pitcher out of a game in which he was in clear command, you're just asking for trouble. And Farrell got it. Fortunately for the Red Sox, they were able to pull out the win.

But it should have been Sale's win, not Kimbrel's.

Red Sox slow down David Price's recovery timeline

Peter Abraham

TORONTO — The Red Sox are calling it a slowdown, not a setback. But however you parse the language, it's clear that David Price may not rejoin the team until sometime in June — if then.

Price tested his left elbow with a brief throwing session on Thursday morning, firing balls from 90 feet while standing in shallow right field at the Rogers Centre.

Manager John Farrell, pitching coach Carl Willis and assistant athletic trainer Masai Takahashi then met with Price for roughly 10 minutes.

The decision was made to have Price throw in the bullpen before Friday night's game against Baltimore. But it's uncertain when he will face hitters. Initially, the plan was for that to be this week.

"Maybe a little bit of a slowdown, but certainly not a setback," Farrell said before a 4-1, 10-inning victory against Toronto.

Price threw in the bullpen three times in a span of six days, a buildup that included a 45-pitch workout on Saturday at Fenway Park. On Tuesday, Farrell said Price did not feel any soreness. That story changed on Thursday.

“You get a little soreness coming out of the intensity in which he was throwing the ball,” the manager said. “We gave it a couple of extra days before we extended it back out to some long toss.”

“I’d love to be able to say this is a straight incline to getting back in the games. But there’s going to be some — I don’t want to say peaks and valleys — but there will be days when you’ve got to monitor how they come out of their workload.”

Farrell didn’t feel the Sox pushed Price too hard last week

“I don’t think it was too fast. It was the highest volume and intensity of work relative to the previous weeks that he’s been going through rehab,” he said.

Price did not speak to reporters before the Red Sox played the Toronto Blue Jays. But his throws in the outfield were made with what appeared to be significant intensity and full extension. There was no outward sign of discomfort.

Typically, a pitcher recovering from injury will face hitters once or twice in a controlled setting before starting a minor league rehabilitation assignment. The Sox have been consistent in saying Price would need to build up to 90 pitches before being activated off the disabled list.

Such a schedule would take approximately three weeks to get through.

“We’re not at [the] point of making a point on the calendar of a return for David. It’s a matter of continuing the progression.”

Full house

With Jackie Bradley Jr. set to be activated off the disabled list on Friday, the Red Sox will have their Opening Day lineup together for the first time since Opening Day.

Illness and/or injury has kept at least one starter out of the lineup for 15 consecutive games.

“I like the way we’ve gone out and shown a lot of resilience,” Farrell said.

With Bradley back, Chris Young will transition back to a reserve role after starting 13 games. That puts a greater spotlight on Hanley Ramirez having not played the field.

The pre-season plans were for Ramirez to play first base against lefthanded starters, which would give Young an opportunity to get at-bats as the designated hitter. But Ramirez clearly prefers to stay in that role. Because of a sore right shoulder, he didn’t play even an inning of first base in spring training.

But Farrell isn’t giving up on the idea.

“He and I have had many conversations about this,” Farrell said. “We know that we’ve got interleague play coming relatively soon in National League ballparks. He’s aware of that.”

“I’m not throwing the towel in on him playing first base.”

Ramirez missed four games with the flu from April 6-10 and has done only occasional work in the field since.

The Sox will not have the DH at Milwaukee for a three-game series that starts May 9. In all, they have 10 interleague road games.

Bogaerts examined

Xander Bogaerts jammed his left thumb sliding into second base in the ninth inning. He finished the game but was taken for X-rays later. Farrell said the shortstop would be evaluated on Friday. Bogaerts said he didn't believe the injury was serious but wasn't sure he would start on Friday . . . Sandy Leon is 2 of his last 24 after going 0 for 3 but was able to draw a walk in the 10th inning that started a three-run rally . . . Craig Kimbrel had converted 37 of 39 saves with the Sox before blowing the game in the ninth inning . . . Toronto's Jose Bautista was 0 for 11 in the series and struck out seven times. He is hitting .109.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Chris Sale deserved better from John Farrell and Red Sox

Michael Silverman

TORONTO — Chris Sale couldn't have pitched any better than he did yesterday.

Well, actually he could have if only John Farrell and Craig Kimbrel had not stood in his way.

First, the skipper's interference.

On a day when Sale was the best pitcher in two countries and deserved to be on the mound to pitch the ninth inning after eight prior impeccable, efficient and scoreless innings, the Red Sox manager outsmarted himself.

He decided that for the bottom of the ninth, with a newly minted 1-0 lead, it was time to lift Sale and insert Kimbrel.

Two pitches into the ninth, Kimbrel threw a 97-mph four-seam fastball right into the wheelhouse of the Kendrys Morales, who jacked the pitch many, many meters over the center field wall and tying the game.

A mistake move followed by a mistake pitch.

By the end, the Red Sox won, 4-1, in 10 innings.

That helped to muffle the impact of the muffed moves, but make no mistake: Sale deserved so, so much better.

"I'm going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine," said Sale about wanting to go back and pitch the ninth. "It is what it is. Do I want to? Yeah. But at the end of the day, he's the manager and makes the calls. Check the book. Craig's been pretty damn good back there. We ended up winning."

Sale was at 102 pitches when he was lifted. That's his lowest pitch total in his four Red Sox starts. He averaged close to 13 pitches an inning yesterday. Had he stuck with that efficiency and mowed through the Toronto batting order in the ninth, his pitch count would have stood at 115. Which would be only four more than his previous start. His first start he was at 104, his second at 108. I suspect he could have handled the increase in workload.

Sale still was mixing his pitches with ridiculous command in the late innings. He struck out the side in order in the seventh. He threw two pitches at 95-plus mph to Devon Travis for the first strikeout of the eighth and a 93-plus pitch to Jose Bautista for his 13th strikeout, which ended the eighth.

In the top of the ninth, the Red Sox scored a run on Xander Bogaerts' RBI single, an at-bat that concluded with a 1 minute, 55 second video review of Bogaerts' slide into second. The safe call was overturned. In

that time, Kimbrel was ramping up his warmups. And in that time, Farrell convinced himself Sale needed to stay on the bench.

This is how Farrell explained his reasoning.

“It was a tough decision, but one where, we take the lead, we’ve got Craig Kimbrel, who’s thrown the baseball extremely well, he’s been dominant in his own right, he’s well rested,” said Farrell. “After kind of a long inning after we get a challenge review, we score that run late in the inning, felt it was time to turn it over to a guy that was fresh and powerful. Unfortunately, the second pitch goes out of the ballpark.”

One more time, he explained.

“The innings, the up and down, first time he’s at that point — there will be a time where he’s gonna take the mound in the ninth inning like that — if it’s a day where Craig doesn’t have the number of days rest that he had, the effectiveness and the efficiency that he has been, that’s a different situation,” Farrell said.

This begged the follow-up question: What would Farrell have done if Bogaerts had not given the Red Sox the lead and the game was still scoreless.

“We had talked about it and actually had Kimbrel warming up in the event that . . . knowing that they’ve used their closer already, likely that Kimbrel’s in that game as well,” said Farrell.

Farrell’s reasoning and decision would obviously look far less sketchy had Kimbrel lived up to his end of the contract. He had a 25-game streak of converting saves and had two full days of rest.

Protecting one-, two- and three-run leads is his job, and there’s no decisions to face like Farrell had — other than to execute pitches like Kimbrel can.

He had one job to do and he failed at it.

“I threw one bad pitch today and it’s a tie ballgame — it sucks, but hopefully it doesn’t happen too often,” said Kimbrel.

“I was just trying to go up — it was more middle,” he continued. “He’s a fastball hitter. You can’t always throw breaking balls to him. I still have to attack him with a fastball, which was right in his wheelhouse and you saw where it went.”

Yep, we all saw it.

The sight was as distressing as it was unnecessary.

That Kimbrel went on to notch a career-high five strikeouts in his two-inning stint and picked up the win bore no resemblance to the muted joy in this victory.

This game should have ended with Sale on the mound. We’ll never know what he would have done in the ninth. We can only hope Farrell learned the hard way Sale deserves that opportunity the next time it arises.

Chris Sale dominant again as Red Sox top Blue Jays in 10 innings

Jason Mastrodonato

TORONTO — This is what the Red Sox have been missing since they traded Jon Lester.

It’s unlike anything their TV audience has seen since Pedro Martinez.

In just four starts, Chris Sale has become the team's super glue, capable of keeping afloat a rotation that has four other pitchers who have yet to string together two consecutive quality starts. Without Sale, the rotation would have a 6.11 ERA.

With him, the Red Sox might win another Cy Young Award.

Yesterday, Sale was the best he's been since arriving in Boston, throwing eight scoreless innings, allowing nothing but four singles and a walk, striking out 13 and getting pulled after just 102 pitches. The Sox dramatically captured a 4-1 win over the Toronto Blue Jays in 10 innings thanks to Mookie Betts' two-out, bases-clearing double.

The game was scoreless until the top of the ninth inning, when Xander Bogaerts poked a two-out, RBI double down the right-field line to give the Red Sox a 1-0 lead.

Through four starts, they've averaged just 1.5 runs of support with Sale on the mound. And yet they've won three of those games.

A great starting pitcher can cover up any team's flaws.

The beginning of his career with the Red Sox has been beyond impressive: 292²/₃ innings, 0.91 ERA and 42 strikeouts.

Rick Porcello should be nervous that Sale is coming for his Cy Young trophy after finishing in the top-six of the American League voting in each of the last five years. He finished fifth behind Porcello last year.

"No, not worried at all," Porcello said, laughing. "I want to win a World Series. I don't really care about that. He's been awesome. Absolutely lights out. Everything that we've seen playing against him. A lot more fun being on his side, that's for sure."

To win the Cy Young, Sale eventually will have to get a few wins.

Last season, Porcello proved that wins still matter as most of his numbers matched Justin Verlander, except Porcello's run support of 6.6 per game led to a 22-4 record that clearly played well in the eyes of the voters.

Marco Estrada hung with Sale for six innings yesterday, keeping the Red Sox scoreless on his watch.

Sale (1-1) was in line for the win entering the ninth, but manager John Farrell pulled him in favor of closer Craig Kimbrel, who allowed a home run to Kendrys Morales that tied the game and sent it into extras.

Why has the offense disappeared when Sale pitches?

"It's just coincidence," said Dustin Pedroia. "It'll even out. It's a long year. Short sample size. What's he had? Four starts. He has 30 more. We'll score for him."

Sale seemed uninterested in the discussion.

"I've said it for years, there are two stats that matter: That's wins and losses," Sale said. "And it's not mine. I'm trying to win games, that's it."

Sale's mentality, even when he was on a struggling Chicago White Sox team for years, is one thing the Red Sox admired about him before completing the trade.

"I think that's the way he pitches, he's such an aggressive guy," Kimbrel said. "From an outsider, all those years watching him pitch, I don't think he's really paying attention to the score as much as he's making pitches and getting guys out. We've seen a great job of that so far."

Sale, one of the quickest pitchers in the league, made speedy work of the Blue Jays on his way to becoming the first pitcher to begin a season with four straight starts of at least seven innings and at least seven strikeouts without allowing more than two runs since Pedro Martinez in 1998.

And he's the first Red Sox pitcher to strike out at least 12 in consecutive games since Pedro in 2001. Roger Clemens and Oil Can Boyd are the only other Red Sox pitchers to ever strike out at least 12 in back-to-back outings.

Sale, David Price, Clayton Kershaw and Max Scherzer are the only pitchers in the last two years to go at least three straight games with at least 10 strikeouts.

The tall lefty has made quite the first impression.

"That probably means more to people outside of here," Sale said. "It doesn't matter who I'm playing against or with or whatever. You want to be good. You want to go out there and do your job. You want to pull your weight. That's all I'm trying to do. I'm trying to go out there and keep this team in games to win."

He doesn't care what color his Sox are.

White or Red, this is the same dominant pitcher.

"He does all the things you think about when you think about the basics in pitching," Porcello said. "He does all of those so well. He gets ahead of guys. He commands his fastball and breaking ball. It's been unbelievable watching him."

Red Sox notebook: Jackie Bradley, Jr. set to return from disabled list

Jason Mastrodonato

TORONTO — Jackie Bradley Jr. will return to the Red Sox today just in time for a three-game series against the division rival Baltimore Orioles.

Bradley finished his rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket by going 1-for-5 with a homer and two walks with two strikeouts over two games.

He injured his right knee rounding first base 12 days ago and was placed on the 10-day disabled list.

"Getting back to full strength is a positive," manager John Farrell said of Bradley's return. "And we're not back there yet given David Price's situation and Tyler Thornburg's situation. But I like the way we've gone out and shown a lot of resilience in a number of these games with coming back."

Andrew Benintendi (.317 average, .826 OPS), who has performed well in center field in Bradley's absence, will slide back to left field while Chris Young (.240 average, .601 OPS), who has been playing against righties and lefties, will be back on the bench for most games.

"He will filter through and be in a similar role that he was when he signed here," Farrell said, implying that Young will only play against lefties. "That doesn't mean we're going to take at-bats away from him. Obviously Jackie coming back and having that alignment against right-handed pitching is likely going to be a better matchup for us. But Chris has done an outstanding job in the role that he has here and he'll continue to be a valuable guy on this team."

Ideally, the Sox would get Young in the lineup as the designated hitter against lefties while moving Hanley Ramirez to first base and putting Mitch Moreland on the bench. But Hanley has yet to play any first base this season.

Farrell said Ramirez has not been resistant to playing first base, though he hinted to reporters in Boston last week that he prefers to DH.

Getting Ramirez at first base with Young at DH against lefties is “still is an alignment I would like us to achieve,” Farrell said. “We’re getting to the point with Jackie coming back, getting to full strength, that this is going to be more of the intent than it’s been because quite honestly we haven’t had the pressing need with the injuries we’ve dealt and guys being sick.”

Sore spot

After Price spent his morning playing long toss in the Rogers Centre outfield, Farrell admitted the left-hander has experienced soreness in his recovery from an elbow strain.

When a pitcher hasn’t thrown for more than a month, then throws a couple intense bullpen sessions, soreness is probably to be expected.

But the acceleration, then deceleration of Price’s progression, and Farrell’s differing comments on how his arm has felt during it, indicates this hasn’t been a simple recovery thus far.

While it seemed like Price was speeding up last week when he threw his third bullpen session and the Red Sox were planning to test him against live hitters shortly afterward, they quickly changed directions after arriving here on Tuesday.

Instead of throwing on the mound against live hitters, Price restarted his long toss program, first from 90 feet, then gradually farther as the week progressed.

It’s unclear when Price first felt sore. On Tuesday, Farrell was asked if Price felt any pain and simply said, “No.”

Yesterday, Farrell said Price experienced soreness somewhere along the line.

“You get a little soreness coming out of the intensity in which he was throwing the ball,” Farrell said. “We gave it a couple of extra days before we extended back out into some long toss. He had a good work day here yesterday with some pretty aggressive flatground work.”

Price said last Saturday that he didn’t want to push himself too fast. Perhaps the soreness was a sign that he should slow down.

“I don’t think it was too fast,” Farrell said. “It was the highest volume and intensity of work relative to the previous weeks that he’s been going through rehab. Maybe a little bit of a slowdown but certainly not a setback and back on the mound tomorrow.”

He’s still scheduled to throw a bullpen session tomorrow in Baltimore. It’ll be his fourth bullpen session in the last two weeks.

It would seem unlikely that Price could return before June, given that he still needs to build up enough strength and confidence to face live hitters, then eventually begin a rehab assignment. The Red Sox still aren’t putting a timetable on it.

Streak snapped

Craig Kimbrel’s save streak is over, having ended yesterday in the Red Sox’ 4-1 win over the Blue Jays in 10 innings.

Kimbrel allowed a homer to Kendrys Morales to blow the save, snapping a streak of 25 straight conversions since last June. It was the second-longest streak in the majors next to Baltimore closer Zach Britton's streak of 54. He has now struck out 12 of the last 16 batters he's faced. . . .

Xander Bogaerts injured his left thumb diving back to the bag late in the game and had images taken afterward. He said he wasn't sure if he'd be able to play today. Farrell said the team will re-evaluate him further today. . . .

Brandon Workman has 10 strikeouts in seven innings at Pawtucket, having allowed only one walk and one hit. On his way back from Tommy John surgery, he is a candidate to return to the Red Sox bullpen next time there is a need, Farrell said. . . .

Former Red Sox prospect Yoan Moncada homered off PawSox lefty Henry Owens yesterday in his first at-bat for Charlotte, the White Sox Triple-A affiliate. Moncada entered the game with three homers and an .882 OPS in 12 games this season.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox seeing some Pedro Martinez in Chris Sale's ridiculous start to season

Tim Britton

TORONTO — Standing in the bullpen at Rogers Centre on Thursday, Dana LeVangie couldn't help but get some flashbacks.

LeVangie is currently the bullpen coach for Boston. He was the club's bullpen catcher back at the turn of the century, at a time when Pedro Martinez was at his peak.

So if there was one person in the ballpark best suited to compare what Chris Sale has done through four starts with the best of Martinez's time with Boston, it's LeVangie.

And he's not shying away from the comparison.

Martinez has long been a pitching polestar for LeVangie. Ask about a current pitcher's dominant stuff, and he can play the trump card, having seen one of the most dominant stretches by a starting pitcher in the game's history up close.

Now, though, he's getting a little déjà vu.

"I saw it [with Pedro], and now I see Chris," LeVangie said after Sale's ridiculous eight shutout innings against the Blue Jays Thursday. "He steps on the mound and there's an edge. That's what Pedro had every time he stepped to the mound.

"You can see it in the eyes. It's all comparable.... You talk about stopping losing streaks, that's what that is right there."

LeVangie isn't the only one impressed. Martinez himself chimed in postgame on Twitter, calling Sale the pitcher he would pay money to see.

Even considering the rarefied way Sale had pitched his first three times out, Thursday represented another notch up. The left-hander allowed four hits over his eight innings, striking out 13 more hitters while walking only one.

"Oh man, he's pretty tough to hit," said Dustin Pedroia. "He's just attacking the zone and overpowering guys with all of his pitches. That's pretty impressive."

“I’m glad we had a little TV down there [in the bullpen] to watch him,” Craig Kimbrel said. “You couldn’t ask him to do any more.”

What the Red Sox couldn’t get over on Thursday was Sale’s efficient strike-throwing. Eighty of his 102 pitches were strikes.

“Even the guys who go up there and gear up and try to hit can’t. That’s when you know his stuff is overpowering,” Pedroia said.

“If you asked him at the end of the day, his command might not have been the best, but his stuff was electric,” said LeVangie. “His deception is incredible.”

In 2016, Sale sacrificed some strikeouts for efficiency. His ERA hardly budged while he led the American League in innings per start and reached a career high in innings. His strikeout rate did dip, though, from more than 32 percent of opposing hitters to just over 25 percent.

Thus far this season, Sale has found a way to combine devastating strikeout stuff with brutal efficiency. Thursday was a master’s class in that mixture, with Sale’s statistics just silly. He was ahead of nearly every hitter, and he finished them off crisply.

Sale threw first-pitch strikes to 20 of the 29 hitters he faced. He was ahead 0-2 on 11 of them. He threw 22 balls while recording 22 swing-and-misses.

“It was something unheard of,” manager John Farrell said of the percentage of strikes, calling it one of the most dominant starts he’d ever seen. “You start to think about what [Jon] Lester and [Clay] Buchholz did in no-hitters.”

Sale as a starter is striking hitters out like an elite late-game reliever. He has punched out 38.9 percent of opposing hitters over his four starts, beyond the best rate ever posted by a qualifying starter (37.5 percent by, guess who, Martinez in 1999).

As if that strikeout rate or Sale’s 0.91 ERA required massaging, consider the context in which he’s performed so far. The Red Sox have scored four runs while Sale has been in the game all season. Sale has taken the mound 30 times to start an inning this season: The game has been tied 24 times; the Sox have been leading by one the other six. He’s yet to throw a pitch with his team trailing.

“Every inning he’s pitched this season his back has been against the wall,” Farrell said. “He’s had very little margin for error. He was at his best today.”

“It’s no different than if we score 10 runs every inning,” he said. “You pitch to your strengths and try to keep it where it’s at no matter what. If I’ve got a 10-run lead, it’s not like I’m going to say, ‘Oh, I can give up four right now.’ You just keep pitching your game.”

“He pitches with all his pitches. He has a great fastball but his slider and his changeup are just as good,” said Kimbrel, who knows something about having elite stuff. “He’s been very special.”

Four games are still just four games, and as good as Sale has been, Martinez was even better, if marginally, in his first quartet of starts with Boston. But considering the way poor starts have quickly colored star players’ tenures with the Red Sox, Sale’s outstanding beginning to his Boston career is important.

“It doesn’t matter who I’m playing with or against or whatever. You want to be good,” Sale said. “You want to do your job and pull your weight. That’s all I’m trying to do.”

So far, so good.

“Today,” LeVangie said shaking his head, “was pretty incredible to watch.”

Red Sox still aiming to play Hanley Ramirez in the field

Tim Britton

TORONTO — The Red Sox haven’t yet given up hope that Hanley Ramirez will play first base for them this season.

“I’m not throwing the towel in on him playing first base,” manager John Farrell said before Thursday’s series finale in Toronto. “He and I have had many conversations about this. We know we have interleague coming up relatively soon in National League ballparks. He’s aware of that.”

Ramirez hasn’t played a single defensive inning all year, including spring training, because of tightness in his throwing shoulder. He’s backed off some pregame work in the field since experiencing the flu in the first week of the season.

He has made it clear that it’s his preference to serve as the team’s designated hitter.

Boston’s offseason plan to play Ramirez at first with Chris Young DHing against left-handers has yet to materialize. That’s hasn’t been too problematic yet, given Mitch Moreland’s hot bat and Young’s consistent at-bats due to Jackie Bradley, Jr.’s injury.

“That still is an alignment I would like us to achieve,” Farrell said. “We’re getting to the point that this is going to be more of the intent than it’s been.”

However, it’s not a great sign that Ramirez has essentially been day-to-day with that shoulder tightness since the start of spring.

The Red Sox play open road interleague play in Milwaukee on May 9. They also play in St. Louis that month.

“We’ll get there,” third-base coach and infield coordinator Brian Butterfield said earlier this week. “It’s not like he’s going to forget how to move his feet and catch a ground ball. When he’s ready to go and feels it won’t affect him offensively and our organization feels it won’t affect him offensively, then we’ll get after it.”

After big base hit, Xander Bogaerts injures left thumb

Tim Britton

TORONTO — Xander Bogaerts jammed his left thumb sliding into second base on his go-ahead single in the ninth inning, and the shortstop is unsure whether he’ll play on Friday in Baltimore.

Although Bogaerts stayed in the game, he underwent tests immediately afterward and said his thumb was still sore postgame.

He’ll be re-evaluated on Friday.

Bogaerts hurt his thumb right after driving in the game’s first run with an opposite-field single down the line with two outs in the ninth. Facing Toronto closer Roberto Osuna, Bogaerts registered payback for a strikeout on Wednesday night.

His whole approach to the at-bat pivoted before it even began, when catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia met with Osuna on the mound after Mitch Moreland’s double.

“The night before, he didn’t have any mound visits and he just blew me away,” Bogaerts said “Normally he’s the type of guy who likes to throw me a lot of sliders. The night before, he threw me a lot of fastballs.”

So when Bogaerts saw Saltalamacchia meet with Osuna, he figured they were discussing a different plan of attack.

“First base is open,” Bogaerts said of the situation. “They don’t want to give in. He kept going to the offspeed.”

Osuna’s first four pitches to Bogaerts were sliders. While the first was in the zone for a strike, Bogaerts was able to lay off the next three to set up an advantage count. He sat fastball, just in case. When he got it, he poked it into right field the way he has so many times with runners in scoring position.

“They haven’t thrown me much in compared to last year,” he said. “I guess that’s what they’re trying to do right now, so I can’t be pulling outside pitches.”

Red Sox 4, Blue Jays 1: Big hit from Mookie Betts gives Red Sox win in extras

Tim Britton

TORONTO — All it took was a little late offense to render the debate moot.

After Craig Kimbrel blew the save on Chris Sale in the ninth, Mookie Betts’ three-run double lifted the Red Sox to a 4-1 win over the Blue Jays in 10 innings on Thursday. What had been a frustrating day for Betts turned to the good in the end, as he ripped a 2-0 Jason Grilli fastball down the left-field line to clear the bases in extras.

The rally had started at the bottom of the order, with a Sandy Leon walk and Brock Holt single.

“I’ve got to give credit to the guys before putting together some good at-bats and giving me an opportunity,” said Betts. “I did have a rough day today, but luckily I was able to stay in it.”

The late offense saved the Red Sox from what would have been a difficult loss. Following eight masterful innings from Sale, Kimbrel allowed a leadoff home run in the ninth to Kendrys Morales to tie the game.

“It just shows the character of this team — the will to win and the drive that they have,” said Sale. “Anybody can sit in a corner and kick themselves and pout about it, but we took the reverse approach and got after it.”

The Red Sox will take Sale handing the ball directly to Kimbrel any day of the week. Still, Sale was cruising on 102 pitches through eight, having struck out five of the previous seven hitters. Manager John Farrell wasn’t sure whether he would have stuck with Sale or gone with Kimbrel had Boston not taken the lead with two outs in the top of the ninth. The manager said the extended inning, which included a two-minute replay review for the third out, played into the call to go with Kimbrel for the save.

“It was a tough decision,” Farrell said. “After a long inning and the review, I felt it was time to turn it over to a guy that was fresh and powerful.”

“I’m going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine,” said Sale. “But at the end of the day, he’s the manager and makes the calls. Check the book. Craig’s been pretty [darn] good back there.... I like the odds there.”

Sale’s work over eight innings was undone on Kimbrel’s second pitch, a high fastball hit to straightaway center by Morales.

Kimbrel rebounded to retire the next six Blue Jays, five via strikeout.

“I still had a job to do,” Kimbrel said about refocusing after the home run. “I gave up the game. I felt like it was my job to keep the game close and keep it going.”

Of course, perhaps the Red Sox can only score runs when Sale’s day is over. The left-hander has pitched 29 2/3 innings this season, during which the Sox have scored a total of four times. The team is 3-1 in those games anyway.

Sale has yet to pitch with even a two-run cushion at any point in a game. He’s taken the mound with a lead for six individual innings over the 30 that he’s started. He has attempted a shutdown inning after a Boston score twice.

“It’s coincidence,” said Dustin Pedroia. “It’ll even out. What’s he had, four starts? He has 30 more. We’ll score for him.”

Sale allowed just four hits over his eight shutout innings, striking out 13 and walking one. He generated as many swings-and-misses (22) as pitches he threw for balls.

This week a “slowdown” but not a “setback” for David Price

Tim Britton

TORONTO — After coming through a light long toss on Thursday, David Price is still on tap to throw his scheduled bullpen session on Friday in Baltimore. The session won’t be as intense, though, as Price’s most recent time off a mound last Saturday.

Manager John Farrell described this week as “maybe a little bit of a slowdown but certainly not a setback.”

Price had thrown three bullpen sessions last week, culminating in a Saturday one that included a couple breaks to simulate innings. On Wednesday, Farrell had suggested Price’s next time off a mound would be a repeat of Saturday. On Thursday, pitching coach Carl Willis said it might be a little lighter than that.

“Right now probably we’re looking at 30 pitches and, if all goes well, probably go back to where he was on Saturday [after that] with a couple days off,” Willis said.

Farrell acknowledged Thursday that Price has experienced soreness this week, two days after saying the slowdown wasn’t the result of soreness.

“You get a little soreness coming out of the intensity in which he was throwing the ball,” Farrell said. “We have it a couple extra days before we extended back out into some long toss.”

“It’s part of the process,” said Willis. “Things have progressed very well, but you can’t just go out and throw and throw and throw. You have to give yourself a break.

“Right now, he’s feeling the normal things he feels getting ready for spring training. Nothing more. For him, it’s kind of been a normal progression.”

Did the Red Sox ramp up the intensity too fast on Price last week?

“I don’t think so,” Willis said. “Coming in, you know there are going to be ebbs and flows a little bit. We don’t want too early to grind through any type of situation where he’s showing some fatigue.”

“I’d love to be able to say that this is a straight incline to getting back into games,” said Farrell, “but there’s going to be — I don’t want to say peaks and valleys — but there’s going to be days you’ve got to monitor how they come out of their work.”

Farrell declined to put any timetable on a return for Price.

"We're not at the point of making a point in the calendar," he said. "It's a matter of continuing the progression."

*** *The Springfield Republican***

Chris Sale, Boston Red Sox ace: 'I want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine'

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Give Chris Sale credit. If the Red Sox ace was at all upset manager John Farrell replaced him with closer Craig Kimbrel in a 1-0 ballgame entering the bottom of the ninth, he didn't express his frustration publicly.

Sale told reporters here at Rogers Centre he wasn't upset.

"No. Do I want to (pitch)? Absolutely," Sale said. "But at the end of the day, I've got Kimbrel coming in and that's pretty electric stuff. So I like the odds there."

Kimbrel couldn't lock down the save. He gave up a monstrous solo homer to Toronto's Kendrys Morales on his second pitch, a 96.8 mph fastball. It was a no-doubter to center field that tied the game 1-1.

The Red Sox eventually won 4-1 over the Blue Jays in 10 innings.

"I'm going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine," Sale said. "It was it is. Do I want to? Yeah. But at the end of the day, he's the manager and makes the calls. And like I said, check the book: Craig's been pretty, damn good back there. We ended up winning."

Sale was at 102 pitches and cruising. He threw 78 percent of his pitches for strikes (80 strikes, 22 balls). In his eight scoreless innings, he allowed just four hits and one walk while striking out 13.

Pitching coach Carl Willis asked Sale after the eighth how he felt.

"I said, 'We're rolling. Let's keep it going. So that's where we left it.'"

Sale had thrown 104, 108 and 111 pitches respectively in his previous three starts.

Sale had a pitch count of more than 102 in 23 of his 32 starts last year. He also reached 120 pitches in three different starts and threw at least 118 pitches in eight starts during 2016.

The Red Sox have scored just four runs in the 29 2/3 innings Sale has been on the mound. He has given up just three runs for a 0.91 ERA.

"It's not different if they score 10 runs every inning," Sale said. "It doesn't matter what the score of the game is. You pitch to your strengths and you try to keep it where it's at no matter what."

The Red Sox are 3-1 in games Sale has started. That's all that matters to him.

"I've said it for years, there's two stats that matter: win and loss. It's not mine. Trying to win games. That's it."

Xander Bogaerts gets sore left thumb examined after jamming it on headfirst slide

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Xander Bogaerts tried to extend his ninth inning RBI single that put Boston ahead 1-0 into a double.

But he got thrown out at second base and he jammed his left thumb sliding headfirst into the bag in the process.

He remained in the game but had the thumb examined after the Red Sox won 4-1 in 10 innings over the Blue Jays here at Rogers Centre.

"He's getting his thumb checked right now," Farrell said not longer after the game ended. "So he got a little bit more sore in the next half inning. So we'll reevaluate him tomorrow."

Bogaerts initially was called safe at second base. But the Blue Jays challenge and won the review.

Farrell and the trainer came out to look at Bogaerts' thumb while the play was being reviewed.

John Farrell, Boston Red Sox manager, explains decision to remove Chris Sale in 1-0 game in 9th

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Boston Red Sox manager John Farrell's decision to remove Chris Sale in a 1-0 game heading into the bottom of the ninth at 102 pitches backfired.

But the Red Sox won anyway.

Closer Craig Kimbrel surrendered a game-tying solo homer to Blue Jays' Kendrys Morales on the second pitch he threw here at Rogers Centre.

Mookie Betts though delivered a two-out, three-run double in the 10th inning to give the Red Sox a 4-1 victory.

Sale was absolutely dominant. He threw 78 percent of his pitches for strikes (80 strikes, 22 balls). In his eight scoreless innings, he allowed just four hits and one walk while striking out 13.

The Red Sox had taken the lead in the top of the ninth on an RBI single by Xander Bogaerts.

Bogaerts got thrown out trying to extend his single into a double. He initially was called safe but the Blue Jays challenged and won the review. The challenge factored into Farrell's decision to go with Kimbrel over Sale.

"It was a tough but one where we take the lead. We've got Craig Kimbrel who's throwing the baseball extremely well," Farrell said. "Has been dominant in his own right. Is well rested. And after kind of a long inning, where we get a challenge review, we score that run late in the inning, felt like it was time to turn it over to a guy that was fresh and was powerful. Unfortunately, the second pitch goes out of the ballpark.

"But we responded as we've done many different times where either the game has been tied late, or we've had to come from behind. And we did it again today."

Sale had thrown 104, 108 and 111 pitches respectively in his previous three starts this season.

"First time he's at that point (this season of pitching eight innings)," Farrell said. "There will be a time where he's going to take the mound in the ninth inning like that. If it's a day where Craig doesn't have the number of days rest that he had, the effectiveness and the efficiency that he has (had), that's a different situation."

Sale might have returned for the ninth if the game was tied.

"We had talked about it," Farrell said. "Knowing they had used their closer already, likely that Kimbrel is in that game as well."

Chris Sale dominates in win with 13 Ks, 78 percent strikes; Mookie Betts delivers in 10th inning

Christopher Smith

TORONTO -- Eight innings. Zero runs. One walk. Four hits. Thirteen strikeouts.

Chris Sale was absolutely dominant. He threw 78 percent of his pitches for strikes (80 strikes, 22 balls).

He struck out the side in the seventh inning on 10 pitches.

The Red Sox won 4-1 over the Toronto Blue Jays here at Rogers Centre in 10 innings -- no thanks to the offense which continues to give Sale almost zero run support.

Boston also earned the victory despite manager John Farrell removing a dominant Sale at 102 pitches with a 1-0 lead entering the bottom of the ninth.

A questionable decision

Xander Bogaerts came through with a two-out RBI single down the right field line in the top of the ninth to put the Red Sox ahead 1-0.

But Farrell opted not to send Sale back out at 102 pitches.

Closer Craig Kimbrel came on for the save instead. He gave up a monstrous solo homer to Kendrys Morales on his second pitch, a 96.8 mph fastball. It was a no-doubter to center field.

Sale had thrown 104, 108 and 111 pitches respectively in his previous three starts this season.

Sale had a pitch count of more than 102 in 23 of his 32 starts last year. He also reached 120 pitches in three different starts and threw at least 118 pitches in eight starts during 2016.

Mookie comes through

Mookie Betts delivered a three-run double with two outs in the 10th inning to put Boston ahead 4-1. Kimbrel pitched a perfect bottom of the 10th and earned the victory.

Lack of run support

Sale has been electric in four starts for the Red Sox. He has allowed three runs in 29 2/3 innings (0.91 ERA). He has recorded 42 strikeouts.

The Red Sox have scored just four runs in the 29 2/3 innings Sale has been on the mound.

The Red Sox have taken two games into the ninth inning scoreless this season. Both were started by Sale.

April 5 vs. Pirates: 7.0 IP, 3 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 1 BB, 7 Ks.

(Red Sox won 3-0 in 12 innings, Sale received a no-decision and Boston scored 0 runs with him on the mound)

April 10 at Detroit: 7.2 IP, 5 H, 2 R, 2 ER, 1 BB, 10 Ks, 1 HR.

(Red Sox lost 2-1, Sale took the loss and Boston scored 1 run with him on the mound)

April 15 vs. Rays: 7.0 IP, 3 H, 1 R, 1 ER, 3 BB, 12 Ks.

(Red Sox won 2-1, Sale got the win and the Red Sox scored 2 runs with him on the mound)

April 20 at Toronto: 8.0 IP, 4 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 1 BB, 13 Ks.

(Red Sox won 4-1, Sale received a no-decision and the Red Sox scored 1 run with him on the mound).

Marco Estrada matches Sale for the first 6 innings

Blue Jays starter Marco Estrada was just as good as Sale during the 6 innings he pitched. He didn't allow a run, gave up three hits and two walks and struck out seven.

He also had success vs. Boston last year with a 3.18 ERA and 1.27 WHIP in five starts.

Brandon Workman has 10 strikeouts in seven scoreless innings of relief for Triple-A Pawtucket

Jen McCaffrey

Brandon Workman hasn't pitched in the majors since the 2014 season.

Coming up on two years removed from Tommy John surgery, the right-hander has gotten off to a strong start in Triple-A Pawtucket.

Workman, who had surgery in June 2015, has allowed just one hit over seven scoreless innings of relief for Pawtucket. In that stretch, he's struck out 10 and walked one.

On Wednesday night, he retired all six batters he faced over two innings of work and struck out five.

While it's only been three appearances, it's a promising sign for the 2010 second-round pick of the Red Sox.

Workman played a key role in the second half of the 2013 season out of the Red Sox bullpen. He made 20 appearances, including three starts, and posted a 4.97 ERA over 41 2/3 innings with 47 strikeouts and 15 walks.

While the Red Sox will want to see more out of Workman, if he can keep it up, he'll be working his way in the bullpen conversation when the need arises.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox prevail after 'tough decision' in 9th

Ian Browne

TORONTO -- On the way to what would become a thrilling 4-1 win in 10 innings, Red Sox manager John Farrell had to make a decision that was agonizing for good reasons.

Heading into the bottom of the ninth of a game in which his team had just taken a 1-0 lead, Farrell had two options:

1. Stick with ace Chris Sale, who had achieved the rare combination of being both overpowering and strikingly efficient.

2. Go to closer Craig Kimbrel, who was untouched in his three previous outings (eight strikeouts, no baserunners over three innings) and had two days of rest coming into Thursday. Farrell chose the latter, which initially led to heartbreak. Kendrys Morales belted Kimbrel's second pitch, a 96.8-mph heater, over the wall in center to tie the game.

This robbed Sale of a win on a day in which he threw 80 of his 102 pitches for strikes, a career-high percentage of 78 percent for the lanky lefty. Over eight innings, Sale allowed four hits and a walk while punching out 13.

"I'm going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine. It is what it is. Do I want to? Yeah. But at the end of the day, he's the manager and makes the calls," said Sale. "Check the book. Craig's been pretty [darn] good back there. We ended up winning."

Yes, the Red Sox made things right in the end, and provided an easier night of sleep for Farrell with that three-run rally in the 10th led by a bases-clearing double by Mookie Betts.

"It was a tough decision, but one where, we take the lead, we've got Craig Kimbrel, who's thrown the baseball extremely well, he's been dominant in his own right," said Farrell. "He's well-rested. After kind of a long inning when we get a challenge review and we score that run late in the inning, we felt it was time to turn it over to a guy that was fresh and powerful. Unfortunately, the second pitch goes out of the ballpark."

Give credit to Kimbrel, who sat down the next six batters he faced for the win -- five of them on strikeouts.

"I didn't want to lose the game," said Kimbrel. "I still had a job to do. [Pitching coach] Carl [Willis] came through and told me if we scored some runs, I was going back out. Initially, there's just that frustration. I gave up the game. I felt like it was my job to keep the game close and keep it going."

Would Farrell have gone back to Sale in the ninth if the Red Sox hadn't jumped in front?

From the sound of it, if the Red Sox had gone down 1-2-3, Sale would have pitched the bottom of the ninth. But the way things unfolded, with an extended rally that included a review of nearly two minutes on the go-ahead single by Xander Bogaerts, it became Kimbrel Time in Farrell's mind.

"That's certainly an option," Farrell said, when asked if what would have happened if the game remained scoreless. "Again, Craig is throwing the ball so well and so dominant, so that was the decision."

And despite Sale's no-decision, he has been amazing in his first four starts with the Red Sox, going 1-1 with a 0.91 ERA. The Red Sox are 3-1 in those games. Thursday was his best so far for Boston.

"He was outstanding, powerful, a lot of strikes," said Farrell. "It was something unheard of, nearly 80 percent strikes on the day. All three pitches were working. He had such good swing-and-miss to his fastball up and away, up to his arm side against right-handers."

Betts delivers in 10th after Sale's 13 K's

Gregor Chisholm and Ian Browne

TORONTO -- Mookie Betts came through with a three-run double in the top of the 10th inning, and along the way, he helped provide some protection to Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel and manager John Farrell.

Betts' go-ahead double came off Blue Jays reliever Jason Grilli and helped secure a 4-1 victory on Thursday afternoon at Rogers Centre.

"I'm just trying to put a good swing on a good pitch," said Betts, who had been 0-for-3 with two strikeouts before clearing the bases. "I did have a rough day today, but it could come down to one at-bat, and luckily I

was able to stay in it. I've got to give credit to the guys before, putting together some good at-bats and giving me an opportunity."

The shot down the left-field line came minutes after Kimbrel coughed up a 1-0 lead in the bottom of the ninth when Kendrys Morales hit a game-tying solo homer.

"I threw one bad pitch today, and it's a tie ballgame," said Kimbrel. "It [stinks], but hopefully it doesn't happen too often."

The late-inning dramatics somewhat overshadowed dominating performances from the starting pitchers on both sides. Chris Sale (0.91 ERA) picked up his fourth consecutive quality start of the year as he set a season high with 13 strikeouts over eight scoreless innings. He limited the Blue Jays to four hits and one walk, but he was pulled from the game in favor of Kimbrel after throwing 80 of his 102 pitches for strikes.

"I mean, that's the goal. That's the objective, filling up the strike zone, throwing strikes, being able to repeat what you're doing out there and giving the team a chance to win," said Sale.

Right-hander Marco Estrada was almost as good, but he too was forced to settle for a no-decision as Sale matched him pitch for pitch. Toronto's veteran starter limited Boston to three hits and a pair of walks over six innings while striking out seven. Estrada kept the Red Sox hitless in three at-bats with runners in scoring position, and he stranded five men in his third quality start of the season to lower his ERA to 2.63.

"My goal every game is to go nine innings and give up zero runs. It's tough to do, obviously, especially when you're facing a lineup like Boston," Estrada said. "Those guys just put up good at-bats. I know we didn't give up too many hits today, but they wasted a lot of good pitches. It's frustrating sometimes. You make a good pitch, and they foul it off instead of popping it up or grounding out. They do a good job over there."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Walk this way: Boston's rally in the top of the 10th got started when Grilli issued a one-out walk to No. 8 hitter Sandy Leon. Grilli worked the count full but then wasn't close on a 93 mph fastball as the go-ahead run reached base. Brock Holt followed with a single, and two batters later, Andrew Benintendi walked to load the bases for Betts. Boston's star outfielder quickly got ahead 2-0, and then he ripped a double down the line as all three runners came around to score. Grilli has now surrendered five earned runs over 6 1/3 innings this season.

"You look at the way we built the inning," said Farrell. "Brock with a big base hit mixed in there, a couple walks where we didn't give up the strike zone. Sandy, particularly, where he chased a number of pitches up [earlier], and then laid off them and works a walk."

Morales' moment: Morales has shown a flair for the dramatic during his brief time with the Blue Jays. On April 15, he hit a walk-off homer in the ninth inning vs. the Orioles, and it was another ninth-inning homer that played a big role in this game. Morales sent the second pitch he saw from Kimbrel over the wall in center field for third home run of the year. According to Statcast™, the ball was projected to travel 427 feet and left his bat at 106 mph. Morales' homer came on a 97.1 mph fastball from Kimbrel, which marked the fastest pitch the veteran slugger has hit out of the park during the Statcast™ era.

"I was just trying to go up. It was more middle," said Kimbrel. "He's a fastball hitter. You can't always throw breaking balls to him. I still have to attack him with a fastball, which was right in his wheelhouse, and you saw where it went."

Doubling up: Major League Baseball's leader in doubles was up to his old tricks again on Thursday afternoon. Mitch Moreland hit a fly ball to right-center field that got by the outstretched glove of outfielder Jose Bautista and went to the wall for a double. According to Statcast™, the play had a catch probability of 63 percent, but Bautista was unable to come up with the grab, and it proved costly right away. In the following at-bat, Xander Bogaerts singled down the first-base line off Osuna as Moreland came around with the go-ahead run.

QUOTABLE

"I'm glad we had a little TV down there to watch him. It's tough to see where his pitches are going from the bullpen, so it's always nice to be able to see it." -- Kimbrel, marveling at Sale's performance

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Sale's strike percentage of 78 percent was the best of any start in his career, topping an outing on July 27, 2013, when he threw 75.6 percent strikes.

The Blue Jays have lost five consecutive series for the first time in franchise history. Their 2-7 start at home marks their worst record to start the season since 2004.

UNDER REVIEW

Farrell used his challenge in the bottom of the third inning after Ryan Goins hit a slow grounder to short. Bogaerts tried to get the forceout at second base, but his throw was deemed late by second-base umpire Laz Diaz. That put runners on first and second with one out, but before it became official, Farrell asked for a review. Following a brief delay, it was deemed that the replays were inconclusive, and as a result, the play on the field stood. In the end it didn't matter, as Sale quickly bounced back to strike out Kevin Pillar and Bautista to end the threat.

In the ninth, when Bogaerts put the Red Sox ahead with the RBI single to right, he was originally awarded second base after advancing on the throw. But after a challenge, the play was overturned, and Bogaerts was ruled out on the head-first slide. The review took one minute and 55 seconds.

WHAT'S NEXT

Red Sox: Left-hander Drew Pomeranz opens a three-game series for the Red Sox on Friday night at Camden Yards, with the first pitch scheduled for 7:05 p.m. ET on MLB.TV. Center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. is expected to be activated and in the starting lineup after being sidelined with a right knee sprain.
Blue Jays: Right-hander Mat Latos will make his first start of the year when the Blue Jays open a four-game series vs. the Angels on Friday night with first pitch scheduled for 10:07 p.m. ET on MLB.TV. Latos made a couple of appearances for Triple-A Buffalo and allowed one earned run over nine innings of work. He will start this game and possibly one other with Aaron Sanchez and J.A. Happ currently on the 10-day disabled list.

Fully rested, Price to resume throwing

Ian Browne

TORONTO -- After a five-day break, David Price will climb back on the mound on Friday in Baltimore for his fourth side session since he was shut down with a left elbow strain sustained on Feb. 28.

The first three of those side sessions were this past week, over a six-day period. It was decided that Price needed a period of recuperation after that, and he threw long-toss on Wednesday and again before Thursday's game.

"He threw the ball good," Red Sox manager John Farrell said Thursday morning. "His planned session of long-toss went as anticipated, and he's on tap for a bullpen [session] tomorrow when we get to Baltimore." Though the brief shutdown from mound work created some external worrying that Price had experienced a setback, Farrell said that it's all part of the recovery process.

"I don't think it was too fast," Farrell said of this past week's progression. "It was the highest volume and intensity of work relative to the previous weeks that he's been going through rehab. Maybe a little bit of a slowdown [the past few days] but certainly not a setback, and he'll be back on the mound tomorrow."

The Red Sox continue not to set any timetable for Price's return to the rotation, figuring there is no point in doing that until he is at least cleared to go on a Minor League rehab assignment.

"We're not at the point of marking a point on the calendar for the return for David," said Farrell. "It's a matter of continuing the progression, and we're back on the mound tomorrow."

Worth noting

- The ongoing subplot of when Hanley Ramirez will be cleared to play first base doesn't seem to have any more clarity now than it did in Spring Training, when the right-handed hitter arrived with right shoulder soreness that limited him to playing only as the designated hitter.

"He and I have had many conversations about this," said Farrell. "We know we have Interleague [play] coming up relatively soon in National League ballparks. He's aware of that. I'm not throwing the towel in on him playing first base. At the same time, we've been able to be pretty darn productive with Mitch [Moreland] going every day."

The Red Sox play three games in Milwaukee (May 9-11) and two games in St. Louis (May 16-17). If Ramirez is unable to play defense by then, the Red Sox would have to play those games without his important bat in the middle of the lineup.

*** *ESPNBoston.com***

Offense might lack 'thunder,' but Red Sox finding other ways to score

Scott Lauber

BALTIMORE -- A few years ago, when Don Orsillo was still doing play-by-play of Boston Red Sox games on television, he often got good-natured grief from wisecracking second baseman Dustin Pedroia for not having a signature, over-the-top home run call.

This season, Orsillo wouldn't need one.

Through 16 games, the Red Sox have hit a grand total of seven home runs -- or as many as Houston's George Springer and Oakland's Khris Davis and one less than Milwaukee's Eric Thames have produced on their own. No other team in the majors has fewer than 10 homers, and 21 teams have at least 15. A Red Sox team hasn't gone deep so infrequently this far into a season since 1993.

Though the Red Sox are last in the majors with seven homers, they're second with 34 doubles, including Mitch Moreland's MLB-best 11. Tom Szczerbowski/Getty Images
As iconic slugger David Ortiz might say if he took a break from his retirement to notice, the offense is lacking "thunder."

But the Sox also have a 10-6 record, in part because they have scored 69 runs, tied for fifth in the American League. They are averaging 4.31 runs per game, better than league average. They lead the AL in doubles (34) and the majors in hits (156). They're opportunistic on the bases, and they make consistent contact, having struck out fewer times (104) than any AL team. All of which suggests they are finding new and different ways to score in the post-Ortiz era.

"I mean, the guy who's supposed to hit the homers is not here anymore: Papi," designated hitter Hanley Ramirez said, referring to Ortiz. "Just have to score one way or the other."

Of course, the Red Sox still have plenty of power threats. Mookie Betts belted 31 homers last season en route to finishing as runner-up for AL MVP. Ramirez hit 30. Center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. launched a career-high 26, while shortstop Xander Bogaerts added 21.

But that group has thus far combined for only one homer, a solo shot by Betts in the seventh inning of Tuesday night's 8-7 victory in Toronto.

There are several possible explanations for the drought. Start here: The lineup hasn't been whole since Opening Day. Betts and Ramirez missed time with the flu; Bogaerts was away from the team for four games to mourn the death of his grandmother in Aruba; Bradley is expected to be reinstated from the disabled list Friday night in Baltimore after missing 12 games with a sprained right knee.

Manager John Farrell notes the weather hasn't been particularly conducive to hitting the long ball, either, with mostly chilly temperatures at Fenway Park. It wouldn't be the first season that it has taken the sluggers a while to muscle up. Last year, the Sox hit only 19 homers in 24 games in April compared to 46 in 28 games in May.

(It is worth mentioning, though, that the Sox hit only one homer in three games this week under the climate-controlled dome at Rogers Centre in Toronto.)

"I mean, it's April. It's not easy to hit home runs," Bogaerts said. "You're playing in Boston. I know the wall is right there [in left field], but it's pretty hard to hit in the cold, in general. We'll hit some home runs, especially when it starts warming up. Looking forward to a lot of home runs from a lot of guys."

Added Farrell: "We're not worried about it. We like the total number of doubles that we've hit. That's the way this team is kind of built. That was the case last year. I'm not concerned about that."

There is, however, the matter of not having Ortiz in the middle of the order. He was known as Big Papi for a reason, and without his constant home run threat to preoccupy them, opposing pitchers would seem to be able to approach Betts and Ramirez differently by not giving them as much to hit or even pitching around them.

Ramirez is a legitimate power source in the cleanup spot, having averaged 27 homers per 162 games over the past 12 seasons. But the middle of the order is otherwise filled with hitters who are unaccustomed to batting in those spots. Bogaerts has been primarily a No. 2 hitter, while Bradley and first baseman Mitch Moreland have typically batted lower in the order.

Clearly, then, these aren't your father's Red Sox. A team that has won over the years by mashing balls over the Green Monster might be content to put a few dents in it and scurry around the bases.

"The game is not determined by homers," said Moreland, who leads the majors with 11 doubles in 61 at-bats. "You've got to have more runs than the other team, and if we have more runs than the other team, we did our job. I don't think anybody's too worried about the lack of homers right now. It's still really early. If they happen, they happen. But there's been plenty of games where homers have been hit and we've lost. The home run is not the end result. Winning the game is the end result."

Chris Sale has been so good, Hall of Famers would pay to watch

Scott Lauber

TORONTO -- Go ahead and debate who should have pitched the ninth inning for the Boston Red Sox on Thursday. And by all means, feel free to analyze why the Sox have scored so few runs in games started by their ace pitcher.

Just don't take your hot takes to Chris Sale.

If there's one thing we've learned about Sale through his first four starts for the Red Sox, it's this: He cares only about winning games and pitching well, in that order. As long as those things happen, everything else is background noise -- and Sale seems to possess the best set of earbuds ever.

Red Sox lefty Chris Sale bewitched the Jays with 13 strikeouts in eight shutout innings but ended up with a no-decision Thursday. Julian Avram/Icon Sportswire

So, after dominating the pitiful Toronto Blue Jays on Thursday afternoon for eight innings and 102 pitches, 80 of which were strikes -- such relentless precision that it is almost unheard of -- Sale made it clear to Boston pitching coach Carl Willis that he had more than enough left to begin the ninth. But when the Red Sox finally broke a scoreless stalemate on a two-out RBI single by Xander Bogaerts that preceded a 1 minute, 55 second replay review, manager John Farrell chose to go to closer Craig Kimbrel, who recently racked up three saves in as many days by striking out seven of nine batters.

Kimbrel gave up a game-tying home run to Kendrys Morales on his second pitch. And even though the Red Sox rallied for a 4-1 victory on Mookie Betts' three-run double in the 10th inning, the armchair managers were readying their pitchforks to protest Farrell's decision to turn away from a pitcher who allowed four hits, struck out 13 and was so powerful he might as well have taken on the Canadian army instead of the watered-down Jays offense.

Sale's take: Who cares? The Sox won.

"I'm going to want the ball in that situation 10 times out of nine," Sale said. "Do I want to [keep pitching]? Yeah.

"But at the end of the day, he's the manager and he makes the calls. Check the book: Craig's been pretty damn good back there. We ended up winning."

Sale wasn't credited with the win, but he couldn't care less about that either. All that matters is that his first four starts for the Red Sox have been as dominant as any pitcher in his first season with the club since Pedro Martinez in 1998. Don't take our word for it. Check the numbers:

Pedro's first four starts: 32 IP, 16 H, 3 R, 7 BB, 44 K, 0.84 ERA.

Sale's first four starts: 29 $\frac{2}{3}$ IP, 15 H, 3 R, 6 BB, 42 K, 0.91 ERA.

Hall of Fame reliever Dennis Eckersley said after Sale's start last Saturday that the 28-year-old lefty's performance has been "pretty darn close" to Pedro. After Thursday's game, Martinez tweeted, "If I'm going to pay money to go see a pitcher right now it would be Chris Sale!"

They don't charge admission in the bullpen, but Kimbrel was "glad we had a little TV down there" to get a better view of Sale's crackling fastball, sweeping slider and bat-slowing changeup.

"It's definitely special," Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland said. "He owns the game. Every pitch he throws, there's conviction behind it. It's fun to watch and fun to play behind because he's in complete control from the first pitch."

Until Betts' big hit, the Sox had scored only four runs with Sale on the mound, the only reason his record stands at 1-1 instead of 4-0. To Sale, all that matters is that the team is 3-1 in his starts. Of the 30 innings in which he has pitched, the Sox have had a lead at the end of only six of them, according to ESPN Stats & Information, leaving the rail-thin Sale to pitch with a margin of error even slimmer than he is.

Mention that to Sale, though, and he swats it away like a mosquito.

"It doesn't matter what the score of the game is," Sale said. "You pitch to your strengths and try to keep it where it's at no matter what. If you've got a 10-run lead, it's [not] like I'm going to go out there and say, 'Oh, I can give up four runs now.' You just keep pitching your game, keep playing your game and relying on the guys behind me."

Next up, Sale will face the New York Yankees on Wednesday night at Fenway Park (7 p.m. ET, ESPN/WatchESPN). It will be his first exposure to the all-consuming Red Sox-Yankees rivalry.

Just don't expect Sale to get consumed by the hype. Like everything else, it's only background noise.

* **WEEI.com**

It's Official: Chris Sale Is Pitching Like Pedro Martinez

Rob Bradford

TORONTO — You can start with the numbers.

In case you forgot, Pedro Martinez was really good in his first four starts with the Red Sox. He pitched 32 innings and gave up three runs for an 0.84 ERA. Opponents hit .148 against him, with Martinez striking out 44 and walking seven.

Chris Sale?

After his eight innings in the Red Sox' 4-1, 10-inning win against the Blue Jays, he is sitting with a 0.91 ERA, having allowed three runs in 29 2/3 innings. He has struck out 42, walked six and allowed a .147 batting average.

But it's more than that. It's the image he's portraying. Complete dominance.

In this case, it was a 102-pitch outing in which he struck out 13, and didn't allow a run. And while he was torturing such Blue Jays hitters as Jose Bautista (4 strikeouts) and Jarrod Saltalamacchia (3 strikeouts), Sale was throwing virtually every pitch for a strike. There was 80 of them, to be exact.

It left an impression.

"It's the best game I've ever caught," said Red Sox catcher Sandy Leon. "He was throwing every pitch in every count. He likes to attack."

As Red Sox pitching coach Carl Willis explained when talking about watching Sale, "It's different."

You know it when you see it. You did when Pedro pitched. Willis realized it back when serving as the coach for Cliff Lee, C.C. Sabathia and Felix Hernandez, all of whom went on Cy Young runs. It's just different. That's how watching Sale has felt.

"The pace he works. The strikes that he throws. The confidence that he throws each pitch with, regardless of the speed," Willis said. "I think that's the key. He'll show you 96 or 97 [mph], then he will reel it back at 91 or 88 and then he will change speed with the breaking ball. And it's all with total confidence and conviction. I've seen guys have good runs. The way Chris does it, some of the movement he gets, and some of the swings you see him get, it's just different."

Yes, the Red Sox don't score runs for Sale. They didn't before Thursday, and they couldn't get one before the starter exited his latest outing. The same thing happened to Martinez in his first season with the Red Sox, with his new club scoring more than three runs just twice over his first nine starts.

It's no coincidence. These are the guys who pitch at a level where opposing pitchers know they have to be their absolute best. It's part of the deal.

"Nobody is perfect," Sale said. "Get after these four days and try and do the same thing next time around."

True enough. But around these parts, this seems as close to pitching perfection as we've seen in some time.

* **CSNNE.com**

Sale Should Have Been Given Chance to Finish What He Started

Evan Drellich

The issue isn't which pitcher gave the Red Sox a better team to win Thursday, Craig Kimbrel or Chris Sale. The chances were overwhelmingly in the Red Sox' favor either way.

It's about ownership.

RED SOX 4, BLUE JAYS 1

Mookie Betts saves the day for Sox

Thursday belonged to Chris Sale, who was an exhibit of efficiency and dominance at Rogers Centre. He deserved a chance to finish off one of the best outings of his career.

Red Sox manager John Farrell didn't give it to him.

Fortunately for Farrell -- and fortunately for Kimbrel, whose failure will be forgotten in this conversation -- the Sox still got a win over the Blue Jays, 4-1 in 10 innings, despite Kimbrel's blown save.

Going to Kimbrel, an elite reliever who has looked otherworldly lately, is not a bad decision in itself. But on this day, Sale should have been afforded the chance to blow this game himself, rather than be told to watch while someone else screws it up for him.

"I'm going to want the ball in that situations 10 times out of nine," Sale told reporters in Toronto.

Sale said he told pitching coach Carl Willis he was available for the ninth.

Kimbrel served up a leadoff home run to Kendrys Morales in the ninth, a shot to straightaway center that tied the game at 1-1.

"After kind of a long inning (with a replay review in the top of the ninth) . . . [I] felt like it was time to turn it over to a guy who was fresh and powerful," Farrell told reporters in Toronto.

It's hard to say that Sale at 102 pitches is actually a better pitcher than Kimbrel at 0. These are two of the absolute best at their jobs. If either pitcher gave up a run, the choice would be second guessed -- and you know it.

You can say the Blue Jays benefited from a new look with Kimbrel coming in. You can argue the opposite: just consider how well Kimbrel has pitched lately.

But then, when you consider the same with Sale; when you consider the 13 strikeouts he had amassed on just 102 pitches; when you consider his ERA is now 0.91 in four starts with the Sox; it comes down to a feeling that this was his game.

Sale's pitch count wasn't too high. And he was already brushing with some history, albeit obscure history.

Sale on Thursday became the first Red Sox pitcher since Pedro Martinez in 2001 to strike out at least 12 in consecutive starts. (Pedro did it in four straight games that May.)

Thursday was the 28th time in major-league history a starter struck out 13 hitters while finishing with 102 pitches or fewer, per Baseball-Reference.com's Play Index. Teams are 21-7 in those kind of outings.

And Sale became the first starter in major-league history to strike out at least 13, finish with 102 pitches or fewer and have at least 80 of those pitches be strikes.

Farrell's job is to put the best pitchers in position to win games.

Between Sale and Kimbrel, there was no obvious answer Thursday as to who would position the Sox better -- not with the way both have been throwing. Who's better, Sale at 102 pitches or Kimbrel at 0? You could argue for hours.

What it should have come down to for Farrell, then, was a realization Thursday belonged to Sale, until Sale gave it away himself.

*** *Associated Press***

Sale's 13 Ks, Betts' 2B in 10th lead Red Sox over Jays 4-1

TORONTO -- When his first pitch of the day was driven to the edge of the warning track, Chris Sale was concerned he might be in for a long afternoon.

Turns out he had nothing to worry about.

Sale struck out 13 over eight shutout innings, Mookie Betts hit a three-run double in the 10th and Boston beat the struggling Toronto Blue Jays 4-1 on Thursday.

"Powerful, a lot of strikes," Boston manager John Farrell said. "All three pitches working. He had such good swing and miss to his fastball up and away."

At 3-12, Toronto is off to the worst start in team history and has lost its first five series for the first time.

"You look at the names on the back here and it's like 'How is this happening?'" Blue Jays pitcher Marco Estrada said.

Sandy Leon drew a one-out walk from Jason Grilli (0-2) in the 10th, and Brock Holt singled to stop an 0-for-12 slide. Andrew Benintendi walked with two outs, and Betts, who was 0 for 3, pulled a 2-0 fastball down the left-field line.

"I was just trying to put a good swing on a good pitch," Betts said. "I did have a rough day but it can come down to one at-bat."

Grilli, who helped Toronto reach the AL Championship Series last season, found it difficult to describe his team's early struggles.

"Losing only makes you appreciate winning," he said.

Mitch Moreland hit a two-out double in the ninth off Roberto Osuna and scored on Xander Bogaerts' single, but Kendrys Morales homered against Craig Kimbrel (1-0) leading off the bottom half, the eighth time Morales has tied a game or given his team a lead with a homer from the ninth inning on.

Farrell called it a tough decision to take Sale out.

"We felt like it was time to turn it over to a guy who was fresh and powerful," Farrell said. "Unfortunately, the second pitch goes out of the ballpark."

Acquired from the Chicago White Sox during the offseason, Sale became the first Boston pitcher to strike out 12 or more in consecutive outings since Pedro Martinez did it in four straight starts in 2001.

"It's impressive, man," Dustin Pedroia said. "He's just attacking the zone, overpowering guys with all of his pitches."

Sale allowed four hits, all singles, and walked one. Throwing 80 of 102 pitches for strikes, Sale lowered his ERA to 0.91. Yet, he is 1-1 because he has received just four runs of support over four starts.

Estrada allowed three hits, all singles, in six innings.

SWING AND A MISS

Betts, who struck out Wednesday for the first time since Sept. 14, fanned in each of his first two at-bats against Marco Estrada -- his first two-strikeout game since July 31 against the Los Angeles Angels.

NOT COOKING AT HOME

Toronto went 2-7 on its opening homestand, its worst start at home since 0-8 in 2004.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Twenty of the past 22 meetings between Boston and Toronto have been decided by three runs or fewer.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LHP David Price has been dealing with soreness in his recovery from an injured left elbow, according to manager John Farrell. Price threw on flat ground for the second straight day Thursday. He is to throw a bullpen session in Baltimore on Friday.

Blue Jays: RHP Mat Latos and RHP Casey Lawrence will be promoted to start against the Los Angeles Angels on Friday and Saturday, manager John Gibbons said. They will start in place of RHP Aaron Sanchez (blister) and LHP J.A. Happ (elbow).

UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Drew Pomeranz (1-0, 5.23) starts the opener of the three-game series at Baltimore on Friday. He is 1-2 with a 4.97 ERA in five games against the Orioles. RHP Dylan Bundy (2-1, 1.86) starts for Baltimore.

Blue Jays: Latos was 0-0 with a 1.00 ERA in two starts at Triple-A. RHP Alex Meyer will make his season debut for the Angels.

*** *The Toronto Sun***

Blue Jays' bats deathly silent in loss to Red Sox

Steve Buffery

TORONTO — Blue Jays outfielder Jose Bautista has won three Silver Slugger Awards in his career, but Thursday against the Boston Red Sox he picked up a golden sombrero.

In baseball lore, the golden sombrero is 'awarded' to a player who strikes out four times in four at-bats, which Bautista did against Red Sox ace Chris Sale in a 4-1 Toronto loss at the Rogers Centre.

And he wasn't the only one. Jays catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia also struck out four times as the Jays dropped to 3-12 in what has been a miserable start to the season.

As manager John Gibbons said prior to Thursday's tilt, if Bautista doesn't have a good year, the Jays will probably do nothing this season. And so far, Bautista is not doing a lot of anything. There's no way of

sugar-coating it, other than perhaps to point out that his mobility in right field and his arm look good this year. But at the plate, it's been a disaster. Bautista is currently on an 0-for-16 streak at the plate, is batting .109 overall and has no home runs in 55 at-bats this season. Worse, he looks lost at times at the plate, and he knows it.

"I'm just swinging at balls outside the strike zone and chasing pitches I normally don't chase unless I'm looking for them," said Bautista, who has hit more than 20 home runs in seven seasons for Toronto, and 40 or more three times. "I caught myself guessing a couple of times and normally that's not what I do when I'm at the plate.

"Anytime that you're (supposed) to be a contributor and you're not, it kind of weighs on you a little bit, but I've got to get past that and just figure out a way to get back on track and start doing more at the plate and put us in better situations to win games," Bautista continued.

The Dominican star said he has to watch not to try to do too much at the plate while he's in his slump.

"That could mean a number of different things, but keeping it simple always helps," he said. "(So I) definitely focus on that. More importantly I want to have good at-bats. I'm not proud of the last two days and the way that I've looked at the plate because my approach hasn't been consistent. I can handle the lack of success base-hit wise and stuff if I execute what my game plan is supposed to be. And the last two days have been pretty bad and I just need to get better at that.

"He's in a tough rut," added Jays manager John Gibbons. "He probably hasn't experienced one like this before I would think. But he's out there battling. Nobody wants to do better than he does. Maybe getting him on the road might do him so good."

The Jays departed for Los Angeles following Thursday's game where they face the Angels for four games starting Friday night before heading to St. Louis for a three-game series starting Tuesday. As a team, the Jays are hitting a dismal .213 and are second-last in RBIs and home runs in the American League. Of course facing a left-hander with Sale's stuff doesn't help. The Boston starter threw eight complete innings, giving up four hits and no runs while walking one and striking out 13. In total, Boston pitchers recorded 18 strikeouts.

"He can throw any pitch for a strike," Bautista said. "He can take velocity on and off with the fastball as he pleases and with his change-up. He's throwing strikes with every pitch, not necessarily relying on just one to get ahead. I mean it's tough. He's very deceptive too."

The loss spoiled a solid performance by Toronto starter Marco Estrada, who went six innings, giving up three hits, no runs, walked two while striking out seven.

In fact, it was both team's closers — two of the best in baseball — who let down their starters on Thursday.

Toronto closer Roberto Osuna gave up a run in the top of the ninth to allow the Red Sox to jump ahead 1-0 before Craig Kimbrel, taking over from Sale in the bottom of the ninth, gave up a leadoff home run to Toronto DH Kendrys Morales. Morales launched a 1-0 offering over the centre-field fence to tie the game 1-1.

In the end, it was Jays reliever Jason Grilli, usually Toronto's set-up man, who handed the victory to the Red Sox, giving up a bases loaded double to Mookie Betts in the top of the 10th to score three runs and ultimately give Boston a 4-1 victory. Kimbrel stayed in the game to pitch the 10th and got the Jays out in order, all strikeouts, to end the game.

The Jays have dropped their first five series to start the season for the first time in club history and have failed to win back-to-back games this year.

READY FOR THE ROAD

Blue Jays manager John Gibbons couldn't get on the team's charter to California fast enough on Thursday night.

After losing to the Boston Red Sox 4-1 at the Rogers Centre to fall to 3-12 on the season, Gibbons suggested that a road trip might be a good thing for his club. Get away from the disappointed crowds, meddling media and all that.

"Yeah, I think it's a great time (for a road swing)," said Gibbons. "We've been here a while (and) it's been a tough — and that's probably an understatement — home stand. So maybe this will do us some good."

The Jays went 2-7 at the Rogers Centre against Milwaukee, Baltimore and Boston and now head out to face the Los Angeles Angels and the St. Louis Cardinals.

"We like being at home," said Toronto starter Marco Estrada. "We love our fans, we want to play here and I feel like we play better here. But it's a long trip to Anaheim, maybe we'll clear our minds."

The Jays were a solid 43-38 on the road last season.

*** *The Toronto Star***

Reeling Blue Jays lose to Red Sox in extra innings

Laura Armstrong

Manager John Gibbons had one wish before the Blue Jays wrapped up a nine-game homestand on Thursday afternoon: a second straight win before hitting the road.

In the end, though, they struck out — falling 4-1 to the Boston Red Sox in 10 innings.

After breaking out for seven runs in a close defeat on Tuesday and winning 3-0 on Wednesday, the Jays' offence was stone cold again. They struck out 18 times against Boston ace Chris Sale and closer Craig Kimbrel, and have now fanned 135 times on the way to a 3-12 record.

Perhaps the West Coast air will help, Gibbons said before they packed up for back-to-back road series against the Los Angeles Angels, starting Friday night, and St. Louis Cardinals.

"We've been here a while and it's been a tough — probably an understatement — homestand," Gibbons said. "Maybe that will do us some good."

Perhaps no Jay is struggling more than slugger Jose Bautista, whose average dropped to .109 (6 for 55) after an 0-for-4 afternoon — all by strikeout. With all-star third baseman Josh Donaldson on the disabled list with a calf strain and still weeks away from returning. Gibbons said the team needs Bautista to produce more than ever.

The four-strikeout game was his second of the season, after going hitless and fanning twice in Wednesday's contest.

"I'm not proud of the last two days and the way that I looked at the plate, because my approach hasn't been consistent," he said. "I can handle the lack of success, base-hit wise, if I execute what my game plan is. The last two days have been pretty bad, so I just need to get better at that."

Bautista, a regular among the league leaders in on-base percentage in recent seasons, says he's been uncharacteristically swinging at pitches out of the strike zone.

“You can’t take anything for granted,” he said of the Jays’ slump overall. “We’re not, but we just need to continue to grind it out and hope for better results.”

The Jays pitching had its ups and downs as well throughout the homestand. Thursday starter Marco Estrada and relievers Joe Biagini and Joe Smith combined for eight scoreless innings, matching Sale. Jays closer Roberto Osuna then gave up a pair of two-out doubles in the ninth and the Red Sox took a one-run lead to the bottom.

Jays DH Kendrys Morales, though, responded with a solo home run, forcing extras.

In the top of the 10th, a three-run double by Mookie Betts off reliever Jason Grilli put the Red Sox back on top before the Jays went 1-2-3 — Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Devon Travis and Chris Coghlan all struck out by Kimbrel — to close it out.

Post-game, a frustrated Grilli, whose ERA sits at 7.11, was like a lot of his teammates: searching for answers after a 2-7 homestand.

“Losing only makes you appreciate winning,” said Grilli. “There’s not much else to say. There’s no words right now.”

The lack of offence has put extra pressure on the pitching staff to deliver. On average, the Jays are averaging just 3.14 runs a game and hitting a lowly .213.

On Thursday, they went 0-for-4 with runners in scoring position, with five hits in all.

The Jays hope a pair of call-ups will be up to the task when they open a four-game weekend set against the Angels, with Mat Latos taking the hill for Friday’s opener, followed by Casey Lawrence on Saturday.