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Brawl is just what Red Sox-Yankees rivalry needed

Dan Shaughnessy

OK, so it wasn't Manny Ramirez vs. Roger Clemens with a Pedro Martinez throwdown of Don Zimmer. It wasn't Bill Lee getting his shoulder unhinged and calling out "Steinbrenner's Brown Shirts." It wasn't Carlton Fisk and Thurman Munson rolling around Fenway's home plate dirt. It wasn't even Jim Lonborg hitting Thad Tillotson to trigger a Yankee Stadium brawl that featured Sox shortstop Rico Petrocelli grappling with his New York City cop brother, Dave, on the infield lawn of the The House That Ruth Built.

This was mild by those lofty standards. This was, "Pardon me, I think you're in my seat," as you board a JetBlue flight to Fort Myers.

But it was still pretty darn good.

Crazy Joe Kelly, the perfect man for the job, drilled DH Tyler Austin with a 2-and-1 pitch in the seventh inning of a Yankees-Red Sox game Wednesday, triggering a benches-clearing episode that could be described as a mild brawl and certainly put new fire into this old rivalry. Punches were thrown and when it was over, Kelly's uniform top was split open Stormy Daniels style, Kelly, Austin, and Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin were ejected, and it was Game On for Sox-Yankees, 2018.

"When someone comes on my property and I'm getting attacked, I'm going to defend myself," said Kelly, who will probably be suspended.

"It happened," said Brock Holt, who was in the middle of the first fracas in the third inning. "Typical Red Sox-Yankees. A four-hour game a couple of brawls, we're right on track."

Sweet. Shots fired. This spoke to the passion and pathos of the old days and it was something to make you look forward to the Thursday night game between the Red Sox and the Yankees. And unlike the 2017 version of the Sox, who totally bollocksed the Manny Machado retaliation, the 2018 Sox took care of business in the moment. Correctly so.

All the hard feelings started in the third inning of the Yankees' 10-7 win when Austin raised his left leg, Ty Cobb style, as he slid hard into Holt at second base on a routine force play. This action triggered benches and bullpens emptying from both sides of the baseball aisle. No punches were thrown in the episode, and the game proceeded, but it was a reminder that there's extra emotion any time the Red Sox and Yankees are both good in the same season.

"He spiked my leg," said Holt. "He cut it pretty good. I probably said something I shouldn't have said, but it was a bad slide and he knows it was a bad slide."

The Sox appealed the play to get an automatic double play but were denied.

"I didn't think it was a dirty slide," said former Sox second baseman Jerry Remy. "But under the new rules, they are accustomed to not being touched. This wasn't brutal. But under today's stupid rules, I guess it could be considered a double play."

When I asked Sox manager Alex Cora, a former middle infielder, what he thought of the slide, he winked and said, "I probably would have turned the double play."

Unlike their John Farrell predecessors, the 2018 the Red Sox seem to know how to deal with these kinds of transgressions. Kelly cut to the chase when Austin came to bat in the seventh.

“I threw a pitch inside and hit him,” said Kelly. “It was one of those that got away. The umpire said, ‘Take your base,’ and other things went down.”

Indeed. Austin slammed his bat into the ground and charged Kelly, while Kelly uttered, “Let’s go!”

There were big bodies all over the Fenway lawn. Kelly emerged with a scratch on his neck and a lot of buttons gone from the front of his uniform.

“As soon as I saw [Aaron] Judge and [Giancarlo] Stanton coming, I started backing up,” admitted Holt. “I grabbed (flyweight) Ronald Torreyes.”

From somewhere in the hardball universe, proving that the baseball gods are good, Pedro “Who is Karim Garcia?” Martinez tweeted, “The only thing I would have done different than Joe Kelly tonight is I would have hit Tyler Austin in his previous at-bat.”

It was a nice demonstration of the Sox of 2018 vs. the Sox of 2017.

“It shows we’ve got each other’s backs,” said Holt. “That was a good one. It shows how close we are.”

The series is 1-1. The rubber match is Thursday night. There are 17 more to play this season. And everyone is expecting retaliation.

“If I get hit I’ll take my base,” said Holt. “Hopefully we don’t fight anymore.”

Au contraire, Mr. Holt. A few more of these incidents are just what we need around here.

Red Sox-Yankees. Just like the old days.

Andrew Benintendi out of Red Sox lineup despite good game

Peter Abraham

Andrew Benintendi was 2 for 3 with a double, a triple, two walks, and two RBIs in Tuesday night’s 14-1 victory against the Yankees.

On Wednesday, he was on the bench.

Manager Alex Cora planned out the lineups before the series started and didn’t change his thinking because Benintendi had a good game. J.D. Martinez started in left field with Hanley Ramirez as the designated hitter and Mitch Moreland at first base.

“No,” Cora said when asked if he considered leaving Benintendi in the lineup. “That decision was made a few days ago.”

Since the first week of spring training, Cora said he would use his reserves liberally with the goal of having the starting players stronger physically at the end of the season.

That Benintendi played well on Tuesday didn’t prompt Cora to change his philosophy on roster management.

“No, no . . . it’s the matchups not only today but the upcoming matchups and trying to get other people hot, too,” he said.

Cora pointed out that he held Mookie Betts out of the lineup earlier this season. It's nothing new.

"We map it out, man. It's not that we're trying to rest guys most of the time," Cora said. "People are worried so much about rhythm. But at the same time, there are certain guys in that dugout that they need to get their rhythm, too. They're important pieces for what we're trying to accomplish."

Cora wants Moreland to stay involved. The Sox also told Martinez when he was signed that he would get time in the outfield, not just as a designated hitter.

"We accomplished a few things," Cora said.

Porcello next

Rick Porcello has a 2.71 earned run average in nine starts against the Yankees since he was traded to the Red Sox. The New Jersey native understands the rivalry between the teams better than most and enjoys it.

But work is work.

"As a whole, we've been playing good baseball and we want to keep it going," said Porcello, who will start Thursday's series finale. "That's part of my job, trying to go out there and give us a quality start and a chance to win."

Aaron Judge is 1 for 10 against Porcello, the one hit a home run last season. Porcello has faced Giancarlo Stanton once, allowing a three-run double in 2013.

"Obviously they both pose a huge challenge, which makes their lineup so tough," Porcello said. "But it's not just those two guys."

Second option

Blake Swihart worked out at second base before and during batting practice, getting tips from infield coach Carlos Febles.

It's the one position Swihart has not played at some point in his career, professional or amateur. But with shortstop Xander Bogaerts on the disabled list with a small fracture in his left foot, the Sox want to have another option just in case.

"It's a different lineup now than a few days when Xander was there," Cora said. "We have to be prepared if something happens."

Swihart is a catcher who has played left field and first base in the majors. He also played a few games at third base in spring training.

Velazquez scheduled

The Sox have tentative plans to start Hector Velazquez against Baltimore on Saturday.

"It looks like it's going to be Velazquez. Let's see what happens [Wednesday]. Hopefully everything goes accordingly," Cora said.

With the Orioles a predominantly righthanded-hitting team, Velazquez was the choice over Brian Johnson. That none of the Baltimore hitters has faced Velazquez before could work in his favor.

Johnson pitched two scoreless innings of relief on Tuesday. His appearance was briefly delayed when he had a nosebleed and an athletic trainer came to the mound to stanch it.

Some of the blood stained Johnson's jersey.

Johnson said he had a few nosebleeds in recent days, the first of his life. He attributed it to dry air.

“Curt Schilling 2.0,” Johnson said, referring to the famed bloody sock of 2004.

Speed merchant

Hanley Ramirez went into the game with 280 career stolen bases, three this season. That put him sixth among active players, three behind Dee Gordon. Jose Reyes had the lead with 512 . . . The Double A Portland Sea Dogs renamed 14 of the 17 skyboxes at Hadlock Field for notable former players. The honorees include Mookie Betts and Dustin Pedroia . . . The Trinity College men’s squash team was recognized on the field before the game. The Bantams won their 17th national championship in February, defeating Harvard . . . Brandeis professor Michael Rosbash, a 2017 Nobel Prize winner, threw out the first pitch. Rosbash and two colleagues were awarded the Nobel for “their discoveries of molecular mechanisms controlling the circadian rhythm.” No idea what that means, but Rosbash threw a strike from the mound.

Rivalry back on: Benches clear a second time in Red Sox-Yankees game

Peter Abraham

On a cold night at Fenway Park, the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry boiled over.

Joe Kelly drilled Tyler Austin with a fastball in the seventh inning, obvious revenge for what the Red Sox considered a dirty slide earlier in the game.

Both benches cleared and the brawl took several minutes to get under control.

The issue started in the third inning when Austin, a rookie, slid into second base. He stuck out his left leg to spike Brock Holt in the right shin and prevent a double play.

When Holt took exception to the aggressive slide, Austin stepped toward him. Umpire David Rackley quickly got between the players, but both benches emptied.

There were only words exchanged, no shoves. Austin briefly pretended he needed to be held back, but that was the extent of it.

The Red Sox asked the umpires to review the play to determine whether Austin had interfered with Holt. But no double play was granted.

In the seventh inning, Kelly got one out before planting a 97.7-mph fastball in Austin’s back.

Austin slammed his bat into the ground then charged the mound.

Kelly stood his ground as Austin ran at him then delivered several punches on the enraged Yankee as they tumbled to the grass and the benches again emptied.

Several players and coaches were hit with punches during the ensuing scrap. The umpires ejected Kelly, Austin, and Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin.

David Price ‘didn’t have any feeling in my fingertips,’ yet said he is OK

Nick Cafardo

The bench-clearing fight was the sexy part of the Red Sox-Yankees game Wednesday night at Fenway Park, but the most important thing that happened was that David Price had to leave the game when his throwing hand went numb.

Both Price and manager Alex Cora downplayed the issue after the game, and both indicated they didn't think the situation was serious. Price said he planned on playing catch Thursday. There were no tests planned on the hand. A lot will depend on how Price feels.

"It's all right. I'll play catch tomorrow and get ready for my next start," Price said.

Price said that his whole hand was affected.

"I didn't have any feeling in my fingertips," Price said. "It's something I've felt before but it didn't go away."

Price said it was not related to the forearm/tricep issues he had last season that limited him to 11 starts.

"No, I had no pain. Even when I came in and did some stuff for the doctors, I still had no pain. It was tough," he said. "Those guys didn't quit and they continued to battle. It was a very good sign. We move on and we'll get them tomorrow."

Price said the hand never felt good throughout the first inning, when he gave up four runs, including a two-run triple to Giancarlo Stanton and a two-run homer by Gary Sanchez. Price had no fastball command as evidenced by his lack of location (he threw 35 pitches, only 16 for strikes).

"Yeah my hand never really warmed up. My arm felt good. In the bullpen it wasn't too bad," Price said. "I don't know how to describe it but it's something I've had to deal with. This [the weather] could be Game 7 of the World Series. I didn't deal with it tonight."

The game-time temperature at Fenway was 39 degrees.

Price said he tried throwing again in the eighth inning. "I went upstairs and threw baseballs against the wall," he said. "It thawed out and I felt fine."

Who knows what this is. Poor circulation? Cold weather? Is there something bigger at play? Does Price have another physical ailment that could land him back on the disabled list? Price was in the dugout late in the game. Maybe it's not so bad, but Cora and the Red Sox were quick to get lefthander Bobby Poyner up in the bullpen in the first inning and he relieved Price to start the second.

Given that Price pitched only $74\frac{2}{3}$ innings in the regular season in 2017, was this somewhat alarming to the 32-year-old lefthander? Price said he wasn't concerned.

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: Price is the key to this team.

Price and Chris Sale could be the best 1-2 combination in baseball. You would be hard-pressed to find a better 1-2 combination in all of baseball. Washington's Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg are really good. There's Yu Darvish and Jon Lester with the Cubs, Luis Severino and Masahiro Tanaka with the Yankees, Clayton Kershaw and Rich Hill with the Dodgers, Zack Grienke and Robbie Ray with the Diamondbacks, Corey Kluber and Carlos Carrasco with the Indians, and Justin Verlander and Dallas Kuechel with the Astros.

The Red Sox are built around Sale and Price. And while the Red Sox won 93 games without Price, they are a pretty tough team to beat with him. Price was lights out in his first two starts.

Entering Wednesday's game, Red Sox starters had a major league-leading 1.68 ERA, giving up just 11 earned runs in 59 innings in 10 games. Price had thrown 14 scoreless innings over his first two starts.

Predictably, Price again struggled against the Yankees. He entered the game 2-4 with a 6.75 ERA in seven starts vs. the Yankees since joining Boston in 2016.

While Price watched the two bench-clearing scuffles from afar, and while the focus was on New York's very big men against some of Boston's smaller players, there was no bigger story than Price's short night and what it means going forward.

It may be that Price is right — there will be no next-day issue and that the poor circulation in his hand was because of the cold weather.

But again, why is that happening?

If there lingering effects, this will go down as a tougher night than just a 10-7 loss to the Yankees, and an end to a nine-game winning streak.

Alex Cora and Aaron Boone know what they've gotten into

Nick Cafardo

Alex Cora and Aaron Boone are managing two of the highest-profile teams in baseball, with demanding fan bases and media.

Cora is beloved following a 9-1 start, while Boone has taken some heat during his honeymoon period for the 5-6 Yankees. Boone received some ridicule on the talk-show circuit last week when he chose to pitch to the Blue Jays' Justin Smoak after intentionally walking Josh Donaldson. Smoak responded with a grand slam.

Boone's Yankees did take a quick 4-0 lead on David Price and the Red Sox on Wednesday night, which should have given Yankees fans some solace after the 14-1 shellacking the Yankees absorbed on Tuesday.

Both first-year managers are media savvy, having worked for several years at ESPN. When both took jobs in baseball again, they realized they would not be able to control the narrative unless they won.

Do both take note of everything said and written about them as a result of their media backgrounds?

"I don't. No," said Boone. "One of the things when I got into this, I tried not to get involved. I like dealing with you guys every day and I know a lot of you very well, but I don't read or pay attention to it very much. Joe Torre once told me when I first came to New York, 'Don't read the papers.' I'm just focused on day to day. Not to say I don't keep up with what's going on. I'm aware of things I need to be aware of. I have conversations with [Yankees public relations director Jason] Zillo all the time about these kinds of things, but I don't really go there."

Boone comes from a baseball family. His grandfather, Ray, was a two-time All-Star in his 13-year career and a longtime Red Sox scout. His father, Bob, won seven Gold Gloves and caught 2,225 games, third most in history, and has continued in an executive role in baseball.

The game is definitely in Boone's DNA. So he understands the good, bad, and ugly of his job, as well as the high expectations for him and the Yankees, who compiled an all-world-type team, though some of the players haven't lived up to expectations thus far.

"Not to be a know-it-all, but that's kind of who I am," said Boone of coming from a baseball family and knowing how things work. "Whether we're rolling right now or we're in a bump in the road, I always try to have a long view on things. There's urgency with everything we do within the day, but also I always try to keep the big picture in mind. Nothing in these first 10-11 games has changed that or altered that in my mind."

Boone said there's nothing he doesn't like about his team, other than its record.

“I think on the competitive side of things, I’m seeing guys come to work every day. I’m seeing guys hooked up on the bench. I’m seeing guys focused. I’m seeing guys, even through a little bit of a storm here in the past week, I don’t see guys blinking, and I think that’s important,” said Boone. “There are going to be bumps along the way. One of my messages all spring was whether we’re rolling or whether we hit a little bump in the road or a storm comes along, we grind, we focus, and we compete. I’m seeing that from our guys and I take heart in that.”

Boone and Cora are popular with the media. Both understand what the media is looking for and what they need on a daily basis to do their jobs. And both seem to understand the responsibility they have to the media, while also understanding that the media informs the fan base.

“People text me and send me clips of whatever is going on,” Cora said. “I’m a baseball fan, so I follow the game. I watch TV. I know there will be good days, bad days, and horrible days, I know that. Hopefully, more good days than horrible ones.”

The best and worst is yet to come for both. Both teams were thought to be mid-90s to 100-plus-win teams. The Yankees may not look like that now, but once Boone gets some of his injured players back — including Aaron Hicks, Jacoby Ellsbury, CC Sabathia, Brandon Drury, and Clint Frazier — the story may be different. When Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton, and Gary Sanchez start clicking in the middle of the order, Boone is likely to receive more accolades from Yankees fans.

Cora has not experienced the fans’ wrath in Boston. There has been no reason to at this point. But if the team runs into a storm, as Boone calls it, and there’s a move or two fans don’t like, Cora will experience the other side of what he’s getting right now.

John Farrell won three division titles and a World Series in five seasons in Boston. Yet in his final season — a year in which he won the division — he was in the crosshairs of talk-show callers and hosts.

In New York, Joe Girardi, too, was seen as someone who had overstayed his welcome, even though it was perceived around baseball that he had done an admirable job pulling together a young team last season and getting it to Game 7 of the American League Championship Series before losing to the Astros.

It’s tough managing either of these teams, but Cora and Boone seem to get what happens when you win, and what happens when you lose, more than most in their profession.

For major league pitchers, tech revolution not yet ready-to-wear

Alex Speier

David Price’s prized left elbow receives seemingly constant care. In between starts, he’ll wear an array of sleeves that offer compression, heat, and vibratory stimulation to the joint that jeopardized his 2017 season. In the dugout, he has been seen employing a tool that looks like a medieval torture implement to massage his wrist and forearm.

The handle-with-care approach by the Red Sox lefthander is understandable. After all, forearm issues limited Price to 11 starts last year and created curiosity about whether his elbow was a time bomb ticking toward Tommy John surgery.

While Price has avoided that fate, the scare crystallized his desire to avoid the knife and to stay on the mound, which might help explain the attention he has visited on his elbow this year.

But for all the precautions that Price is taking, he is not using MLB-approved in-game wearable technology. Indeed, when asked about such devices, which monitor workload and elbow stress, he expressed no knowledge of their availability.

“I have not used it,” he said. “I don’t know how they measure stress on the elbow.”

Why not?

Back up two years.

In early 2016, Major League Baseball and the Players Association approved the in-game use of two wearable technologies: the motusTHROW, a sensor placed on the elbow that tracks workload and arm stress, and the Zephyr BioHarness, which monitors heart rate and breathing.

The list has since been expanded to include Catapult GPS tracker and WHOOP, a sensor strapped to the wrist that measures heart rate and general body strain over the course of a day with an eye toward guiding recovery (including sleep).

The motusTHROW has the greatest relevance for Price and other pitchers worried about preserving their elbows.

“It’s a small sensor that goes in a sleeve that’s worn over the elbow,” said Will Carroll, director of media relations at Motus Global. “Our device measures throw count, arm speed, arm slot — meaning where the elbow is in relation to the body, the rotation of the arm — how far it rotates back, how far it’s working forward, and it measures the force on the elbow, specifically on the ulnar collateral ligament, with each and every throw.”

The technology has the potential to help manage pitcher workload in a way that could limit injuries. If, for instance, a slight arm angle change can be detected, then a team can try to make a mechanical adjustment or prescribe rest to restore the strength that helps a pitcher maintain his delivery. Or if a pitcher is able to throw with greater velocity without generating undue stress in his elbow, he can have greater confidence when airing it out on the mound.

“We have a tool that will help guide you,” said Carroll. “We’re not going to tell you what to do, but it’s kind of like driving a car that doesn’t have a speedometer. You think you know how fast you’re going — but maybe you are, maybe you aren’t.”

“We want to help guide those decisions. We think better information creates better decisions.”

General distrust

The in-game wearables agreement was intended to create the possibility of shared efforts to preserve player health while maximizing performance. According to the terms, use of the devices is completely voluntary.

If the devices are used, the data are made available only after games (so in-game decision-making isn’t influenced), are available to a select few members of the organization (typically the general manager, assistant GM, manager, and the training and medical staff), and are inadmissible in arbitration hearings.

Players also can purchase the device themselves. If they do, they can choose whether or not to provide the data to teams or doctors (such as Dr. James Andrews). Any data provided to teams can be destroyed at the request of the player.

Despite these protections meant to ease pitchers’ fears that teams might abuse the information, almost none are using the motusTHROW in games.

Price, Drew Pomeranz, and Carson Smith — all of whom have dealt with elbow/forearm issues in the recent past — were unaware of the sensor. The fact that it hasn’t been publicized widely with players is a product of the general distrust they express about the use of such technology.

Despite the fact that the data can’t be used in arbitration hearings, pitchers remain suspicious of what teams might do with such medical information.

“It could turn into something they want to use against you,” said Pomeranz. “Some stuff is too much information. There’s a place for all of it, I think. It’s not just, ‘Oh, that’s bad,’ but relying on some of this stuff is a little too far.”

Moreover, many pitchers prefer to respond individually to how their body feels rather than relying on biometric data.

“I think you’re going to feel it if something like [elbow stress] is going on,” said Price. “If you’re feeling good and throwing well and get negative feedback from that, I think that might mess with you and cause you to change something that might lead to your shoulder hurting or back hurting.

“You might do something different that you’re not accustomed to, just because you’ve got results on that that you weren’t expecting to get even though you’ve been throwing the ball well.

“I think the biggest thing is listen to your body. You’ve got to be able to do that. I heard that a lot when I was a younger guy in the big leagues from all the veterans — to take a day off from throwing. The longer you do this, the better you understand that.”

A fan in Betances

Even so, the technology does have its advocates in the big leagues, the foremost being Yankees reliever Dellin Betances, a Motus spokesperson. Betances, who accesses his data on a Motus app and does not make it available to the Yankees, said he has used the sensor in a sleeve on occasion during games, but he relies on it more during the offseason and to monitor work between outings.

“When you first put it on, you feel the chip in there, but once you start throwing, you don’t even think about it,” said Betances, who had ligament reinforcement surgery in 2009, early in his pro career. “It’s just there. It doesn’t affect you in any way.

“It’s something I was interested in, just because I’ve had injuries in the past. If you can find a way to prevent some of these, the information that the Motus chip allows you to have and the Motus app is good information.

“It’s information you can use not only to prevent injuries but maybe if you feel like your arm angle is different than it’s accustomed to being, it can help fix that and let you perform better, too.”

Many big leaguers use such sensors during offseason workouts. Data-driven performance-training facilities such as Driveline Baseball — an industry leader to which many players flock in the offseason — employ such technologies. Still, in-game application has been almost nonexistent.

While use of wearables is voluntary for major leaguers, minor leaguers who aren’t on 40-man rosters aren’t governed by the same MLB/MLBPA negotiated restrictions. As such, some organizations are encouraging more widespread use of the devices among their minor league pitchers.

For now, the Red Sox have avoided such use — at the minor league and big league levels.

“Players hesitate in general about anything where they feel like a lab rat while they’re trying to compete,” said Red Sox director of pitching analytics Brian Bannister. “Other sports where it’s GPS-based, like football and basketball, there’s no opposition.

“I think anything where it’s actually measuring stress on the body over time during a performance, you just haven’t seen a lot of adoption.

“I prefer it in more of a lab setting where everyone is on board vs. forcing a player, trying to convince them to use it in a game or something similar.”

Things may change

The Sox and other teams feel little need to push the point. After all, the Red Sox are one of the teams using motion-capture technology that uses cameras to log a lot of the biomechanical data that could be provided by the motusTHROW.

“We’re already doing stuff like that, just not in a wearable format,” said Bannister. “You can do different things with high-speed cameras, machine learning, things like that, that generate the same results but you’re not forcing a player to actually wear something that can potentially impact or modify how he throws or just his mental state while competing.”

In some ways, elbow sensors such as the motusTHROW (available commercially for \$150 a pop) may be more useful for Little Leaguers as well as high school and college players who are subject to looser oversight and more vulnerable to excessive workloads.

Even so, while in-game wearables haven’t been embraced at the big league level, their potential applications remain significant as players and teams make sense of how to use them. Sports sit at a fascinating crossroads of emergent technologies and privacy concerns, as players and teams grapple with the question of how to use new technological frontiers to their advantage. While players now exhibit an arm’s-length hesitation about such devices, over time that may change.

“You never know until you try the device, right?” said Betances. “I like it. I definitely find good use for it.

“I think us pitchers, we’re accustomed to doing things a certain way. You don’t want to mess around. But from me using it before, it had no bad effect on how you pitch. You don’t even feel it. I think the more people use it, the more they’ll like it.”

Who needs batting gloves? Not the Red Sox’ Blake Swihart

Peter Abraham

It was 37 degrees at Fenway Park when Blake Swihart went to the plate in the seventh inning on Tuesday night. He was not wearing batting gloves.

It doesn’t matter how cold it gets, Swihart has never worn gloves, outside of one rainy night in a minor league game a few years ago when he was worried the bat would fly out of his hands and land in the crowd.

“I’ve always liked to hit with my bare hands,” Swihart said on Wednesday before batting practice. “It doesn’t matter what the weather is. I’m used to it.”

The first pitch Swihart saw on Tuesday was a 91-mile-per-hour fastball from the Yankees’ Chasen Shreve that he fouled off. Surely that had to sting?

“I was more upset that I just missed it,” Swihart said. “It didn’t hurt. I don’t know the difference anyway.”

Then there’s Mookie Betts. He has worn two pairs of gloves for all five home games the Red Sox have played this season. The average temperature at Fenway Park has been 39.8 degrees at first pitch.

“I wear two gloves early in the season and late in the season,” Betts said. “I hate being cold.”

Betts wears batting gloves any time he swings a bat, indoors or out.

“Even if I’m just fooling around and taking a few swings, I put them on,” he said. “It just feels more comfortable.”

Swihart is one of a small group of players in the majors who eschew batting gloves. Notable barehanded hitters include Evan Gattis of the Astros and Wil Myers of the Padres.

Red Sox Triple A first baseman Sam Travis is part of that group, too.

“I don’t care how cold it gets,” Swihart said. “I want to feel the bat.”

David Ortiz also had something to do with Mookie Betts’ fast start

Alex Speier

For all of the talk about Mookie Betts’ increased aggressiveness early in counts, it’s possible to exaggerate the significance of his change in approach. After all, through 10 games this year, Betts is actually swinging less frequently than at any other point in his career.

To date, Betts has swung at just 33.3 percent of pitches – down from last year’s rate of 36.0 percent and his career norm of 38.7 percent. He’s swung at the first pitch in just 6.8 percent of his plate appearances, a rate that is less than half his career standard of 14.3 percent. For all of the discussions of approach, there may be an even more significant change that Betts has made in erupting to his explosive start, a mechanical adjustment that is particularly interesting given how the idea formed to make it.

For Betts, getting the right stride of his front foot has always been the key. At the beginning of the 2013 minor league season, after Betts got off to a dismal start in Single A Greenville, it was a couple of days of cage work with Drive hitting coach U.L. Washington to adjust and control his leg lift that allowed Betts to sync his body in a way that allowed his athleticism and hands to transform him from a little-known prospect to a player on the fast track to superstardom.

Last year, however, Betts’ stride drifted too far forward. At the point of impact, his stance became too open.

“I think one of the big things with Mookie is controlling that stride length. The further he gets his stride length out, the longer his swing. He’s so quick anyway it doesn’t matter, but [the right stride length creates] more precision, more accuracy with his barrel,” explained hitting coach Tim Hyers. “We try to get a lot of guys with their feet underneath them because it helps their hips to stay connected to the ground. With him, when his stride length gets too far in my opinion, that’s when he starts to leak, he starts to get [too much length with his swing] in the back, and I just call it a clean path. It disrupts his clean path. When his stride is a little more under control, underneath him, it allows the hands to work. We all know what kind of hands he has.”

Those hands – the ones that a scout who saw him in Portland compared not to a baseball player but instead to boxer Floyd Mayweather – allowed Betts to make contact and put the ball in play a year ago but without the consistent ability to drive the ball that had been on display in his MVP runner-up season of 2016.

“I was hitting some balls good and they weren’t really going anywhere,” said Betts. “This year, I’m able to let my hands take over and it seems to work.”

Betts’ stride length has a lot to do with that. And for that, while the 25-year-old notes the influence of both Hyers and assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett, he also identifies another critical influence in allowing him to get his mechanics back in sync in a way that allows him to generate exceptional electricity in seemingly every swing.

The one whom Betts calls “Large Father” – David Ortiz – briefly visited Red Sox spring training at the end of February and beginning of March. Ortiz immediately identified what he remembered of Betts during his spectacular 2016 season, and what he saw him doing differently in 2017.

“The main person that helped me with [correcting the stride] was Ortiz. He’s actually the No. 1 person who helped with that,” said Betts. “He came in, sat me down, and it was kind of like overnight, I think.”

The ability of Ortiz to convey a message with potentially profound impact is a welcome asset for the current Red Sox staff. While Hyers has a long history with Betts dating to his time from 2013-15 as the Red Sox' minor league hitting coordinator, Ortiz has an even longer history with the Red Sox star.

"If David Ortiz can share his knowledge with these guys, it's something that goes a long ways. He's so knowledgeable about the feel, the game-planning, reading pitchers, and also mechanics. When he's around and talks to them, it only helps them out," said Hyers. "I think David was like, 'Hey, when you were going good, this is what I remember – this is what you were doing really well.' I think Mookie said, 'Oh, yeah – I'll put that at the top of the list.'"

The feedback from Ortiz and his coaches – along with the encouragement of Red Sox manager Alex Cora to attack meaty pitches early in counts – had something to do with Betts' .432/.533/.730 start. Betts's remarkable athleticism and aptitude allowed him to make a critical and potentially challenging adjustment almost immediately.

Tuesday's 4-for-4 game with a grand slam and two doubles inflated Betts' line to almost fictional proportions, but it reflects an almost perfect approach. While he has been more aggressive to pitches in the strike zone this year, swinging at 58.4 percent of them (up from 53.8 percent last year), he's chasing fewer pitches out of the strike zone than ever, swinging at a career-low 14.6 percent of pitches.

He's making pitchers work in the strike zone. When they do, he's punishing them.

"He goes in there with an idea of what he wants to do," said No. 2 hitter Andrew Benintendi. "He doesn't swing at bad pitches. He waits for that pitcher to throw what he wants or make a mistake. When he does, it's trouble for them."

That is particularly true when opposing pitchers try to beat him with four-seam fastballs in the strike zone, a task that has seemed all but impossible this year. According to Statcast data at BaseballSavant.com, Betts has seen 76 four-seam fastballs this year. He's 8-for-15 against them with four doubles, good for a .533 average and .800 slugging mark. Perhaps even more startling, he has not swung and missed at a four-seamer this year. He has just four swings and misses all season against the 184 pitches he's seen, a 2.1 percent swing-and-miss rate that is easily the lowest in the majors.

He's on time all the time, he's balanced, he's not expanding the strike zone, he's aggressive on hittable pitches in it, and he's hitting the snot out of the ball. It's a dazzling combination.

"He is an MVP-type player. Period," said one scout.

It's impossible for Betts to maintain what he's doing, but the early returns on his approach in 2016 suggest a player who may have another gear to his already impressive game. Thanks in part to the conversations he's had with Ortiz and members of the Red Sox staff, there is a sense of enormous possibility that hovers over Betts and the Red Sox in the initial weeks of the 2018 season.

"Knowing his talent, his potential is – it's untapped so far," said Hyers. "He's a guy that in my opinion, his ceiling is whatever he wants to make it."

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox, Yankees renew hatred in fight-filled Bombers win

Jason Mastrodonato

The bad blood is back.

New York Yankee Tyler Austin, in his 61st career major league game, sparked the rivalry with a questionable spikes-up slide into Brock Holt's ankle and Joe Kelly made Austin pay with a 98-mph heater in the back four innings later.

Austin charged the mound and punches were thrown as both benches and bullpens cleared.

The Yankees jumped out to a huge lead after David Price left after the first inning due to health concerns, J.D. Martinez hit a grand slam to bring the Red Sox back to life and then chaos ensued, interrupting any momentum and the Yankees ended up closing out a 10-7 win to even the series.

The loss snapped the Sox' nine-game winning streak.

The chaos started with Austin's slide in the third inning.

With runners on first and second, Tyler Wade dropped down a bunt and Rafael Devers threw to Holt at second to retire Austin. Austin was clearly out while Holt kept his right foot on the bag and had no intention of turning a double play.

Still, Austin slid with his spikes straight into Holt's ankle, a similar play to the one involving Manny Machado and Dustin Pedroia last year.

Holt took issue with the slide and exchanged words with Austin, prompting both benches and bullpens to clear but no physical contact ensued. After a short delay, play resumed.

The next time Austin was up in the fifth inning, Heath Hembree struck him out on four pitches and he quietly went to the dugout.

It wasn't until the seventh inning that Austin got his due. Kelly started him with a swinging strike on a slider, then came way inside on a 98-mph heater but didn't hit him. The next pitch was another slider low. The fourth one was 98 mph and plunked Austin in the back.

Austin lost his temper immediately, slamming his bat as he made his way toward Kelly, who motioned Austin toward him. Kelly dodged the initial charge and threw him on the ground as he wildly threw punches.

The two biggest players on the field, Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton, quickly emerged to hold Kelly back and tried to make peace. But Austin threw a punch toward Kelly that missed and connected on the head of Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles.

Both teams continued yapping at each other during a lengthy delay, and Kelly and Austin were ejected.

The game was interesting, too.

Price gave up four runs on a Stanton triple and Gary Sanchez homered in the first inning, then never returned due to a sensation in his pitching hand.

Sox manager Alex Cora used nearly his entire bullpen to piece together the game from there, avoiding only Hector Velazquez, who is likely to start Saturday, and closer Craig Kimbrel.

Down 8-1 in the fifth, the Sox jumped back into the game when they loaded the bases and Martinez connected on a juicy splitter from Masahiro Tanaka for a grand slam to center field that made the score 8-6.

The Sox scored six runs off Tanaka, the most they've managed in his 15 career starts against them.

But the Yanks added two more off Matt Barnes in the sixth and the Sox' bats showed little life after the brawl.

They put two runners on in the ninth against Aroldis Chapman. Cora perplexingly used defensive catcher Sandy Leon to pinch-hit for Brock Holt (Andrew Benintendi and Blake Swihart were also available) and Leon popped up. Mookie Betts and Rafael Devers struck out to end the game.

Red Sox notebook: David Price exits early after rough inning

Jason Mastrodonato

David Price's first start against the New York Yankees since last July ended after only one inning.

Price took the mound for the Red Sox last night having not allowed a run in 14 innings to start the year. But the Yankees knocked him around for four runs in the first inning and he never returned for the second.

Price walked off the mound after the first and appeared to be flexing his left forearm. Then he went straight into the tunnel and was followed by pitching coach Dana LeVangie and trainer Brad Pearson.

He was replaced by Bobby Poyner to start the second inning.

The Sox said Price left the game for precautionary reasons after he felt a sensation in his left hand.

Price returned to the dugout by the end of the 10-7 loss.

It was supposed to be a big year for Price after he missed the first two months of 2017 while recovering from a left elbow strain. He also experienced blister issues due to a split fingernail last June.

The Red Sox were counting on him as their No. 2 starter this year and took care of him in spring training, asking for less work between starts and holding Price, and other starters, to lower pitch counts.

Price threw just 76 and 91 pitches in his first two starts, respectively.

His fastball velocity averaged 93 mph during his first two starts and averaged 92 mph last night.

Price gave up a single to Brett Gardner and a walk to Aaron Judge to start the game, then left a 92-mph heater belt-high on the outside part of the plate for Giancarlo Stanton, who hammered it into the center-field triangle for a two-run triple.

Two batters later, Gary Sanchez hit an 89-mph cutter left over the top part of the plate for a no-doubt home run to left field. It was Sanchez' fifth career homer off Price.

The Sox are already two starters down as Drew Pomeranz and Steven Wright began the year on the disabled list. Hector Velazquez is expected to start Saturday while Pomeranz continues to rehab in Double-A Portland. Brian Johnson, who started in the second series but has since been in the bullpen, would likely replace Price if he were to miss time.

Velazquez threw 523 innings of one-run ball against the Tampa Bay Rays in the fourth game of the year but has been pitching out of the bullpen since then.

"Let's see what happens today, hopefully everything goes accordingly to plan and we don't have to use him but it looks like it's going to be Velazquez on Saturday," manager Alex Cora said before the game.

Benny to the bench

Just as Andrew Benintendi was starting to heat up, Cora took him out of the lineup.

Benintendi had reached base in seven straight games before getting the night off last night.

Cora said he usually decides at least four days in advance what his lineups will look like as he tries to map out enough rest to keep everyone fresh.

“I mean it’s not only the hot part of it, it’s the matchups, not only today but the upcoming matchups and trying to get other people hot, too,” Cora said. “We did it with Mookie Betts already. He hit a homer and didn’t play the next day. (Benintendi) had a good game yesterday and we did it today. We map it out, man.

“It’s not that we’re trying to rest guys most of the time and people are worried so much about rhythm, but at the same time there are certain guys in that dugout that they need to get their rhythm too and they’re important pieces of what we’re trying to accomplish.”

In Benintendi’s place, J.D. Martinez started as the left fielder, pushing Hanley Ramirez to the designated hitter spot and allowing Mitch Moreland to get into the lineup.

Benintendi began the season 0-for-13 but has gone 7-for-21 with eight walks since. He’s leading the American League with 11 walks this season.

“He’s been putting good at-bats in the whole season,” Cora said. “His on-base percentage is .400 and that’s what we ask of our second hitter. Maybe later on (in the year hot streaks will matter), but now I’ll map it out and go from there.”

Benintendi was thrilled to get involved in the action on Tuesday.

“It was nice to get something going offensively,” he said. “Obviously I’ve just been working with (hitting coach Tim Hyers), trying to find little things going on. Hopefully I get something going.”

Keep it down

Rick Porcello goes into tonight’s start with a 2-0 record and 2.84 ERA to start the season.

Current Yankees have hit .242 with a .760 OPS off Porcello in his career. Giancarlo Stanton is 1-for-1 off him with a double and Aaron Judge is 1-for-10 with a homer.

“Just trying to keep the ball down,” Porcello said. “Obviously they both pose a huge challenge which is what makes their lineup so tough. And it’s not just those two guys. It’s Gary Sanchez, Didi Gregorius and all the guys that follow up. Those guys make everyone else better and you have to be on your game with this lineup.”

*** *The Providence Journal***

Yankees 10, Red Sox 7: New York strikes back in a testy affair at Fenway

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- If this season does indeed play out as an extended grudge match between the Red Sox and Yankees for supremacy atop the American League East and beyond, circle Wednesday night as the first real flash point.

The benches cleared twice and New York supplied the majority of the offensive fireworks in a wild affair at Fenway Park, the kind of game that can only turn up the heat on one of the oldest rivalries in all of sports.

Boston dished out most of the punishment on the scoreboard in Tuesday’s series opener and was on the receiving end 24 hours later. Gary Sanchez cracked a pair of two-run homers and Giancarlo Stanton

showed signs of life at the plate as the Yankees battled past the Red Sox, 10-7, in nearly four hours of fantastic theater.

David Price lasted just one inning in the shortest start of his career, departing for precautionary reasons due to what Boston staff members termed a “sensation” the pitcher felt in his left hand. Stanton’s two-run triple to right center and a two-run blast by Sanchez off an advertising board above the Monster Seats gave New York a 4-0 head start in the top of the first. In was the beginning of the end for the nine-game Red Sox winning streak and just the second loss suffered by a club riding the best start in franchise history.

“It stinks to end our winning streak like that, but we’ll move on,” Price said. “We’ll get them tomorrow.”

Tyler Austin’s RBI single made it a 5-1 game in the third, but that was less impactful than his slide into second base on a force play later in the inning. Austin carried over the bag, with his spikes clipping the right foot of Boston shortstop Brock Holt, and tempers flared. There was no real venom in that confrontation, but more was to come in the seventh.

“I just wanted him to know that it was a bad slide,” Holt said. “I think everyone on the field knows that it was. I think he knows that now, too.”

The Yankees padded their lead in the interim against the Red Sox bullpen, with Didi Gregorius lifting a sacrifice fly to left in the fourth and Sanchez launching a towering drive toward the light tower in left center off Heath Hembree for a second homer of the night. It was 8-1 and Boston looked all but finished.

New York starter Masahiro Tanaka had retired 10 straight men into the bottom of the fifth, only allowing a solo homer to left by Hanley Ramirez in the first. The Red Sox proceeded to bat around, with Mookie Betts ripping an RBI double into the corner in left and J.D. Martinez pouncing on a fat splitter down the middle to drive one into the bleachers in center. The grand slam was Boston’s third of the home stand, the sixth of his career for Martinez, and made it an 8-6 game.

“We felt we were a few swings away from being back,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “We proved it.”

Matt Barnes couldn’t hold it there, as the Yankees answered immediately against the third Red Sox reliever in the sixth. Stanton’s RBI single up the middle and another sacrifice fly by Gregorius, this one to center, restored a four-run lead. Three New York relievers held the Red Sox mostly at bay over the final four innings, with Jackie Bradley Jr. notching his third hit and scoring on a wild pitch in the ninth.

“It was more the circumstances,” Cora said. “Christian (Vazquez) throws the ball away, then they get crossed up. It wasn’t a good one.”

There was one matter of business left to settle – or, perhaps, left to be continued – in the top of the seventh. Joe Kelly dotted Austin between the shoulder blades with a 98 mph fastball, and this time cooler heads didn’t prevail. Austin spiked his bat with his right hand and headed for the mound, with Kelly landing a couple haymakers and Austin connecting solidly to the temple of Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles with a right hand. Austin and Kelly were both ejected for their respective roles in the fracas, and the bad blood has ample opportunity to spill over again with 17 games remaining this season between the two clubs.

“I tried to stay out of it,” Holt said. “They’ve got a lot of big guys over there. It shows how close-knit we are in here, and same goes for them.”

Betts taking Cora’s advice

Bill Koch

BOSTON — The scouting report on Mookie Betts entering last year’s American League Division Series was a simple one.

The Red Sox right fielder would take either the first pitch or the first strike in each of his first two at-bats. Betts would then swing early in the count in his third at-bat. Astros pitchers adjusted accordingly, and Betts managed just two extra-base hits without driving in a run while Boston was eliminated in four games.

Houston's former bench coach has no issue sharing his secrets with Betts now. Red Sox manager Alex Cora had a good look at the five-tool talent and he broached the topic of swinging earlier in the count with Betts soon after his November hiring.

"He must really pay attention to detail," Betts remembered thinking. "It was one of the first things he said."

Betts swung at 53.8 percent of pitches in the strike zone last season, his lowest number since becoming a regular in 2015. His OPS dipped nearly 100 points from his breakout 2016 campaign, a year in which he finished second to Angels outfielder Mike Trout in the A.L. Most Valuable Player voting. Cora saw a chance for Betts to produce out of the leadoff spot along similar lines as George Springer, the Astros' star outfielder who homered five times while leading his team to a World Series title in 2017.

"I saw it first-hand last year," Cora said. "I know how it works. He accepted the challenge, and he's doing an outstanding job."

Betts changed his tune from the opening pitch of the season, sending a deep drive to left-center at Tropicana Field that was run down by Tampa Bay center fielder Kevin Kiermaier. He's ambushing opposing pitchers early and often, swinging at 58.4 percent of pitches in the strike zone through 10 games. That's the exact number Betts carried through 158 games two years ago, as he racked up a career-high 31 home runs and 78 extra-base hits.

"He showed me numbers of my swing percentages," Betts said. "Not necessarily scouting reports — just swing more often."

Betts began his historic night Tuesday from his opening at-bat, hitting a leadoff double off the Green Monster for the third straight game of the homestand. He finished with his third career grand slam and a career-high five runs scored, the catalyst in a 14-1 win over the Yankees at Fenway Park. Betts became the first Red Sox player to have at least four hits, four runs scored and four RBI against New York since runs batted in became an official statistic 98 years ago.

"The great thing about him is his ability to make contact is unreal," Cora said. "And he can do damage when he makes contact."

Betts entered Wednesday connecting on 95 percent of his swings this season, including 97.8 percent of swings at pitches in the strike zone. He struck out swinging in his third at-bat on Opening Day against Rays ace Chris Archer and didn't miss again for a full week. Betts went a span of 26 plate appearances and 105 pitches before striking out swinging against Tampa Bay reliever Andrew Kittredge in the 11th inning of a 3-2 win last Thursday.

"I know he's not swinging and missing, but I told him, 'Hey man, there's nothing wrong with swinging and missing at pitches. It doesn't matter. Go for it.'"

"There was a 2-0 count, he took a big hack and he swung and missed — it's just a strike. With his ability, he's going to put the ball in play later in the at-bat."

The at-bat Cora referenced was in the fifth inning Tuesday night against New York starter Luis Severino. Betts wound up drawing a walk, a warmup for a sixth frame when he doubled to left and sent a screaming liner into the Green Monster seats to cap a nine-run rally.

"I think it's an easy adjustment — pretty much swing more," Betts said. "When I'm in the box, that's kind of what I'm thinking — get some good swings off and see what happens."

Red Sox left-hander Price departs after one inning in Wednesday's start

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- Just two days after Xander Bogaerts was placed on the disabled list, another injury setback threatened to claim the immediate future of a second Red Sox standout.

David Price left Wednesday's start against the Yankees after just one inning and 35 pitches. Boston officials announced the left-hander departed for precautionary reasons after experiencing a sensation in his throwing hand, that coming after New York built an early 4-0 lead. Price will be evaluated further after the shortest of his 262 career starts, but he said in the clubhouse later in the evening that he hopes to make his next start as scheduled.

"My hand never really warmed up," Price said. "My arm felt fine. My arm felt really good. I just had no clue where (the ball) was going."

Price was cuffed around by the Yankees during his brief stint, with Giancarlo Stanton drilling a two-run triple to the triangle in right center and Gary Sanchez smashing a two-run homer to left. Price entered having allowed just seven hits and no earned runs over his first two outings, a span of 14 innings pitched against Tampa Bay. He said there are no plans for additional testing and will avoid an MRI for now.

"The only times you ever feel really helpless on the mound are times like that -- when you can't feel the baseball," Price said. "That's unfortunate. It stinks."

"We don't know if it was the cold weather or there was an issue there," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "He couldn't grip the ball. He felt it early in the inning or halfway through the inning."

Price endured two lengthy stints on the disabled list last season, both due to elbow troubles. He was shut down in spring training, waiting until May 29 to make his 2017 debut at the White Sox. His final start came July 22 at the Angels, as Price allowed five earned runs in as many innings and was forced to come out of the bullpen in both his five September appearances and the playoffs.

"I had no pain," Price said. "Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors, I still had no pain. That was tough."

"Those guys didn't quit. They continued to battle. That was a very good sign."

Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez, Saturday's likely starter, both remain stretched out after being dropped to the bullpen prior to the series. Johnson worked the final two innings of Tuesday's 14-1 hammering of the Yankees and tossed 1 2/3 scoreless on Wednesday. Eduardo Rodriguez made his return to the rotation in Sunday's dramatic 8-7 comeback against the Rays, requiring 92 pitches to battle through 3 2/3 innings.

"It seems like (Price) should be fine as of now," Cora said. "Tomorrow, we reevaluate him and we go from there."

Bogaerts (left ankle) suffered a cracked talus bone in that same Sunday game. He slid into the Tampa Bay dugout attempting to chase down an errant throw in the seventh inning.

Yanks vs. Sox is a healthy rivalry once again

Kevin McNamara

BOSTON — There was a hiatus for a few years but we're happy to report that baseball's best rivalry is back in a pretty good place.

The first of 19 Red Sox-Yankees games tipped off at frigid Fenway Park on Tuesday night and that old buzz was rattling through the ball yard again. Two new managers who appreciate what it means to play in this ancient rivalry sent out lineups filled with stars. Aces Chris Sale and Luis Severino took the mound, with Boston's fire-balling lefty leading the Sox to a 14-1 victory.

The Red Sox fans who packed the park came ready to hurl that devilish mix of invective hate that isn't exactly present when the Rays or the Twins come to town. Big targets like sluggers Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton caught tons of abuse, especially the slump-ridden Stanton, who struck out meekly in his first two at-bats against Sale.

The health of the rivalry is really resting on the improving fate of the Yankees. The Bombers finally awoke from an inexcusable slumber last year when they won 90-plus games for the first time in five seasons. With a collection of young, explosive talent, the Yanks fell two games shy of the Red Sox in the A.L. East but woke up the echoes in the Bronx in October. A wildcard game win over the Twins was followed by a shocking upset of the Indians. A stirring American League Championship Series with the Astros didn't end until a Game 7 loss.

Brian Cashman upped the ante in the offseason by trading for Stanton and now the Yanks are seen as the favorites to unseat the Red Sox atop the A.L. East.

Things haven't started well for a Yankees team that came to town sporting a 5-5 record. Meanwhile the Red Sox took advantage of Tampa Bay and Miami to race out to the best start (9-1) in the franchise's 118-year history. Both managers know that their team's ultimate success will rest in large part in how they handle their chief opposition. They clearly couldn't wait to see how they matched up.

"That's a fun part of sports, rivalries," said Boston's Alex Cora. "Playing at the old Yankee Stadium was a lot of fun. You know a lot of people are watching. I'm glad I'm a part of it."

Cora played for the Sox from 2005-08, winning a World Series ring in 2007. Those Red Sox teams never faced the Yankees in October but Cora easily recalled a few personal highlights in the rivalry. He remembers winning a game with a single off Mariano Rivera and driving in four runs in a victory at Yankee Stadium.

When Cora insisted "It's just another series" before the game, the gathered media didn't bite. But Cora will be good for this series, if only because of his refreshing honesty. While John Farrell would filibuster basic questions with hardball gobbledygook, Cora lets the truth slip out. He said he's most surprised by his team's early-season defense because "halfway through spring training I was worried." He even admitted to a mistake in Sunday's comeback win over the Rays when he failed to lift J.D. Martinez for a defensive replacement.

"Honestly, I'm going to be honest with you, we scored six runs and we were so excited. The manager missed that one," he said.

Why would he tip his hand? "Why lie? It happens. Everybody saw it. I ask our guys to be genuine, transparent and responsible. If I'm asking them to be that way, then I better be that way," he said.

Boone needs no introduction. His Game 7 home run to end the 2003 ALCS is one of the most memorable moments in recent baseball history. The shot made him a Yankees legend. In New England his name is best when hyphenated, just like Bucky Dent's.

In his trips to Boston as an ESPN analyst, Boone says he was always been treated warmly. "Now that I have the uniform back on maybe that changes," he admits.

Throwing a rookie manager into the pinstripes is risky. Boone is coping with a virulent injury bug and a strikeout plague that's already turned Stanton into a target of the Bronx boo birds. Sale blew him away in

his first two at-bats, giving him 22 strikeouts in his first 44 at-bats with the Yankees. Evidence of the slugger who led the majors in homers (59) a year ago is nowhere to be found.

"I think he's handled everything really well," Boone said, "and I think part of that comes from the confidence he has as a player. He understands that once he locks it in, he's an MVP. He recognizes that and he sees the long game."

The long game for the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry is exciting. The two teams should have the spotlight of the baseball world all summer, maybe until a season-ending set at Fenway in September.

With any luck, the drama will even spill into October. Just like the good old days.

* *MassLive.com*

Red Sox-Yankees brawl: Punches, blood, headlocks and star players bring new chapter to rivalry

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Red Sox righty Joe Kelly proved ready to rumble after plunking Tyler Austin with a 97.7 mph heater.

Austin slammed down his bat in front of home plate.

"Let's go," Kelly yelled to Austin.

Austin charged the mound.

"I was ready to defend myself, yeah," a sore Kelly, with a cut on his neck, said after the Red Sox's 10-7 loss to the Yankees at Fenway Park. "Somebody comes at my property and in my backyard, I'm going to have two dogs. Come on my property and I feel like I'm getting attacked, I'm going to have to defend myself."

Kelly punched Austin and a benches-clearing brawl ensued. The bedlam even included Austin punching Boston third base coach Carlos Febles.

The Red Sox-Yankees rivalry felt intense last year because both clubs won over 90 games. Remember the CC Sabathia-Eduardo Nunez bunt game? Sure, that was cool.

Whenever these two teams are fighting for first place, things always get entertaining.

The intensity should ramp up a few notches this year thanks to the Yankees adding NL MVP Giancarlo Stanton and Boston boasting the major's largest payroll at approximately \$232 million with the J.D. Martinez signing.

Those few extra notches were felt here Wednesday.

The Stanton acquisition is reminiscent of the Alex Rodriguez trade (Feb. 16, 2004). The rich Yankees becoming richer.

Stanton has the potential to be a real villain for Red Sox fans after he rejected all other trade destinations and forced his way to New York, leaving Miami to receive an unimpressive prospect package.

Both sides have legit star power (Stanton, Judge, Chris Sale, David Price, Mookie Betts, Gary Sanchez, Martinez, Andrew Benintendi). Star power competing for the AL East title is what powered the rivalry back during its height in 2003-04.

Former Red Sox ace Pedro Martinez -- who experienced the rivalry height -- was providing excellent commentary via Twitter as Wednesday's brawl unfolded:

Christian Vazquez is expecting New York to retaliate.

"You know that's coming," Vazquez said. "They feel like us. The clubhouse is our second home. It's wanting to protect our home, so it will be something soon. If not this series, maybe in New York."

This isn't over. Expect the Yankees to throw at a Red Sox hitter today or when Boston heads to the Bronx (May 8-10).

The Red Sox made a statement by retaliating after Austin slid overaggressively into Brock Holt during the third inning. This is a different team from last year's club, which failed to retaliate immediately after Manny Machado's takeout slide of Dustin Pedroia.

The 2018 Red Sox took care of business. They continue to play with an edge that eluded them at times in 2017.

It was good to see them respond in an appropriate manner. And it was fun to see these two teams brawl. It at least brought back some memories of Jason Varitek vs. A-Rod on July 24, 2004.

"We take it as another game, another team," J.D. Martinez said. "It's the fans and everybody that get caught up in it. At the end of the day, it's just another team in our division that we have to beat if we want to win the division."

New York and Boston again are the top two teams in the division -- and that means the rivalry comes organically like it did here Wednesday.

When two teams with this much talent play each other 19 times a year, tension will boil over. Luckily, the bad blood already is there with still 17 games remaining.

If you think last night was fun, just think about the potential intensity when the Red Sox and Yankees close out the regular season against each other with three games at Fenway Park (Sept. 28-30). The AL East title likely will be decided during those final three days.

Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez on possible Yankees retaliation: 'There will be something soon'

Mark Chiarelli

BOSTON -- Christian Vazquez's view of Wednesday's night's fistcuffs at Fenway Park was unmatched.

Vazquez was behind the plate when Tyler Austin charged Joe Kelly, peevied after the Red Sox reliever drilled him in the back. It was the second of two benches-clearing incidents involving Austin after a questionable third-inning slide. This one included multiple punches.

Vazquez didn't corral Austin before the Yankees designated hitter charged Kelly. He did grab a hand-full of Austin's jersey, but it was to no avail.

"I was trying to hold him," Vazquez said. "Grab his jersey. But the first base coach grabbed me."

He did, however, get a sense of how angry Austin became.

"He was pissed," Vazquez said. "That hurt. 98 in the ribs in this weather? But like I said, it's part of the game."

Now we'll see whether there's more in store for the rekindled rivalry.

The three-game series concludes Thursday -- a 7:10 p.m. series finale featuring Rick Porcello and Sonny Gray. The two teams don't play again until early May, when Boston travels to New York for a three-game series beginning on May 8th.

Vazquez believes the Yankees will retaliate at some point.

"You know that's coming," he said. "They feel like us, you know? ... There will be something soon. If not this series, maybe in New York."

Wednesday's drama began after Austin spiked Brock Holt on a slide. Holt said he doesn't believe the Yankees will throw at him, hinting that if it does happen, New York will probably seek out one of Boston's middle-of-the-order bats.

If he's wrong, and Holt is plunked, don't expect another round.

"If I am, I'll take my base," Holt said. I don't think they'll hit me if they hit anyone. I don't think I'll be the person they go after. But if they do, you wear it and take your base. Hopefully we don't fight anymore."

Holt believes Austin made 'bad slide,' jokes he wanted no part of Stanton, Judge in brawl

Mark Chiarelli

BOSTON -- Brock Holt thought he got his point across.

The Red Sox shortstop called Tyler Austin's third-inning slide into second base "a bad slide." Austin went in spikes-up, cutting Holt's calf, as Holt stretched like a first baseman as he received a throw from Rafael Devers.

Holt had no chance of turning two on the play -- a bunt by speedy Tyler Wade -- and was simply hoping to get the force out.

But Austin caught him. Holt turned around, jawing in Austin's direction. Austin took a few steps toward Holt before an umpire, Devers and Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin interjected. The benches cleared but the situation never escalated.

"I probably said something I shouldn't have to start it off, so I apologize for that," Holt said postgame following the Yankees' 10-7 win over the Red Sox.

"I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think everyone on the field knows that it was. I think he knows that now too."

Holt said he thought that was the end of it. So when Joe Kelly appeared to retaliate in the seventh inning, plunking Austin, even Holt was surprised.

"I thought it was over," he said. "Like I said, we're not trying to fight those guys over there. They're big. I wasn't expecting it to happen. Something did happen. It escalated quickly."

Holt was jovial postgame, joking that as soon as he saw Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton run toward the ensuing pile after Austin charged the mound, he backed away. He chalked it up to two teams playing hard.

Holt said he didn't even necessarily think Austin meant to spike him.

"I don't think it was intentional," Holt said. "I think he was going in hard. It was a bunt. I'm not going to turn a double play on that play, especially with Wade running. We're trying to get the lead out. I think he was just going in hard, but he went in hard a little late and with the spikes up. It happened. You move on."

Holt added he doesn't expect the Yankees to throw at him, but said he'll simply take first base and "wear it" if it happens.

Regardless of intent, Wednesday's game will act as a fire-starter for the no-longer-dormant Red Sox/Yankees rivalry. It's likely plenty of Red Sox fans barely knew of Tyler Austin before this series. Now he'll be a household name -- a role-playing villain not unlike Karim Garcia from years ago.

Of course, a Sox/Yankees fight in April isn't on the same level as a playoff fracas from the early 2000s.

But even Holt, in his sixth season with the Red Sox, acknowledged Wednesday's game had a throwback-type feel to it.

"They have a pretty good team over there," he said of the Yankees. "It happened. Typical Red Sox-Yankee game. About four hours long and a couple bench-clearing brawls. So we're right on track here."

David Price injury update: Red Sox LHP didn't have feeling in fingertips, will play catch Thursday

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Lefty David Price left Boston's 10-7 loss to the Yankees on Wednesday after just one inning because he felt numbness in his left hand.

"I didn't have any feeling in my fingertips," Price explained. "That's something I've felt before but it didn't go away (this time)."

He had difficulty gripping the ball because of the cold weather or for some other unknown reason, Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. But it seems like Price will be fine, Cora added.

"It's all right," Price said. "I'll play catch tomorrow and get ready for my next start."

The Red Sox don't think the hand issue is related to last year's arm problems. His two DL stints (elbow strain, elbow inflammation) during 2017 totaled 93 games. He was limited to 74 2/3 regular season innings after throwing more than 200 innings in his previous six seasons.

"I had no pain, I have no pain," Price said. "Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors, I still had no pain."

Price said his hand never warmed up.

"My arm felt fine," he said. "My arm felt really good."

"It's something I've always had to deal with," Price added.

He was able to overcome it in the past because of it happening in warmer temperatures.

"That's it. I mean his could be Game 7 of the World Series. So you've got to deal with it. I didn't do that tonight."

Joe Kelly on hitting Tyler Austin: 'It's one of those that got away'

Mark Chiarelli

BOSTON -- The party line in Boston is that Joe Kelly simply threw a fastball too far inside in the 7th inning of Wednesday's game, plunking Tyler Austin.

Austin certainly didn't buy it.

The sequence had a retaliatory feel after Austin spiked Brock Holt on a slide, cutting the Red Sox shortstop on the calf, in the third inning of Thursday's 10-7 Yankees win. Kelly drilled the New York designated hitter with a 97 mph heater in the seventh. Austin then tomahawked his bat in front of the batter's box before charging Kelly.

Kelly even appeared to entice Austin on, gesturing at him as he began to approach.

But Kelly, who had a visible cut above his left shoulder, told reporters postgame he wasn't intentionally trying to hit Austin. His manager, Alex Cora, said something similar, saying their game-long plan was to pitch Austin inside.

"I threw a pitch inside and it hit him," Kelly said. "It's one of those that got away."

The result was a legitimate baseball fracas and possible folk-lore status for Kelly, at least for the next couple weeks within Red Sox nation. He threw a couple punches at the back of Austin's head in the skirmish. Austin later struck Red Sox coach Carlos Febles, who said he was fine postgame. Austin, Kelly and Yankees coach Phil Nevin were all ejected.

Kelly said it was the first time he'd ever been involved in something like that.

"I definitely wasn't expecting it," he said. "It was a pitch that got away that hit an opposing player. The umpire said take your base and then things went down."

Kelly was later asked about his open invitation to Austin, where he appeared to say "come on" before Austin charged the mound.

"I was ready to defend myself," Kelly said. "If someone comes on your property, in your back yard, I have two dogs. If you come on my property and I feel like I'm getting attacked, then I have to defend myself."

Holt was appreciative of Kelly's efforts.

"It shows that we all have each other's back," Holt said. "That was a pretty good one. Probably one of the better ones I've been a part of. I tried to stay out of it. They have a lot of big guys over there. But yeah, it shows how close-knit we are for them. And same goes for them."

While Kelly played coy, he won over at least two former Red Sox pitchers.

J.D. Martinez delivers Boston Red Sox's third grand slam in four days, bashing one 436 feet to center

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- The Red Sox went the entire 2017 season without hitting a grand slam. They have belted three over the past four days.

J.D. Martinez crushed the latest, a 436-footer to center field here in the fifth inning Wednesday. The Red Sox entered the fifth inning trailing 8-1. It's now 10-6 in the sixth inning.

Martinez's grand slam traveled with a 112.4 exit velocity and 22 degree launch angle.

Martinez is 7-for-12 with three homers, two doubles, seven RBIs and four strikeouts in his career vs. Masahiro Tanaka who starts for New York today.

Xander Bogaerts ended the Red Sox's 560-day grand slam drought Saturday. Meanwhile, Mookie Betts belted the other grand slam here Tuesday.

Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora on Eduardo Nunez's defense: 'He's getting into bad habits'

Mark Chiarelli

BOSTON - Eduardo Nunez's misplay on a sharp Didi Gregorius grounder Tuesday night was benign. Chris Sale maneuvered around the lead-off single in the sixth inning with ease, and Boston's bats rocked the Yankees for nine runs in the bottom half of the inning, rolling to a 14-1 lead.

Heck, it wasn't even ruled an error. The ball left Gregorius' bat at over 94 mph, deflecting off Nunez's glove and over to shortstop Brock Holt.

But the play stood out. The Red Sox had shifted over to the right side of the infield on Gregorius, correctly predicting the outcome, and still couldn't produce an out. And Nunez didn't have to range very far, instead eaten up on a short hop.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora was asked about Nunez's defense Wednesday afternoon.

"He's getting into bad habits," Cora said. "That's something we talked to Xander, too, the other day. It seems like pre-pitch is late. They're not getting where they're supposed to when the ball is hit."

Nunez isn't considered a plus-defender, but he's a versatile one, subsidizing a bat which, for the better part of the last three years, has been just above league average.

Since joining the Red Sox last year, he's played mostly second base while also mixing in at third base and shortstop - his two preferred positions in the infield. Cora said Nunez has encouraged coaches to stay on him, harping on the details defensively.

"Eduardo, from the get-go, has been telling Carlos (Febles) and Ramon (Vazquez) -- 'Remind me. Keep telling me what I have to do.' In his own words, he'll say 'I get lazy out there.' We don't want that."

Cora said specifically, Nunez hasn't been consistent in finding a pre-pitch routine preparing him for every possible ball in play.

"It doesn't matter if you go left, right, if you do a hop like (Dustin) Pedroia," Cora said. "You have to have your feet with momentum when the ball is going to be hit so you can react. If you're in the air, you're late. If you're on the ground too much, you're flat-footed. It's about timing. When you do that, you can react. We're trying to accomplish that."

Cora said there were three plays against the Marlins this year that he's willing to give Nunez the benefit of the doubt on, saying the 30-year-old infielder's vision was obscured by an umpire unwilling to move from his position in the middle of the infield.

But, overall, Cora reiterated Nunez needs to become more consistent, at least in his preparation prior to the pitch.

He'll have plenty of opportunities. Nunez is in Boston's lineup Wednesday against Yankees starter Masahiro Tanaka, and should see some work at shortstop while Bogaerts is injured.

Nunez has had some success offensively against Tanaka. According to Baseball Savant, Nunez's average exit velocity on balls in play against the righty (seven at-bats) is over 100 miles-per-hour.

Hector Velazquez news: Red Sox RHP will likely start Saturday against Baltimore Orioles

Mark Chiarelli

BOSTON -- Barring Wednesday night wonkiness against the Yankees, Red Sox righty Hector Velazquez will start Saturday against the Baltimore Orioles.

"It looks like it's going to be Velazquez," manager Alex Cora said. "Let's see what happens today. Hopefully everything goes according to plan and we don't have to use him, but it looks like it's going to be Velazquez."

Velazquez's lone start was a win over the Rays on April 1, when he allowed one run over 5 2/3 innings. He's since appeared in relief twice -- both also against the Rays -- and last pitched Sunday, throwing 37 pitches and surrendering two runs.

Boston expected either Velazquez or lefty Brian Johnson to assume Saturday's open rotation spot after Drew Pomeranz determined he'd need at least one more rehab start, which is Friday for Double-A Portland.

Johnson pitched Tuesday night against the Yankees, throwing two scoreless innings in relief.

*** *The Lowell Sun***

Rivalry is back: Sox, Yankees duke it out

Matt Langone

BOSTON -- Even just two weeks into the season, it's a safe assumption that the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees are going to be really good teams in 2018.

But that's not enough to restore the enormous amount of fun that once lived inside this bitter baseball rivalry. If we're going to get back to those glory years when Sox-Yanks was must-see entertainment every time they took the field together, there's one necessary ingredient: hatred.

Well, it looks like it's back.

That's the takeaway from Wednesday night's game at frosty 40-degree Fenway Park, as a four-hour slugfest featured two incidents that cleared the benches and the bullpens and had the 32,400 fans in the ballpark roaring. It wasn't quite Pedro tossing Don Zimmer by his bald head, or A-Rod brawling Jason Varitek, but it was still pretty fun and it felt like old times.

By the way, the Yankees won, 10-7, to improve to 6-6, while the Red Sox dropped to 9-2. Now let's get back to festivities that had the ballpark buzzing.

The Yankees and Sox erupted into a benches-clearing brawl in the top of the seventh inning after Boston reliever Joe Kelly drilled New York's DH Tyler Austin in the back with a 97 mph fastball. The 6-foot-2, 220-pound Austin slammed his bat down and charged at slender Kelly, while Kelly smiled and appeared to mouth the words "Come on!" toward Austin. Members of both teams sprinted onto the field and a pileup ensued. Punches were thrown.

Kelly, Austin and Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin were ejected.

"I just hope nobody gets stepped on, I've been in those, you know," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "I grabbed one of the bigger guys on their side -- CC (Sabathia) -- that wasn't smart from my end. It is what it is. It's going to happen... just hope nobody gets hurt."

"If you look at the game we were trying to go in earlier with (Heath) Hembree inside with (Austin). On that sequence we threw slider, fastball in, slider in, fastball in. The kid charged the mound and he had his reason, but if you take a look at the game, you know, we're coming back and we're short in pitching. You just got to pay attention to the game and you judge by yourself."

That was the main event after the undercard scuffle in the third inning. That was when Austin slid hard into second base with his spikes up at Red Sox shortstop Brock Holt, who took offense to it. The two had words for each other and the benches and bullpens emptied onto the field.

Cora was asked if he would've taken offense to such a slide.

"Probably would've turned the double play," quipped Cora.

It's early-April and the teams have only played each other twice with 17 more games to go, yet they already can't stand each other. They'll play the rubber match of this three-game series on Thursday night at Fenway. This is great for Boston, this is great for New York and this is great for the sport.

Part of the reason interest in baseball around here has cooled over the past few years is the lack of intrigue in Red Sox-Yankees games. The names of old have retired and the teams are loaded with young players who have never quite experienced the intensity that this rivalry is capable of bringing.

With Cora at the helm and a new slugger in J.D. Martinez, who belted a grand slam on Wednesday night, Boston entered Wednesday with the best record in the American League and tied for the best record in Major League Baseball. They've been fun and exciting to watch.

The Yankees, meanwhile, entered Wednesday below-.500, and were humiliated by the Sox on Tuesday night in a 14-1 loss. But don't be fooled by any of that. New York will figure it all out, they'll hit a ton and they'll win a lot more than they'll lose. That's the reality, and it's a fun reality because the same can be said for the Sox.

Perhaps that drubbing the Yankees took on Tuesday night was exactly what they needed to wake up their bats, because on Wednesday night they came out swinging with bad intentions. New York posted a four-run first inning that knocked Red Sox starter David Price out of the game after just one inning of work.

Giancarlo Stanton crushed a two-run triple and catcher Gary Sanchez launched a two-run home run to left field in the opening frame. In a possible act of damage control in support of their high-priced left-hander, the Red Sox announced that Price was removed from the game for precautionary reasons after experiencing a sensation in his left hand.

Price (1-1) entered the contest with a 0.00 ERA and 29.1 consecutive scoreless innings, so it's possible he did actually experience "a sensation" in his left hand (whatever that means). Or maybe he just got pummeled by a really good lineup.

The much-criticized Stanton, who has already struck out 23 times, went 3-for-5 with three RBI and two runs scored. Sanchez, who was hitting .056 coming into the day, added another homer in the fourth during his three-hit night to go with four RBI. Meanwhile, the Yankees other big bopper Aaron Judge went 2-for-4 to raise his average to .348.

These teams will likely be pummeling each other all season, figuratively and maybe even literally if Wednesday night is any indication.

The rivalry is back.

*** *The Worcester Telegram & Gazette***

Dugouts and bullpens clear as Sox, Yanks throw down

Rich Garven

BOSTON _ Mookie Betts was chatting at his locker Tuesday afternoon a few hours before the Red Sox and New York Yankees kicked off a three-game series at Fenway Park.

The two-time American League All-Star expected the first of 19 meetings between these ancient rivals this season would be “very intense, like a playoff game” and it would be important to “stay even-keeled.”

As it turned out, the Sox scored nine runs in the sixth to drain the energy out of the highly anticipated showdown while on their way to a 14-1 smackdown of the Yanks.

The intensity finally surfaced and then bubbled over 24 hours later.

The rematch Wednesday night had the feel of those nasty, knockdown battles between the Red Sox and Yankees in the 1970s and early 2000s thanks to a pair of bench-clearing, bullpen-emptying dustups during a 10-7 victory for the New Yorkers.

“Red Sox-Yankees,” said David Price, who started and took the loss. “That’s what everybody wants. That’s what they got.”

The first confrontation was somewhat theatrical; the second was undeniably authentic. Both involved Yankees designated hitter Tyler Austin.

In the top of the third, Austin extended the Yankees’ lead to 5-1 with an RBI single to left. On the next play, he slid into second on a fielder’s choice bunt and was called out.

It was all good except for the fact Austin came in high with his left leg, driving his cleat into the lower right calf of shortstop Brock Holt. Holt took exception verbally, leading to every player and coach in the old ballpark congregating in the infield for a lot of talking and a little bit of pushing.

“I probably said something I shouldn’t have to start the whole thing,” Holt said. “I’m sorry for that. I just wanted him to know that it was a bad slide. I think everyone on the field knows that it was. I think he knows that now, too.”

Holt didn’t think Austin was intentionally trying to make contact with him.

“I think he was going in hard,” Holt said. “It was a bunt, I’m not going to turn a double play on that play _ especially with (Tyler) Wade running. So we were trying to get the lead out.

“So I think he was just going in hard, but he went in hard a little late with the spikes up. It happened and you move on.”

But fast forward to the seventh and it appeared the Red Sox hadn’t moved on from Austin’s aggressive play. With a 1-1 count, one out and the Yankees leading, 10-6, righthander reliever Joe Kelly drilled Austin in the back with a 98-mph fastball.

Kelly dismissed the idea he was standing up for his teammates, instead insisting he threw a pitch inside and it got away.

“On a cold night you’re not going to have perfect command ... it’s not like I have Greg Maddux command,” Kelly said. “We’ll see what happens. I hope I don’t get suspended. It wasn’t like it was a blowout game. We were still in that ballgame. We had a big rally the inning before, so no intent there.”

Austin slammed the barrel of his bat on home plate, walked forcefully forward and then aggressively charged the mound. He was met by Kelly, who got in a couple of rights as the pair tumbled to the ground while players and coaches raced out to join the physical fracas.

“I was ready to defend myself,” Kelly said.

"It shows that we've all got each other's back," Holt added. "That was a pretty good one _ probably one of the better ones that I've been a part of. I tried to stay out of it. They've got a lot of big guys over there. It shows how close-knit we are in here, and same goes for them."

The 6-foot-1, 174-pound Kelly, who was giving away an inch and 46 pounds to Austin, had his jersey ripped and his glasses torn off in the melee. He said he was pretty sore.

Austin got up and nailed Carlos Febles with an overhand right as the Sox' third base coach was held by Joe Judge among a throng of baseball bodies.

Both Kelly and Austin were ejected.

"I just hope nobody gets stepped on," manager Alex Cora said. "I've been in those. I grabbed one of the bigger guys from their side _ C.C. (Sabathia). That wasn't smart. It is what it is. It's going to happen."

****Redsox.com***

Rivalry gets heated as winning streak ends

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- In what felt like a throwback rivalry game to 2003-04, there were tape-measure homers, a fracas that included punches from both sides and ultimately a 10-7 victory by the Yankees over the Red Sox on Wednesday night.

That was how a nine-game winning streak ended for the Red Sox, while the Yankees (6-6) got back to .500.

"Red Sox, Yankees. That's what everybody wants," said Red Sox lefty David Price. "That's what they got."

The most untimely thing that happened for the Red Sox was Price experiencing a numbing sensation in his left hand that forced him out of the game after just one inning and 35 pitches, in which he gave up four runs.

The good news was that by game's end, Price had the feeling back in his hand and expected to make his next start. He thinks the numbness was simply a case of another chilly night at Fenway Park.

"I had no pain," said Price. "I have no pain. Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors, I still had no pain. It was tough. Those guys didn't quit. They continued to battle. That was a very good sign. It stinks to not extend our winning streak like that, but we'll move on and get them tomorrow."

It was Gary Sanchez who put the Yankees on his back early with two homers, a double and four RBIs and the visitors broke out to an 8-1 lead.

But Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez countered with a grand slam to center in the fifth against Masahiro Tanaka that slimmed New York's lead to 8-6.

Things got wild in the top of the seventh, after Boston reliever Joe Kelly hit Tyler Austin in the back with a 97.7-mph fastball.

Austin threw his bat down and then charged the mound, and he and Kelly threw punches at each other. Austin also landed a punch to the head of Red Sox third-base coach Carlos Febles.

"It's a pitch that got away on a cold night. Not like I had perfect command," Kelly said. "It's not like I have Greg Maddux command. We'll see what happens. I don't think I should be suspended. It wasn't a blowout game. We were still in that ballgame. We had a big rally the inning before."

The tension stemmed from an incident in the third, when Austin slid hard with his left foot into Red Sox shortstop Brock Holt's right leg. Benches emptied that time also, but the situation was quickly diffused.

"I probably said something I probably shouldn't have to start it off," said Holt. "I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think he knows that now."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Gary is scary: Sanchez said before Wednesday's game that he has been working with hitting coach Marcus Thames on several mechanical adjustments, while both manager Aaron Boone and general manager Brian Cashman said that their catcher would reclaim his offensive thump. They didn't have to wait long, as Sanchez became the fourth Yankee with a multihomer game this season, joining Stanton, Didi Gregorius and Austin.

J.D.'s first Sox slam: Martinez's first grand slam with the Red Sox was the sixth of his career. It was the third slam by the Red Sox in the last four games, marking the first time that has happened in team history. Martinez's shot wasn't cheap. The blast had an exit velocity of 112.4 mph, the fourth-hardest homer Statcast™ has measured from Martinez since 2015. Mookie Betts hit a slam against the Yankees on Tuesday. This was the first time the Red Sox have hit grand slams against the Yankees in back-to-back games since Luis Rivera and Mike Greenwell did it in 1990.

Hanley's rocket: Red Sox slugger Hanley Ramirez continues to look rejuvenated this season. He hit a bullet of a solo homer in the bottom of the first inning, a drive that had an exit velocity of 117.5 mph, making it the hardest-hit ball for a Red Sox player since Statcast™ started in 2015. It is the second hardest hit in baseball so far this season trailing only a Stanton homer (117.9 mph) from April 4 against the Rays. The drive smacked a sign beyond the Monster seats and traveled a projected distance of 432 feet.

QUOTABLE

"You know that's coming. You know that's coming. They feel like us. The clubhouse is our second home. It's wanting to protect our home. So it will be something soon. If not this series maybe in New York." -- Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez, expecting retaliation from the Yankees

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Martinez became Boston's first cleanup hitter to belt a grand slam against the Yankees since Hall of Famer Jim Rice on June 26, 1987.

WHAT'S NEXT

Right-hander Rick Porcello (2-0, 2.84 ERA) tries to continue his strong start when he takes the ball in the rubber match of this three-game series between the rivals at Fenway. First pitch is scheduled for 7:10 p.m. ET.

Benches clear twice, 4 ejected as Yanks top Sox

Bryan Hoch

BOSTON -- Tyler Austin absorbed a 97.7-mph fastball with his left elbow and slammed his bat violently on home plate, taking a few purposeful steps toward the mound. Joe Kelly removed the glove from his left hand and beckoned toward the batter, inviting this score to be settled in the center of Fenway Park.

Those actions cleared both benches and bullpens in the seventh inning of the Yankees' 10-7 victory over the Red Sox on Wednesday evening, and will surely be scrutinized by Major League Baseball in the days to come. They also delivered an unmistakable pronouncement: The rivalry is back.

"I felt like that it was intentional and I didn't want to let anybody push myself around or do anything like that," Austin said. "That's why I went out there."

Austin and Kelly each threw punches in the ensuing fracas, prompting their ejections. Yankees third-base coach Phil Nevin and reliever Tommy Kahnle were also tossed; Nevin said that he had been jawing at the Red Sox's dugout, while Kahnle said he was incensed after having been pushed by an umpire.

Kelly claimed the pitch had been an inside fastball that got away. He left the field with his uniform jersey torn and spots of blood on his neck, while Austin sported a bloody lip.

"I was ready to defend myself," said Kelly. "Someone comes in my property in my backyard? I have two dogs. Ready to come on my property and I'm being attacked, then I'm ready to defend myself."

Aaron Judge had sprinted to the center of the pile, where he attempted to play peacemaker, pulling Kelly off Austin.

"I saw Kelly was on top of Tyler after he tried to tackle him, so my job was just to get Kelly up and get him off," Judge said. "No one ever likes getting hit with 98 to the back. Everybody was pretty upset about it."

Cameras also captured Austin landing a punch on the head of Red Sox third-base coach Carlos Febles. Austin acknowledged that he had thrown punches.

"I'm just trying to defend myself, man. That's all that was," Austin said.

Tempers initially flared in the third inning, when Austin slid hard into second base on a Tyler Wade fielder's choice, his spikes connecting with Boston shortstop Brock Holt. Words were exchanged between Austin and Holt, which prompted the bullpens and benches to empty.

"I probably said something I shouldn't have to start the whole thing," Holt said. "I'm sorry for that. I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think everyone on the field knows that it was."

Replays showed that Austin had his left foot pointing up as he slid into Holt's right foot, with third baseman Rafael Devers having fielded Wade's bunt swiftly. Holt said that his right calf was sliced by Austin's spikes, but Austin maintained that it was a fine play.

"I felt like my slide into second base was a clean slide," Austin said. "I play the game hard. I thought there was absolutely nothing wrong with that slide. I had no thought that they were going to throw at me."

That situation was diffused quickly. Heath Hembree struck out Austin in the fifth inning, and with the Yankees leading by four runs, Kelly opened their seventh-inning showdown with a slider that went for a swinging strike.

"You don't need to drill him for that [slide]," Giancarlo Stanton said, "and if you're going to do it, do it on the first pitch."

The next pitch was a high and inside fastball, and Austin said he considered that it had been a purpose pitch.

"After that pitch, it had crossed my mind, but I thought it was over after that," Austin said. "He missed with the first one. Once that happens, it's kind of over."

Kelly followed with a slider that missed the strike zone, and Austin was plunked by the 2-1 offering, discarding his batting helmet and tumbling toward Kelly onto the infield grass.

"The kid that charged the mound, he had his reasons," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "But if you take a look at the game, we're coming back and we're short on pitching. I don't know. You've just got to pay attention to the game and you judge by yourself."

Yankees manager Aaron Boone said that he thought the Red Sox were in the wrong.

"I thought it was a hard slide into second, nothing remotely dirty about it," Boone said. "To take matters into your own hands and you go hit one of our guys for that, I thought was an overreaction. I didn't think it was right."

Though the rest of the game proceeded without incident, tension remained high even in the visiting clubhouse, where Austin was ushered to a pillar in the center of the room. A newspaper reporter and a cameraman nearly came to blows while jockeying for position, exchanging angry words.

"What's happening here?" Austin said, bewildered.

Media scuffles aside, Boone said that he believes the on-field incident is "probably over with," but Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez is not so certain about the lack of a carryover.

"You know that's coming," Vazquez said. "They feel like us. The clubhouse is our second home. It's wanting to protect our home, so it will be something soon. If not this series, maybe in New York."

Price confident he will make next start

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- What originally felt alarming -- David Price being removed from Wednesday's eventual 10-7 loss to the Yankees after just one inning due to a sensation in his left hand -- seemed like no big deal by the end of the night.

"David, as you guys know, he was feeling some issues with his hand," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "As you guys know, we've been trying to take care of [the starting pitchers] from the get-go. As soon as he mentioned it to [pitching coach] Dana [LeVangie], we took him out. They were looking at him inside."

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"Tomorrow he's going to come back, most likely he's going to try to play catch and go from there, but it seems like he should be fine as of now. But tomorrow we re-evaluate him and we go from there."

Price is confident that it he will make his next scheduled start. The lefty thinks the scare was caused by his hand not responding well to another bitterly-cold night at Fenway Park. It was 42 degrees at first pitch with a 13-mph wind.

"It's all right," Price said. "I'll play catch tomorrow and get ready for my next start."

It was clear something was wrong with Price the way he labored through the first inning, throwing 35 pitches and giving up four runs.

"My whole hand," said Price. "Didn't have any feeling in my fingertips. It was something I've felt before but it didn't go away."

Price had no doubt he would be clear to resume throwing on Thursday.

"I'm playing catch," Price said. "I threw a couple of baseballs in the eighth inning upstairs against the wall. My hand was thawed out from earlier and I felt fine."

One thing Price wanted to emphasize is that this had nothing to do with his left elbow injuries from last season, when he was limited to just 11 starts.

"I had no pain. I have no pain," said Price. "Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors I still had no pain. It was tough. Those guys didn't quit. They continued to battle. That was a very good sign. It stinks to not extend our winning streak like that, but we'll move on and get them tomorrow."

Price had fired 14 scoreless innings in his first two starts before getting roughed up by Giancarlo Stanton (two-run triple) and Gary Sanchez (two-run homer) in Wednesday's start.

"The only time you feel really helpless on the mound are times like that, whenever you can't feel the baseball. That's unfortunate. It stinks," said Price. "My hand never really warmed up. My arm felt fine. My arm felt really good. I had no clue where it was going."

J.D. rounding into form, belts slam off Tanaka

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- For a team that didn't hit a grand slam in 2017, it's been a little surreal to see them come in a historical bunch the past few days.

When J.D. Martinez clocked a slam to center against Masahiro Tanaka in the bottom of the fifth inning in Wednesday's 10-7 loss to the Yankees, it was the third slam in the past four games for Boston.

Never before had the Red Sox hit three grand slams in a span of four games.

Xander Bogaerts hit a slam to lead his team to victory over the Rays on Saturday. Mookie Betts smashed one in Tuesday's 14-1 rout.

And then came Martinez, whose bullet to center suddenly trimmed an 8-2 deficit to 8-6.

It was the sixth grand slam in Martinez's career.

"Fortunately enough I came up with the bases loaded," said Martinez. "We had some good at-bats before that, guys got on and I knew he had to throw me a pitch over the plate and I was just able to put a good swing on it really. It's obviously something good to take home, but at the end of the day we lost, so it really doesn't matter."

It felt like it mattered at the time, however, because it got the Red Sox right back in the game.

The slugger jumped all over a first-pitch splitter from Tanaka, and it left his bat with an exit velocity of 112.4 mph while traveling a projected distance of 436 feet, according to Statcast™.

It was Martinez's second homer of the season.

Interestingly, it was the first time a Boston cleanup hitter struck for a grand slam against the Yankees since Hall of Famer Jim Rice on June 26, 1987.

Also, it was the first time the Red Sox have hit slams in two straight games against the Yankees since Luis Rivera and Mike Greenwell pulled it off in 1990.

As for Martinez, he is starting to round into form after a slow start. The right-handed hitter is slashing .250/.295/.500 and has made strides in recent days.

"Yesterday I hit the ball hard twice. Today I hit the ball good," said Martinez. "I've been just kind of grinding it out type deal. You can look at it, my swing feels good. It's coming around little by little."

Cora takes long-term view with lineups

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Andrew Benintendi smashed a double and a triple in Tuesday's 14-1 rout against the Yankees. He also had the go-ahead double in Sunday's epic 8-7 comeback win against the Rays.

So why was Benintendi not in the starting lineup for Wednesday's game against the Yankees?

It is all part of the long-term planning that Red Sox manager Alex Cora does when it comes to the lineup.

"That decision [on Benintendi] was made a few days ago," Cora said.

So don't be surprised when a player gets a day off after hitting a home run in the previous game, as was the case for Mookie Betts on April 3 at Miami.

"I mean, it's not only the hot part of it, it's the matchups, not only today but the upcoming matchups and trying to get other people hot, too," Cora said. "We map it out, man. It's not that we're trying to rest guys most of the time and people are worried so much about rhythm, but at the same time, there are certain guys in that dugout that they need to get their rhythm, too, and they're important pieces of what we're trying to accomplish."

Cora then expanded on his Wednesday decision with Benintendi, which resulted in J.D. Martinez playing left field, Mitch Moreland getting the start at first and Hanley Ramirez serving as the designated hitter.

"Today we accomplish a few things," said Cora. "Mitch is getting at-bats. It's still a tough matchup for lefties [against Masahiro Tanaka], let's be honest. But Mitch gets at-bats, Hanley is off his feet. J.D. is playing left field and Benny's off his feet and we can use him probably late in the game if necessary.

"So we accomplish a few things. People see what happened yesterday, yeah. [Benintendi] has been putting good at-bats in the whole season. His on-base percentage is .400, and that's what we ask of our second hitter. Maybe later on [recent games will play a bigger role], but now I'll map it out and go from there. We'll go with what we planned."

How far out does Cora plot the lineup?

"Sometimes four [days]," Cora said. "Sometimes a whole week."

Velazquez likely for Saturday

With Drew Pomeranz making one last rehab start on Friday for Double-A Portland, the Red Sox need a fifth starter on Saturday. Cora is currently leaning toward righty Hector Velazquez, who has pitched twice in the bullpen since his only start of the season on April 1.

"Hopefully everything goes accordingly to plan and we don't have to use him, but it looks like it's going to be Velazquez," said Cora.

The other option would be lefty Brian Johnson, who pitched in relief on Tuesday.

Swihart gets some practice at second

After the Red Sox re-signed Eduardo Nunez in Spring Training, Cora cooled on the need to get super-utilityman Blake Swihart game action at second base. But with shortstop Xander Bogaerts on the disabled list, Cora had Swihart do some pregame work at second -- a position he has never played -- the past couple of days.

"We need options," Cora said. "We've got to run for people and we may have to hit [for someone]. It's a different lineup now than a few days ago when Xander was there, so we have to be prepared if something happens. He worked at second late in Spring Training, turned double plays. He's athletic enough in case we need him he can go there and make routine plays and turn double plays."

****ESPNBoston.com***

Benches clear twice in Red Sox-Yankees; 3 players, 1 coach ejected

Cole Harvey

BOSTON -- The bad blood is back in baseball's most intense rivalry.

The benches cleared twice in Wednesday night's game at Fenway Park between the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox, and Yankees designated hitter Tyler Austin was in the middle of everything.

During the second incident in New York's 10-7 win, in which Austin was hit by a pitch, there were punches and pushes.

"Once I got hit, it was going to happen," Austin said.

"It" being the second of Wednesday's bench-clearing dust-ups, a brawl that added to the litany of fights that have occurred throughout the storied rivalry. This particular brawl included towering Yankees slugger Aaron Judge hauling a Red Sox pitcher off the field in a headlock, Austin connecting with a punch on a Red Sox assistant coach and the two teams expressing contradictory feelings as to what precipitated the events in question.

Once the fight was over, even one former Red Sox-Yankees brawl participant, Pedro Martinez, chimed in on the incident on Twitter.

The bad blood is back, and it has people buzzing.

"Red Sox-Yankees," Boston pitcher David Price said. "That's what everybody wants. That's what they got."

It all began in the bottom of the third inning, when Austin was a runner on first base. As Yankees second baseman Tyler Wade laid down a bunt along the third-base line, Austin raced to second base, where he slid into Red Sox shortstop Brock Holt.

Holt took exception to the somewhat late slide, and after the forceout was recorded, he and Austin began yelling at each other. Players from both dugouts and bullpens raced out to second base, where the yelling intensified momentarily.

"I don't think it was intentional. I think he was going in hard, and it was a bunt," Holt said. "I'm not going to turn a double play on that, especially with Wade running, so I think he was just going in hard, but he went in hard a little late with his spikes up."

Austin disagreed with Holt's assessment of the timing of the slide.

"My slide into second base was a clean slide, and I play the game hard," Holt said. "I thought there was absolutely nothing wrong with that slide."

Yankees manager Aaron Boone and general manager Brian Cashman echoed those sentiments.

"Nothing remotely dirty about it," Boone said.

"There was no reason for fisticuffs to happen based on that slide," Cashman added.

But they did. After the teams separated from the third-inning jawing session, game action resumed.

The Yankees and Red Sox were involved in two benches-clearing scuffles in their Wednesday night game at Fenway Park. Maddie Meyer/Getty Images

Four innings later, the sparks flew.

A 97.7 mph fastball from Red Sox reliever Joe Kelly hit Austin in the back of his left elbow, one pitch after Austin watched another fastball whiz closely by him well off the inside corner.

When he was hit, Austin became instantly enraged, throwing his bat down and then his helmet before charging the mound.

"How angry did that make us?" Judge asked, responding to a reporter's question. "No one likes getting hit with a 98 mph fastball, so everybody was pretty upset about it."

As Austin jogged up to Kelly, the pitcher appeared to egg him on, motioning for him to step forward while the benches and bullpens cleared.

"I mean, I was ready to defend myself," Kelly said. "If someone comes on my property in my backyard, I'm going to put up two dogs and get ready to defend myself."

In the ensuing fracas, Kelly and Austin tussled briefly on the ground, and Austin threw a punch that landed on the side of the head of Red Sox third-base coach Carlos Febles. Not long after, Austin was pushed back by Yankees hitting coach Marcus Thames, while Judge and fellow Yankees slugger Giancarlo Stanton walked amid a pile of Red Sox players from the mound area to Boston's dugout.

Judge, who ended up getting Kelly in a headlock, said his sole intention was to get the pitcher away from the scuffle in order to diffuse the situation.

"I saw Kelly going after Tyler after he tried to tackle him, so my job was to get Kelly up and get him off," Judge said. "I was just trying to get him up and pick him up."

The sight of the 6-foot-7 Judge and the 6-foot-6 Giancarlo Stanton charging onto the field was enough to spook the 5-foot-10, 180-pound Holt.

"Yeah, I'm not trying to get involved with any of those guys," Holt said. "I mean, not just those two. They have a pretty big team over there."

The entire scene prompted Martinez -- the former Boston pitcher who infamously grabbed then-72-year-old Yankees assistant coach Don Zimmer by the head and threw him to the ground during the 2003 ALCS, another of the famed brawls between the teams -- to tweet about what he felt Kelly did wrong in this latest incident.

Once the tensions eased, Kelly and Austin were ejected, as well as Yankees third-base coach Phil Nevin and Yankees relief pitcher Tommy Kahnle. Kelly was replaced by pitcher Brian Johnson, and Shane Robinson replaced Austin. Yankees quality control coach/infield instructor Carlos Mendoza came in for Nevin.

Nevin said he had been yelling at Boston's bench, expressing his "displeasure" over something that happened in the game. The arguing went back and forth, he said.

"You catch the tail end of something," Nevin said. "[The umpires] get the second guy sometimes."

According to Boone, Kahnle was ejected for yelling at an umpire. The pitcher contended to Boone that he was pushed aside "pretty significantly."

The ejections were the first for either team in 2018. Boston's most recent ejection came in September, when then-pitching coach Carl Willis was tossed from a game at Yankee Stadium. About two weeks before in a game at Detroit, Yankees Dellin Betances, Kahnle and Austin Romine were ejected after a brawl with the Tigers.

David Price feels 'no pain' in left hand after leaving Red Sox game after one inning

Scott Lauber

BOSTON -- Despite leaving his start after one inning Wednesday night because of numbness in his left hand, Boston Red Sox ace David Price believes he avoided serious injury.

Price, who gave up four first-inning runs in a brawl-filled 10-7 loss to the New York Yankees, said he expects to play catch Thursday with the hope of making his next start.

"My hand never really warmed up," Price said. "My arm felt fine. My arm felt really good. I had no clue where [the ball] was going."

Price, off to the best start of his career, missed most of last season with elbow and forearm injuries. Neither he nor Red Sox manager Alex Cora believes this latest issue is related. At this point, Price isn't scheduled for an MRI or any additional testing.

If anything, Price and Cora thought the problem might have been caused by the cold weather. It was 42 degrees at Fenway Park when Price threw his first pitch.

"We don't know if it was the cold weather or if there was an issue there, but he couldn't grip the ball," Cora said. "He felt it early in the inning or halfway through the inning. You saw the fastball command. We've been praising him about hitting his spots and he didn't."

Entering the game, Price hadn't allowed a run in 14 innings over two starts and 22 innings dating to his late-season relief stint last year. But he gave up a leadoff infield single to Brett Gardner and walked Aaron Judge before allowing a two-run triple to Giancarlo Stanton. After getting Didi Gregorius to pop up, Price allowed a two-run homer to Gary Sanchez.

Only 16 of Price's 35 pitches were strikes. His velocity also appeared to be down, with only two 93 mph radar readings. When he completed the inning, he went directly down a tunnel to the clubhouse with a trainer.

It marked the shortest start of Price's 11-year career.

"I had no pain. I have no pain," said Price, who described the issue as a lack of feeling in his fingertips. "Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors, I still had no pain."

After being examined by doctors, Price said his hand had "thawed out" enough to throw a few balls against a wall in the training room. He is scheduled to start again in the Red Sox's annual Patriots' Day matinee Monday against the Baltimore Orioles.

"He's going to come back [Thursday], most likely play catch and go from there," Cora said. "But it seems like he should be fine as of now."

****WEEI.com***

Breaking down heroes and zeroes from Red Sox-Yankees brawl

Alex Reimer

The Red Sox and Yankees had an actual baseball fight Wednesday. Benches cleared for the second time after Joe Kelly plunked Tyler Austin in the back with a 98 mph fastball, prompting the biggest melee between the two rivals since Pedro Martinez threw down Don Zimmer in the 2003 ALCS.

Suspensions will probably be handed to both Kelly and Austin, who threw punches in the brawl. Fines could be issued as well. Though Rob Manfred and his lieutenants were undoubtedly grinning once the action started — in case you haven't heard, the Sox-Yankees rivalry is back — the commissioner's office will be forced to come down hard on the offending parties. Publicly, MLB must be against fighting.

But that doesn't mean we can't embrace it. There were numerous heroes and zeroes from the early-season altercation (we need a better name for it). The list is below:

Heroes

Joe Kelly: Austin's slide into second base in the third inning, which cleared the benches for the first time, was far from the dirtiest action that's ever occurred on a baseball diamond. But he did go into Brock Holt with his spikes up, which clearly agitated the shortstop. Kelly was standing up for his teammate.

Last season, the stench from the Red Sox' lack of response to the Manny Machado episode lingered for several weeks. Kelly was ensuring that kind of passivity wouldn't happen this year, even if his beanball was a bit of an overreaction.

Plus, Kelly also gave the Red Sox their new rallying cry. "Let's go!"

Tyler Austin: It's been suggested Austin should have taken his medicine and walked to first base after getting drilled with a 98 mph heater. That's baloney. The Yankees' designated hitter has a right to stand up for himself, and that's exactly what he did.

Aaron Judge: Every brawl needs a peacemaker. Judge, who stands at 6-foot-7 and weighs 285 pounds, played that role to perfection.

Although, his interests may have been comprised. The slugger was once photographed wearing a Red Sox shirt.

CC Sabathia: Sabathia is on the disabled list with a right hip injury. But that didn't stop the burly left-handed from playing a big role in the fracas. Still dressed in his warmup jacket, Sabathia took on both Mitch Moreland and Chris Sale.

Phil Nevin: Nevin, who serves as the Yankees' third base coach, got ejected from the contest as well. After the game, he provided a refreshingly blunt self-assessment about his appearance on the field.

"I know one thing. I'm going to wear less layers tomorrow, because geez, I look fat with a sweatshirt under my jersey," he said. "I'll be freezing, but I don't want to look like that on the field anymore."

Zeroes

Christian Vazquez: It's the catcher's responsibility to hold back a hitter from charging the mound. Vazquez failed miserably in that regard. Jason Varitek was probably crying on his couch.

Tyler Austin: Yes, it's possible to be a hero and a zero. No rational human being can blame Austin for charging the mound. But he went after Febles, who had nothing to do with the beaning. That's weak.

Bradford: The Red Sox got it right this time around

Rob Bradford

On the surface, this might seem like a mess. Really, it was a test. The Red Sox passed.

Sure, you had one of your most important pitchers (David Price) leave the game after just one inning because of some tingling in his hand. You let the Yankees' confidence resurface thanks to their 10-7 win. And the momentum that was garnered via a nine-game win streak has now suddenly been derailed.

But, bear with me.

The Red Sox found out something about themselves Wednesday night which hadn't yet been defined. They got it right. And at this time of year, this time around, that's gold.

On most nights we would be talking about the optimism stemming from a J.D. Martinez fifth-inning grand slam that put the hosts right back in the thick of things. Or perhaps the 117.3 mph home run hit by Hanley Ramirez in the first? Nope. What unfolded was something that is going to be much more meaningful than another dose of resiliency.

The Red Sox fought back. And this time they did it the right way against the right team. That meant something.

It wasn't complicated. Brock Holt gets spiked, and takes issue with the baserunner who spiked him. A few innings later, Joe Kelly hits the aforementioned player (Tyler Austin) with a 98 mph fastball in the back. The pitch starts a brawl that includes the Red Sox pitcher managing to get the better of his attacker, while somehow being escorted away by two pinstriped twin towers, Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton.

Seems simple, right? Well think about how convoluted it was a year ago, and where that led the Red Sox.

In that case, Manny Machado basically wrecks Dustin Pedroia's knee on a similar play Holt experienced. The next day the plan was to hit Machado after starter Steven Wright exited the game. But reliever Heath Hembree never got the chance because the coaching staff called off the Code Red, leaving it to Eduardo Rodriguez and Matt Barnes the next day. We know how that worked out. Not well. Both pitchers missed.

Not only were the Red Sox left searching for the right retaliation, but because of the conflicting messages from the coaching staff, the chaos was only amplified, with Dustin Pedroia's on-camera proclamation, and then the teams' cranking up the back-and-forth at Fenway a few days later. It was ugly. Not until Chris Sale put some punctuation on the predicament via a well-placed fastball did the Sox have some semblance of satisfaction.

What that did was leave an uncomfortable undercurrent among many of the players, feeling that the decision-makers were more worried about having to win that day than sticking to the blueprint of a baseball season.

This time, Kelly helped the Sox maintain their big picture mentality.

Can you imagine if the Red Sox didn't act after that Austin slide against the Yankees? If they took the same tact as the year before? It would have simply been unacceptable considering everyone knows this Yankees club is the built-in bad guy. As David Price said after the game, "Red Sox, Yankees. That's what everybody wants. That's what they got." He's right. And it was really important it was delivered when it was.

You could sense on social media -- which sometimes offers what kind of heartbeat we're dealing with -- that this was going to be a win for a team that more and more Boston fans are actually starting to care about. Not only did Kelly execute the strategic offering in fine fashion, but then he invited the Yankee to throw fists. The image of the reliever yelling out to Austin, "Let's go!" was what the people wanted more

than anything. It might not have been Jason Varitek shoving his glove in Alex Rodriguez's face, but it was along the same lines.

Instantly the reliever so many had focused their ire for the first weeks represented something's gold around here. Joe Kelly, Yankee slayer. He even got the ultimate seal of approval from a guy who knows a little bit about the subject.

As Pedro Martinez wrote on Twitter: "The only thing I would had done different than Joe Kelly tonight, is I would've hit Tyler Austin at his previous at bat. Other than that, Kelly executed perfectly." And then, "Sliding with the cleats up is a no-no in baseball. That means fight fight fight!"

And what was weird about the Red Sox' fans satisfaction was that the actual brawl didn't really include the likes of Jonny Gomes diving fist-first into a pile of Yankees. There was a lot of separating bodies and standing on the outskirts. But that was OK, because that's what the biggest, baddest roster on the planet -- the Yankees -- were also doing.

For the Red Sox, it wasn't a blood-measuring contest. It was simply about doing the right thing at the right time in the right way.

It was the latest example that this group might be on to something.

Christian Vazquez is expecting some Yankees retaliation

Rob Bradford

Tyler Austin slid into Brock Holt's leg.

Holt took exception to the slide, offering some pointed words to the Yankees baserunner.

The benches cleared.

Four innings later, Red Sox reliever Joe Kelly offered some payback with a 98 mph fastball in Austin's back. The New York designated hitter also took exception, charging the mound.

The benches cleared.

Kelly was ejected, along with Austin and Yankees coach Phil Nevin.

That's it, right? At least one Red Sox player doesn't think so.

"You know that's coming. You know that's coming," said Sox catcher Christian Vazquez after his team's 10-7 loss to the Yankees. "They feel like us. The clubhouse is our second home. It's wanting to protect our home. So it will be something soon. If not this series maybe in New York."

After the game, the key players offered their side of things ...

HOLT

"I probably said something I probably shouldn't have to start it off. I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think he knows that now."

"I don't think it was intentional. I think he was going in hard. It was a bunt. I'm not going to turn a double play on that play, especially with Wade running. We're trying to get the lead out. I think he was just going in hard, but he went in hard a little late with his spikes up. It happened and we'll move on."

"Everyone was just asking if I was all right. I was good. He spiked my leg, cut it pretty good, but other than that, I was fine. It probably shouldn't have happened. I just wanted him to know it wasn't a good slide. That's what went down."

"It shows that we've all got each other's back. That was a pretty good one, probably one of the better ones I've been a part of. I tried to stay out of it. They've got a lot of big guys over there. But yeah, shows how close-knit we are in here. Same goes for them, how close-knit they are."

KELLY

"Austin, a lot of power to right side, right field, whole game plan is sliders in the dirt, sliders down and pitch him in. I mean, I threw a pitch inside and it hit him. It's one of those that got away."

"I was ready to defend myself. Someone comes in my property in my backyard I have two dogs. Ready to come on my property and I'm being attacked, then I'm ready to defend myself."

"It's a pitch that got away on a cold night. Not like I had perfect command. It's not like I have Greg Maddux command. We'll see what happens. I don't think I should be suspended. It wasn't a blowout game. We were still in that ballgame. We had a big rally the inning before."

"I got attacked and got charged, that's how the jersey rips. It's one of those things. Just trying to defend myself I'm 6-foot tall, 175 pounds, just have to try to maneuver out there."

Yankees 10, Red Sox 7: David Price's hand was the real story

Rob Bradford

Sure, there was a fight. ([Click here for more on that.](#))

Yes, J.D. Martinez hit a grand slam.

And the Red Sox win streak was ended at nine games thanks to the Yankees' 10-7 victory Wednesday night at Fenway Park. ([For a complete recap, click here.](#))

But after the heart rates had gone down and everyone realized we are just 11 games in, the reality of what truly was important to the Red Sox should have kicked in. This should have been all about David Price's left arm.

The Red Sox starter suffered through the shortest start of his career, lasting just an inning thanks to experiencing a sensation in his left hand. Something clearly wasn't right even before his exit, with the pinpoint control which had resulted in no runs over his first 14 innings this season abandoning him. By the time Bobby Poyner came on for the second inning, Price had allowed four runs while throwing just 16 of his 35 pitches for strikes.

Price is undeniably one of the most important pieces of this Red Sox puzzle, paving the way for Yawkey Way/Jersey Street breath-holding until a diagnosis was given.

Fortunately for the Red Sox, the postgame explanation was about as palatable as the Red Sox could have hoped for.

"It's alright. I'll play catch tomorrow and get ready for my next start," Price said.

When asked what exactly happened he said, "My whole hand. Didn't have any feeling in my fingertips. It was something I've felt before but it didn't go away. ... I had no pain. I have no pain. Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors I still had no pain. It was tough. Those guys didn't quit. They

continued to battle. That was a very good sign. It stinks to not extend our winning streak like that, but we'll move on and get them tomorrow."

In the short-term, the outing put the Red Sox in a bind, with Alex Cora choosing to string together the final eight innings with Poyner, Heath Hembree, Matt Barnes, Joe Kelly, Brian Johnson and Carson Smith. They could live with that, even though it resulted in just their fourth loss in their last 84 games when scoring six or more runs.

If Price wasn't (or isn't) OK, that's the real news.

But, first of all, the lefty said this sensation isn't anything new.

"The bullpen wasn't too bad. My arm felt better in the game than it did in the bullpen. It loosened up just fine. My hand, I don't know how to really explain it or describe it, but it's something that I've always had to deal with," Price said.

And, secondly, he is insisting this has nothing to do with that elbow issue from a year ago.

"No. I'm playing catch," he said when asked if there would be any more tests. "I threw a couple of baseballs in the eighth inning upstairs against the wall. My hand was thawed out from earlier and I felt fine."

"As you guys know, we've been trying to take care of them from the get-go," Cora said. "As soon as he mentioned it to Dana [LeVangie], we took him out. They were looking at him inside. Tomorrow he's going to come back, most likely he's going to try to play catch and go from there, but it seems like he should be fine as of now. But tomorrow we re-evaluate him and we go from there."

Punches thrown in Red Sox, Yankees melee

Rob Bradford

After the benches cleared without any physical contact in the third inning of the Red Sox game against the Yankees Wednesday night, things were taken to another level in the seventh inning.

Stemming from Tyler Austin's slide into shortstop Brock Holt, which emptied both benches, Red Sox reliever Joe Kelly lit the fuse one more time by hitting the Yankees designated hitter in the back with a 97 mph fastball. After throwing the bat down to the ground, Austin started walking to the mound to confront Kelly.

Kelly waved on Austin, who immediately started running toward the Red Sox' pitcher with catcher Chrisitan Vazquez in pursuit. Kelly managed to dodge the Yankees' hitter, attempting to get two punches in with Austin's face on the ground.

Austin sprung up and threw a punch which hit Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles, but didn't come close to Kelly.

As the dugouts and bullpens emptied, Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge could be seen corralling Kelly toward the Red Sox dugout, although in more of a peaceful manner than trying to escalate the situation.

Both Kelly and Austin were ejected.

Benches clear during Red Sox, Yankees game

Rob Bradford

Things got feisty during the third inning of the Red Sox game against the Yankees Wednesday night (sort of).

With the Yankees holding a 5-1 lead, Tyler Wade bunted down the third base line where Rafael Devers picked up the ball and tossed it to second for a force out. But while Sox shortstop Brock Holt was gathering in the throw Tyler Austin clipped Holt's foot by extending his leg during the slide.

Holt immediately took issue with Austin's slide, squaring up with the Yankees designated hitter. While there were no pushing or physical contact, both benches and bullpens stormed onto the field before order was restored.

David Price exits after just 1 inning against Yankees for precautionary reasons after feeling 'sensation' in left hand

Rob Bradford

The run of good fortune for the Red Sox' starting rotation hit a brick wall Wednesday night.

David Price, who had been the team's best pitcher after two trips through the rotation, left his start against the Yankees after just one inning. The lefty allowed four runs, two coming on a two-run triple off the bat of Giancarlo Stanton, with Gary Sanchez also supplying a pair of RBI via his home run over the left field wall.

The Red Sox announced that he was removed for precautionary reasons after experiencing "a sensation in his left hand." He will undergo further testing.

Price finished throwing 35 pitches, 19 strikes. He struck out one, walked two and gave up three hits. The starter was replaced by Bobby Poyner, who required a visit from the training staff of his own in the third inning, but remained in the game.

In his first two starts of the season, Price didn't allow a run over 14 innings, giving up seven hits and three walks while striking out 10.

Second base becoming an option for Blake Swihart

Rob Bradford

Second base is the only position Blake Swihart has never played in a game.

But desperate times are leading to desperate measures.

With Swihart having only seen seven plate appearances this season, and without the option of going to Triple-A Pawtucket without clearing waivers, the Red Sox asked the switch-hitter to start working out at second starting Wednesday. So, there he was, just before 3 p.m., working at the position with infield coach Carlos Febles and injured second baseman Dustin Pedroia serving as his mentors.

"It feels good," Swihart said. "I have to keep working at it. The footwork around second base is going to take a while but I'll get it. I'll do whatever I need to do to get in the game."

"We need options," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "We've got to run for people and we may have to hit. It's a different lineup now than a few days ago when Xander was there, so we have to be prepared if something happens. He worked at second late in spring training, turned double plays, he's athletic enough in case we need him he can go there and make routine plays and turn double plays."

Swihart has played in left field, first base and designated hitter, getting his only start as a DH in the Red Sox' third game of the year.

Has the lack of playing time been a source of frustration?

"Yes and no. I know my situation so I just have to be ready to go when my name is called," he said.

Why is Andrew Benintendi not starting? Alex Cora has his reasons

Rob Bradford

Andrew Benintendi had his best day of the season Tuesday night, reaching base in four of five plate appearances. Wednesday he was starting the game on the bench.

According to Alex Cora, it isn't that complicated.

This was a plan put in place days ago.

This isn't the first time Cora has stuck to the game-plan despite a player seemingly starting to find his swing. After Mookie Betts' home run against Miami, the right fielder got his only day off. And Jackie Bradley Jr. started Sunday's game on the bench despite hitting the ball hard throughout Saturday's win.

"I mean it's not only the hot part of it," Cora said. "It's the matchups, not only today but the upcoming matchups and trying to get other people hot too. Yeah. It's, I mean, we did it with Mookie already. He hit a homer and didn't play the next day. [Benintendi] had a good game yesterday and we did it today. We map it out, man. It's not that we're trying to rest guys most of the time and people are worried so much about rhythm, but at the same time there are certain guys in that dugout that they need to get their rhythm too and they're important pieces of what we're trying to accomplish. Today we accomplish a few things. Mitch [Moreland] is getting at-bats. It's still a tough matchup for lefties, let's be honest. But Mitch gets at-bats, Hanley [Ramirez] is off his feet. J.D. [Martinez] is playing left field and Benny's off his feet and we can use him probably late in the game if necessary. So we accomplish a few things. People see what happened [Tuesday], yeah. [Benintendi's] been putting good at-bats in the whole season. His on-base percentage is .400 and that's what we ask of our second hitter. Maybe later on, but now I'll map it out and go from there. It might be different now with Xander [Bogaerts]. We don't have Xander offensively. But as of now, no. We'll go with what we planned."

Cora explained that the scheduled lineup is mapped out anywhere from four days before to an entire week.

The decision with Benintendi puts Martinez back in left field, where he now has gotten five starts.

The following is the Red Sox' lineup against Yankees starter Masahiro Tanaka:

Mookie Betts RF

Rafael Devers 3B

Hanley Ramirez DH

J.D. Martinez LF

Mitch Moreland 1B

Eduardo Nunez 2B

Jackie Bradley Jr. CF

Christian Vazquez C

Brock Holt SS

Tomase: Mike Trout's former coach explains why Mookie Betts belongs in that class

John Tomase

Ron Roenicke isn't the only man to coach Mookie Betts and Mike Trout -- former Red Sox bench coach Gary DiSarcina earned that distinction, too -- but he brings the freshest perspective to the discussion.

Roenicke spent the last two seasons as Angels third base coach, where he watched Trout outlast the upstart Betts in the 2016 MVP race and then follow up with a fourth-place finish last year despite missing nearly 50 games.

With Betts off to a ridiculous start punctuated by Tuesday's 4-for-4 and grand slam against the Yankees, Roenicke weighed in on what it's like to witness both superstars on a daily basis.

"They both have power. They can both hit for average," Roenicke said. "They don't chase a lot of pitches out of the zone. I guess you just have to see it through the season. I mean, unbelievable player, Mookie. Trying to compare, maybe there's five guys you can put up there at the top, saying they're best player in the game, and Mookie even before I was here, he's one of them."

It goes without saying that Trout belongs at the very top of that list. Since winning Rookie of the Year in 2012, Trout has claimed a pair of MVPs, finished second three times, and posted his "worst" showing with last year's fourth place finish.

Betts, meanwhile, finished second to Trout in 2016 and placed sixth last year while winning a pair of Gold Gloves. Ten games into this season, he leads baseball with a .432 average to accompany a 1.263 OPS. He has ripped line drives since his first swing of the season, which Tampa's Kevin Kiermaier tracked down with a leaping catch against the fence in the deepest part of Tropicana Field.

"Since the season started, he has really swung the bat well," Roenicke said. "He killed that ball, first swing, and they made the catch on him."

The swing is a good place to start. Betts has been locked in, targeting almost nothing but strikes and virtually never missing. Trout, by contrast, grinds at-bats until he gets his pitch.

"Trout's a little bit different," Roenicke said. "They pitch him a little different. He fouls off a lot of balls. I think with his approach, he'll always foul off a lot of balls. They pitch him in a lot. He's always trying to get that thing out of there. But he fouls off so many pitches that they make a mistake and then he hits it."

"Mookie doesn't miss too many balls. He swings and it's amazing. Today you throw him a couple of fastballs and all of a sudden you throw him a good breaking ball and he's right on the breaking ball. That's not easy to do."

When Roenicke evaluates players that talented, it almost ceases to be about their production, which is basically a given. He instead focuses on the incremental improvements they make in the pursuit of perfection.

For Trout, that meant upgrading his arm, the only aspect of his game that could be considered below average. And he turned to a far less heralded teammate for inspiration -- Kole Calhoun.

The last right fielder to win a Gold Glove before Betts, Calhoun may not be a star anywhere near Trout's orbit, but he's got a great arm. The two are close friends, and before every series, Calhoun would challenge Trout to join him in a ritual.

"I'd watch Cole tell Trout, 'Let's go,'" Roenicke said. "First game of every series they'd play long toss. Then they'd throw to some bases. And I saw Trout, when I was there last year, was a pretty good thrower. That was probably the only thing you could say he was a little below average in, and he's not below average anymore. That speaks a lot for Calhoun, too. But Trout was willing to do it. He knew the part of his game he wanted to get better, and he worked on it and really improved on it."

Similarly, Betts overhauled his offensive approach this winter. A naturally patient and selective hitter, Betts has amplified the aggressiveness on fastballs, especially early in the count. The result is probably the most sustained run of hard contact in his career.

"Anytime I see a great player, the personalities impress me more than anything," Roenicke said. "When you're that good, sometimes you're just not open to talking about some things to make you better. Both Trout and Mookie, they're always trying to figure out how to get better. As a coach, that's what it's all about."

Two years ago, Roenicke paid attention to Betts not only when the Angels played the Red Sox, but as the season wore on and it became clear he'd be Trout's primary competition for the MVP Award. He liked what he saw then, and he can't wait to see what Betts is capable of now.

"Because I was with Trout, I was looking at who else in the league was having the kind of year that could match him," he said. "Everybody's looking at the offensive years, but you've got to look at what Mookie does defensively. There was one year when I thought Yadier Molina should've won the MVP, because defensively he was the best catcher in the game, and he also hit .330. And I thought, how could you have a better year? He didn't win the MVP and it bothered me, because I think people were looking too much at offense. You contribute that much defensively, Mookie contributes a lot defensively. I had Andrelton Simmons last year, watching what he does at shortstop. If those guys hit, along with what they do, they're making a huge impact on both sides of the field. For me, that's what an MVP does."

Betts has made a strong opening argument to join that race again. And Trout, whose four homers lead the American League, will undoubtedly be right there with him. You can count on one hand the players who belong in the discussion for best in the game, and Roenicke feels blessed to have coached two of them.

****NBC Sports Boston***

Red Sox show unity, follow baseball protocol in brawl — but is protocol broken?

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — The Red Sox followed baseball's age-old guide to policing in Wednesday's brawl with the Yankees. They stuck to the sport's standard for unity and toughness. In all the ways they looked bad last April, when Matt Barnes threw at Manny Machado, the Sox looked good Wednesday night at Fenway Park.

Tyler Austin and Joe Kelly were ejected after the former charged the mound in the seventh inning. Kelly hit Austin with a 98 mph fastball on what looked like the second attempt to drill Austin in the at-bat. Austin's crime — and it was a crime as constituted in baseball — was sliding into second base with an elevated left foot in the third inning, catching Brock Holt's right leg (but not badly).

But this penal system, which the Sox certainly did not design, is all sorts of messed up.

Christian Vazquez thinks the Yankees are going to take a shot at the Red Sox now. He's probably right.

What kind of dispute-resolution mechanism doesn't actually end the dispute? Or has a punishment that often doesn't really fit the crime?

We have to reiterate the Sox handled the situation properly. And by properly, we mean relative to baseball's accepted practice.

Keith Foulke on Twitter gave the thumbs up emoji. Pedro Martinez applauded Kelly.

The worst part of the brawl, at least upon initial review, was probably the punch Austin landed to the left side of Sox third-base coach Carlos Febles' head. Febles didn't appear to do anything other than try to pull away people.

Kelly landed some punches on Austin while Austin was on the ground, and punches on the ground aren't usually looked upon well. But Austin did charge Kelly. Kelly also had some bruising on his neck, and his jersey was torn.

The Sox had to do something, lest their credibility as a unit be questioned. Holt was unharmed by Austin's slide, but he could have been hurt.

"Sliding with the cleats up is a no-no in baseball," Martinez wrote. "That means fight fight fight!"

(Holt admitted he didn't handle the situation perfectly. When the benches first cleared in the third inning because of the slide, no punches were thrown, but maybe the benches didn't have to clear. "I probably said something I probably shouldn't have to start it off," Holt said. "I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think he knows that now.")

The Sox were skewered last April for how they handled Machado's high slide. Credit for not making the same mistake twice.

But should this form of retaliation should still be allowed? And is it effective?

The drama of the Red Sox and Yankees hoping to pummel each other is appealing to many: fans, media. Who isn't pumped that the rivalry's intensity is growing?

"Red Sox-Yankees, that's what everybody wants," David Price said dryly, with what sounded like an implied eye roll. "That's what they got."

For as much legislation as commissioner Rob Manfred has undertaken in baseball, it's strange to think we've reached a limit on the number of times a pitching coach can walk to the mound, but there's no real deterrent on baseball's old-school policing method: fastballs.

A fastball to the ribs, or the rear end, or the backstop, is almost exclusively the game's recommended on-field punishment, no matter the grievance. And unfortunately, that punishment has always involved the potential for a pitch to the head. (Pitches elsewhere can cause injury too. See the Padres' Manuel Margot, who just went to the disabled list after a pitch to the ribs.)

Speed it up, kids. But, if you need occasionally injure someone to right a wrong, go for it.

The lone stumbling block to harsher punishment appears this: the only way to deter retaliation pitches is a huge penalty. But what if a pitch truly gets away from someone? Maybe that's just a risk worth taking.

That brings us to what Vazquez acknowledged, what most people are thinking: something else is coming from the Yankees.

"You know that's coming. You know that's coming," Vazquez said. "They feel like us. The clubhouse is our second home. It's wanting to protect our home. So it will be something soon. If not this series maybe in New York."

If the initial crime was punished as it should be, why the hell would this thing continue?

Kelly said he was attacked. Can't Austin argue he was attacked by a 98 mph fastball? Who was put in more physical danger, Holt or Austin? Austin, without a doubt.

The Sox followed standard operating procedure. But that doesn't appear likely to bring us to a point of resolution, to a resolved dispute.

The Sox look and acted like a tough baseball team. They followed the age-old map of law and order. But this form of justice, entertaining as it may be, too often appears ineffective as it does dangerous.

Bench-clearing brawl ensues between Red Sox and Yankees after Joe Kelly drills Tyler Austin

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — The Red Sox apparently aren't tolerating high slides, as they might have last April. And they're not waiting to express their feelings.

Red Sox reliever Joe Kelly and Yankees DH Tyler Austin were ejected Wednesday night after the benches cleared for the second time, with punches thrown during Round Two.

Austin in the third inning irked the Red Sox with a slide into second base, as his left foot caught shortstop Brock Holt's right leg. Move ahead four innings with the Yanks leading 10-6 and Kelly was out for revenge. With one out, he appeared to miss with an intent pitch in the second pitch of the at-bat. On the fourth pitch, he got Austin in the back.

Austin slammed down his bat and started to walk toward the mound. Kelly was seen on camera saying "Come on" to Austin while beckoning Austin with his hand. Austin picked up steam and went at Kelly. Austin didn't seem to land any blows on Kelly and went to the ground, and Kelly may have successfully got a punch in with Austin on the ground.

Austin later was seen on camera landing a punch to the left side of third-base coach Carlos Febles' head in a scene with a lot of people bunched together. Febles stayed in the game.

The teams lingered on the field for a while. Phil Nevin, the Yankees third-base coach, started pointing and screaming at the Red Sox dugout after the sides had dispersed, unhappy with something.

On a frosty night in front of 32,400, Sox-Yanks hasn't been this heated in years.

In the first dust-up, there were two runners on when Tyler Wade dropped down a bunt fielded by Rafael Devers, who threw on to Holt covering at second base. Austin was on first base.

Austin, who had just singled to grow the Yankees lead to 5-1 with none out in the third, had his left foot above the ground and it made contact with Holt's right leg, which was on the base. The two exchanged words and quickly, the bullpens cleared, but the confrontation didn't escalate.

The umpires on the field determined the play was not a double-play attempt and was therefore non-reviewable, per the rules.

Red Sox, Yankees clear benches over slide into second

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — Game 1 between the Red Sox and Yankees in the 2018 season was a slugfest. Game 2 looked momentarily like it could head that way for a different reason.

Starting at shortstop with Xander Bogaerts on the disabled list, Brock Holt didn't appreciate Tyler Austin's slide into second base in the third inning Wednesday night at Fenway Park. There were two runners on when Tyler Wade dropped a bunt fielded by Rafael Devers, who threw on to Holt covering at second base.

Austin, who had just singled to grow the Yankees lead to 5-1 with none out in the third, had his left foot above the ground and his spikes made contact with Holt's leg. The two exchanged words and the bullpens quickly cleared, but the confrontation didn't escalate.

The Red Sox appeared to attempt to challenge the play, but the play was not eligible for review. Instead, the umpires' conference was considered a rules check, and it lasted one minute, 53 seconds.

The Red Sox and Orioles famously had bad blood last season because of a high-spike slide from Manny Machado that clipped Dustin Pedroia. The impact Austin made with Holt was not near the same severity, however. Holt was likely bothered as a matter of principle, because of the possibility he could have been hurt.

*** *NESN.com***

Red Sox Wrap: Yankees Claim 10-7 Victory In Wild Contest At Fenway

Logan Mullen

BOSTON — It was absolute pandemonium at Fenway Park on Wednesday night.

The Boston Red Sox saw their nine-game winning streak halted as they fell to the New York Yankees 10-7, but that was just one of many stories as the game featured one unbelievable turn after another.

Twice the benches cleared, with the second instance escalating into an all-out melee. There were four home runs, including a grand slam by J.D. Martinez and two blasts from Gary Sanchez. Sox starter David Price saw his stellar beginning of the season halted after allowing four runs in the first inning before exiting as a precaution due to a "sensation" in his left hand.

All said, in the second contest of 19 between these two teams, Wednesday night ignited a five-alarm fire between baseball's biggest rivals.

With the loss, the Red Sox fall to 9-2, while the Yankees climb to 6-6.

Here's how it all went down:

GAME IN A WORD

Insane.

This game had everything. From grand slams to bench-clearers, there was no shortage of chaos in this one.

ON THE BUMP

— Price got the start, but exited as a precaution after one inning due to a "sensation" in his left hand.

The southpaw struggled with control out of the chute, and the Yankees made him pay with a four-run first inning. After allowing a leadoff infield single to Brett Gardner, Price issued a walk to Aaron Judge. Giancarlo Stanton then stepped to the plate and smacked a two-run triple to the center-field triangle. Two batters later, Sanchez cleared the bases with a two-run homer into the Green Monster seats.

— Bobby Poyner came in and pitched a scoreless second inning, but was tagged for one run on a Tyler Austin RBI single in the third. The lefty finished his two innings having allowed one run on four hits while walking one and recording a strikeout.

— Heath Hembree took over in the fourth, and the righty struggled to be effective as he surrendered three runs in the frame.

Facing the top of the order, Hembree allowed Gardner and Judge to reach on singles. Two batters later, Gardner was plated on a Didi Gregorius sacrifice fly. The next at-bat, Sanchez went yard again, blasting a two-run shot to put New York up 8-1.

Hembree did redeem himself in the fifth, pitching a 1-2-3 inning. He finished with three hits and as many runs allowed with a pair of strikeouts over his two innings of work.

— Matt Barnes pitched the sixth and allowed a pair of runs — which brought the Yankees' advantage to 10-6 — on one hit, one walk, one strikeout and two wild pitches.

— Joe Kelly pitched 1/3 of an inning, getting tossed after beaming Austin and inciting the bench-clearing brawl.

— Brian Johnson came in to replace Kelly and looked sharp in relief. He allowed one hit with three strikeouts over 1 2/3 innings.

— Carson Smith tossed a scoreless ninth inning, striking out and walking one.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— Down 4-0 in the first inning, Hanley Ramirez blasted solo home run into an advertisement above the Monster seats.

— The Red Sox cut into the lead with a five-run fifth inning. After singles from Jackie Bradley Jr. and Brock Holt, Mookie Betts drove the center fielder in with a double. Three batters later with two outs and the bases loaded, Martinez took New York starter Masahiro Tanaka to the center field bleachers, cutting the deficit to 8-6.

— The Red Sox showed life with no outs in the ninth, as Bradley Jr. got on with a single and moved to third on a Christian Vazquez double. Bradley Jr. later scored on a wild pitch to bring the Red Sox within three. However, that was all the damage Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman would allow.

— Bradley Jr. paced the Sox with a three-hit game, while Martinez had a pair of hits.

— Betts, Ramirez, Mitch Moreland, Vazquez and Holt all recorded one hit.

— Rafael Devers and Eduardo Nunez both went hitless, as did pinch-hitter Sandy Leon in his lone at-bat.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Yankees will play the rubber match of their three-game set Thursday night. Rick Porcello is scheduled to take the mound for Boston and will be opposed by Sonny Gray. First pitch from Fenway Park is set for 7:10 p.m. ET.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

McAdam: From 'It's not me' to 'Let's go' ... these Sox look changed

Sean McAdam

From a distance, the obvious take from Wednesday's outbreak of WrestleMania on the Fenway lawn is: The Rivalry is back!

Red Sox and Yankees players duking it out (shades of Varitek-ARod). A Yankee coach being restrained by a small army of players, coaches and umpires (the ghost of Don Zimmer). And the looming threat of this ill-will carrying over for the next 17 regular season games and beyond.

Have you heard? These two teams just don't like each other.

But that's not that the takeaway from the extracurriculars of the Sox' 10-7 loss Wednesday night.

No, the real news is this: these Red Sox do like each other. At least enough to fight together, and to do it the right way.

Compare this beanball and subsequent brawl to the mess which took place last April in Baltimore. The set-up is almost exactly the same, but the resolution is completely different.

Then, as now, a questionable takeout slide involved some spikes and accusations of dirty play. Then, as now, the Red Sox took it upon themselves to respond.

After that, however, the similarities end. Last year, it took the Red Sox two games to exact their revenge. And even then, it was sloppily executed, with numerous failed attempts topped by an ugly pitch from Matt Barnes near Manny Machado's head. It devolved from there, with Dustin Pedroia seemingly siding with Machado instead of his teammates ("It's not me; it's them," he was famously seen saying to Machado from the top step of the dugout).

Even then, it wasn't over when it was over. It carried forth to the Orioles' visit to Fenway. Their futile attempts to settle the score became a bad vaudeville act, and the stench of their botched response lingered and, in time, became a clumsy metaphor for their dysfunctional season: These guys can't do anything right.

Not this time. It took the Red Sox exactly four innings to square things.

After Tyler Austin slid past the second base bag and aimed his spikes at the right leg of shortstop Brock Holt, the Red Sox took just four innings before they achieved payback. Reliever Joe Kelly airmailed a 98 mph fastball to Austin's back. No misses, no dangerous head shots this time.

Austin feigned outrage and slammed first his bat, then his helmet before jogging purposefully toward Kelly, who assumed a combat stance, all the while inviting Austin to bring it.

In seconds, the two were throwing roundhouse rights, with Kelly seemingly getting in the best shots. Soon, it was a sea of (angry) humanity, with bodies pulled off the pile indiscriminately.

Of course, baseball being baseball and looming fines and suspensions at stake, the Sox had to be careful about how unifying a measure this could be. Because, you know, they had gameplanned to pitch inside to Austin, and sometimes, pitches just get away.

(Kelly, not exactly known for precision control, had a humorous alibi at the ready. "I walk a batter per inning, so it's not like I have Greg Maddux command," he said, tongue presumably firmly in cheek).

But every once in a while, the Red Sox would wander off script.

"It shows that we all have each other's back," said Holt, whose honor was being defended. "It shows how close-knit we are in here."

Kelly, who authored the revenge was more circumspect, and so was manager Alex Cora.

“If you take a look at the game,” said Cora, refusing to break character, “we were coming back (on the scoreboard) and we were short of pitching, so. . . I don’t know. You just have to pay attention to the game and judge for yourself.”

Nope, nothing to see here, folks. Beanball? What is this beanball of which you speak?

So maybe the routine needs freshening up. Maybe the pretense should be dropped. Regardless of what was said post-game, discipline will be forthcoming. The commissioner’s office isn’t about to deluded that this was all about one that got away from Kelly.

But then, that’s part of the act: deny, deny, deny. Part of the code.

Peel back the curtain, and everyone can see. Cora, unintentionally, provided the evidence: “You just have to pay attention to the game and judge for yourself.”

We did and we will. And what we witnessed was a team responding the proper way.

No sloppy execution. No planning the counter-attack for days or weeks. You get one of ours, we’re coming after yours. Baseball justice, the way it ought to be.

It seems simple, but the 2017 Red Sox couldn’t manage it.

The 2018 Red Sox just did, and 11 games into the season, no clearer distinction exists between what went wrong a year ago, and how different things are now.

BSJ Game Report: Yankees 10, Red Sox 7 – Price exits, benches clear as streak snapped

Sean McAdam

HEADLINES

David Price exits with hand injury: After being battered around for four runs on three hits and three walks in the first inning, Red Sox starter David Price did not return for the second inning. The Red Sox announced that he felt a “sensation in his left hand” during the inning and was being examined further.

“I didn’t have any feeling in my fingertips,” said Price after the loss. “It’s something that I’ve felt before, but it didn’t go away (this time).”

Price didn’t seem himself right from the first couple of batters, when he couldn’t throw strikes. He had pitched 14 scoreless innings in his first two outings, but wasn’t nearly as sharp Wednesday night. He threw a ball against the wall in the Red Sox clubhouse in the eighth inning and reported he had regained feeling in his fingers.

After the game, Price downplayed the seriousness of the injury.

“It’s alright,” he said. “I’ll play catch tomorrow and get ready for my next start.

“The bullpen wasn’t too bad. My arm felt better in the game than it did in the bullpen. It loosened up just fine. My hand, I don’t know how to really explain it or describe it, but it’s something that I’ve always had to deal with.”

Said Alex Cora: “Tomorrow . . . most likely he’s going to try to play catch and go from there, but it seems like he should be fine as of now. But tomorrow we re-evaluate him and we go from there.”

Benches empty, tempers flare: In the third inning, Tyler Austin went in spikes high on an attempted take-out slide of shortstop Brock Holt. Holt didn't appreciate the gesture and the two had words, resulting in the benches and bullpens emptying. Nothing much came of it other than some posturing and shouting. But in the seventh, the Sox went for payback as reliever Joe Kelly drilled Austin in the back. Austin, infuriated, slammed his bat and helmet and slowly took off for the mound with Kelly, waving his arms, inviting him. Kelly got a few solid rights in as the two rolled around, joined by 48 other players, plus coaches and umpires. Austin and Kelly were ejected, along with New York third base coach Phil Nevin and reliever Tommy Kahnle

Red Sox bullpen fizzles: With Price out of the game, the Red Sox trailed 4-1. But Bobby Poyner, Heath Hembree and Matt Barnes combined to allow another six runs over the next five innings, enough cushion so that not even a five-run fifth by the Sox — highlighted by a grand slam into the center field bleachers by J.D. Martinez — was enough of a comeback effort. Among the five relievers used by the Red Sox — not counting Kelly, who recorded an out before his purpose pitch — only Brian Johnson and Carson Smith were effective.

TURNING POINT

The Red Sox showed signs of life in the fifth with a run-scoring double by Mookie Betts and the slam by Martinez — the third in the last four games for the Sox. But with Fenway roaring in anticipation of a comeback, Matt Barnes entered in the sixth and issued a leadoff walk, a run-scoring single, two wild pitches and a sacrifice fly. Whatever momentum the Sox had seized the previous half inning was effectively wiped out.

TWO UP

J.D. Martinez: There were signs Martinez was starting to stir in Tuesday's series opener when he barreled a ball to the warning track in right and hit a booming double to straightaway center. Sure enough, after he singled in the first, then cranked a ball into the center field bleachers for his sixth career grand slam as the Sox showed some life in a five-run fifth.

Hanley Ramirez: Ramirez continued to wield a hot bat, extending his hitting streak to nine-straight games with a bullet line drive that landed in the Monster Seats in the first inning. He later hit a hard liner to third, drew a walk, and came within a foot or two of homering into the bullpen with a deep flyout in the seventh.

TWO DOWN

Eduardo Nunez: It's not getting any better for Nunez. At the plate, he was 0-for-4 with two strikeouts, dropping his average to .220 for the season. But where he's really struggling is in the field, where he again appeared to fumble often on balls hit directly at him. He also failed to knock down a throw by Vazquez, which landed in center field, allowing an extra base.

Christian Vazquez: Vazquez was charged with the team's first error of the season with a poor throw on a caught stealing attempt. Worse, he failed to slow down Austin when the Yankee DH decided to charge the mound and go after Kelly. Given that Austin took the time to first slam his bat, then his helmet, Vazquez should have anticipated better and gotten in the way before Austin took off.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"You know that's coming."

— Christian Vazquez, when asked if the Red Sox expect further retaliation from the Yankees.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Red Sox have three grand slams in the last four games — after going all of last season without one.

More than half of the Red Sox runs this season — 32-of-63 — have come with two out.
Mookie Betts has doubled in four straight games
UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Yankees play the rubber game of the series Thursday night with RHP Rick Porcello (2-0, 2.84) facing RHP Sonny Gray (1-0, 3.60)

Final: Yankees 10, Red Sox 7 — Price (hand) lasts 1 inning; brawl in 7th

Sean McAdam

In what former Red Sox broadcaster Ned Martin would have surely labeled a “wild and wooly affair,” the Red Sox and Yankees slugged 16 runs, and occasionally, each other in a 10-7 Yankee win that snapped the Red Sox’ nine-game winning streak.

Starter David Price, who put the Sox in a quick 4-0 hole, left after one inning with an undisclosed hand injury. The Yankee offense didn’t let up when Price was gone, managing six runs over the next five innings against a trio of relievers.

When Joe Kelly attempted to retaliate for what the Sox thought was a dirty takeout slide in the third by Tyler Austin, drilling Austin with a pitch in the back in the top of the seventh, Austin charged the mound, Kelly stood his ground and the benches and bullpens cleared. At least three combatants were ejected.

A five-run fifth — capped by a grand slam by J.D. Martinez — was negated when the Yanks kept adding on the next inning against the Boston bullpen.

WHO: Red Sox vs. New York Yankees

WHEN: 7:10 pm

WHERE: Fenway Park

TV/RADIO: NESN-MLB Network/WEEI 93.7 FM

WHAT’S UP: The Sox have won nine in a row and are off to their best start in history. They own the best record in the American League and haven’t lost since the season opener on March 29. On Tuesday, they took the first game of the series from the Yankees by a lopsided 14-1 score. The Yankees are reeling a bit, having fallen under .500 (5-6) while dropping 4.5 games behind the first-place Red Sox.

STARTING PITCHERS: LHP David Price (1-0, 0.00) vs. RHP Masahiro Tanaka (1-1, 2.92)

IN-GAME OBSERVATIONS:

10:01 Well, this has gotten interesting. Joe Kelly drills Tyler Austin in the back in retaliation for Austin going into Brock Holt with his spikes up in the third. Austin slams his bat in frustrating, and begins sprinting, slowly at first, to the mound. Kelly invites him out with a wave, in a ‘bring-it-on’ gesture. Kelly gets some solid rights in as the two roll around and 48 players and assorted coaches mingle.

9:41 Some signs of life at the plate for Jackie Bradley Jr., with three hits in the last two games — all of them to left field.

9:37 After the Red Sox scored five runs in the bottom of the fifth, Barnes has given two runs right back to the Yankees — thanks in part to a leadoff walk and two wild pitches.

9:28 With a five-run inning, the Red Sox had some momentum going. But Matt Barnes, in to start the sixth, walked the first hitter he faced, Brett Gardner, with four straight balls after getting ahead 0-and-1.

9:15 J.D. Martinez with his sixth career grand slam into the center field bleachers, bringing the Red Sox to within two. There was that patented Martinez swing — first pitch, directly to the ball, power up the middle.

8:53 If the Red Sox had in their minds to retaliate against Tyler Austin for his questionable slide into Brock Holt in the third inning, they're apparently waiting a while. Hembree just struck him out on four pitches, with none coming far inside.

8:49 I know the Red Sox have preached a certain aggressiveness at the plate, but over the last three innings, Masahiro Tanaka has needed seven pitches (2nd inning), five pitches (3rd inning) and eight pitches (4th inning). That's 20 pitches to get the last nine outs. That would seem to qualify as over-aggressive.

8:28 Tanaka needed 25 pitches to get out of the first inning, but has since needed just 12 pitches to get through the next two frames, covering six outs.

8:21 Playing just in front of the bag at first, Mitch Moreland makes a nice diving stab of a hard line drive by Miguel Andujar, than rolls over and tags first to double up Tyler Wade and end the inning. For now, maybe that's not a big play. But being that it saved at least one run — if not two — we'll see as the game develops.

8:18 Two games in, tensions are running high between the teams. Tyler Austin went in spikes high and took out Brock Holt's back leg on a force at second, and Holt took exception. Benches and bullpens cleared, but players quickly moved off.

8:08 Red Sox announce that Price left the game for precautionary reasons after experiencing "a sensation" in his left hand. Being further evaluated.

7:51: Cora has repeatedly talked up Poyner's deception and how it helps his fastball play up. He just two swinging strikes (and a strikeout) of Stanton with consecutive 90 mph four-seamers. Not exactly overpowering on the radar gun, but tough to pick up.

7:48 Nothing definitive announced yet, but have to believe there's something physically wrong with Price to come out after 35 pitches. Sure, it was a poor inning, but ordinarily, he'd be given a chance to settle in. Will update as soon as we hear further.

7:35: Hanley Ramirez, being ultra-aggressive, swings at the first pitch from Tanaka and hits off one of the banners in the Monster Seats. Exit velo: 117.5, making it the second-hardest hit ball this season to date.

7:30: Ugly, ugly inning for Price, who couldn't locate any pitch with any consistency: two walks, one homer, one triple and 35 pitches needed.

7:21: Gary Sanchez, who had been just 2-for-36 coming in, swats a ball into the Monster Seats, and very quickly, the Yankees have a 4-0 lead. Side note: J.D. Martinez never tracked that ball, as he looked up helplessly, trying to track. It came down about 25 feet behind him, on top of the wall.

7:18: On one swing by Giancarlo Stanton, Price gives up more runs than he had in the previous 14 innings combined. Stanton belted a triple to the deepest part of the triangle, scoring Brett Gardner (infield single) and Aaron Judge (walk).

LINEUPS

RED SOX

Betts RF
Devers 3B
Ramirez DH
Martinez LF
Moreland 1B
Nunez 2B
Bradley CF

Vazquez C
Holt SS

YANKEES

Gardner CF
Judge RF
Stanton LF
Gregorius SS
Sanchez C
Walker 1B
Austin DH
Wade 2B
Andujar 3B

NEWS AND NOTES:

Blake Swihart got some pre-game work in at second base — just in case. “We need options (with Xander Bogaerts out of the mix in the middle of the infield),” said Alex Cora. “We’ve got to run for people, we might have to hit (for others). It’s a different lineup now than it was a few days ago when Xander was there. We have to be prepared if something happens. He worked at second late in spring training, turning double plays. He’s athletic enough that, in case we need him, he can make the routine plays and turn double plays.”

With Andrew Benintendi getting the night off, Cora had Rafael Devers hitting second in the lineup. “He’ll get more at-bats there,” Cora said of the decision. “The way Mookie’s getting on base, he’ll probably get (fewer) split-finger fastballs. Maybe he’ll get a pitch up in the zone and do damage with it. When Andrew’s not playing, you’ll see Devers in that spot because we can do damage right away (with him).”

Cora acknowledged that Eduardo Nunez has struggled some defensively — not just with his range, which is to expected with his knee not yet 100 percent, but also on balls hit directly at him. He’s bobbled a few and been handcuffed at times. “He’s getting into some bad habits,” said Cora. “That’s something we talked about with Xander, too, the other day. It seems like their pre-pitch (setup) is late. They’re not getting where they’re supposed to when the ball is going to be hit. So we need to be on top of them. Eduardo, from the get-go, has been telling Carlos (Febles, third base coach and infield instructor) and Ramon (Vazquez), ‘Remind me – keep telling me what I have to do,’ because, in his own words, he said, ‘I get lazy out there.’ We don’t want that.” Cora said a few plays in which Nunez struggled in the Miami series were the result of the second base umpire blocking his view on some balls. “There were three balls hit right at the umpire and he didn’t see them,” Cora said. “Two went by and the other one he blocked. I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt on those ones. But he knows he’s getting late and we’ve got to work on it.”

Cora said the Red Sox have yet to “take the next step” when it comes to having closer Craig Kimbrel pitch in innings other than the ninth.

RHP Hector Velazquez is the likely choice to start Saturday against Baltimore. The choice is down to Velazquez or lefty Brian Johnson, but because the Orioles’ have a righty-heavy lineup, Velazquez is the favorite — unless he’s needed for multiple innings Wednesday night.

McAdam: Urged to swing away, Mookie Betts powering Sox from top spot

Sean McAdam

Like virtually everything else associated with the game of baseball in 2018, the role of the leadoff hitter is undergoing a reimagining.

Gone are the patient hitters who work walks and whose sole purpose is to get on base. In their place: athletic hitters with power, and the freedom to swing as they see fit.

In the dugout of the world champion Houston Astros, bench coach Alex Cora saw that concept personified in outfielder George Springer. And immediately after being hired as the Red Sox manager last November, Cora began to think of Mookie Betts the same way.

Betts had been the Red Sox leadoff hitter, off-and-on, for part of the previous two seasons. But Cora saw some similarities between what Springer brought to the role and what Betts had the potential to bring.

When manager and outfielder talked last November, Cora told Betts he envisioned him bringing “instant offense” to the top of the Red Sox lineup. And, 10 games into the season, Betts has provided.

That was on full display at Fenway Tuesday night as Betts offered a little bit of everything from the top spot. Yes, there was the critical on-base component: reaching base in all five plate appearances. There were runs scored, the ultimate box to be checked, with a career-high five. And even, for the traditionalists, some patience in the form of a fourth-inning walk.

But there was also muscle: a first-inning double to center to start. It marked the third-straight game Betts doubled to lead off the home half of the first, then came around to score. That’s the perfect embodiment of Cora’s fantasy of “instant offense” — just add Mookie.

Then, in the sixth, came another double — this one to left — and, after the Red Sox batted around, a grand slam which put the finishing touches on a nine-run sixth and a 14-1 walloping of the New York Yankees.

“First of all, he’s going to make contact,” said Cora. “But now, he understands that he can do damage in the strike zone. He doesn’t have to just put the ball in play and get singles. I know he’s not swinging and missing, but I told him, ‘Hey man, there’s nothing wrong with swinging and missing at pitches. It doesn’t matter — go for it.’ There was a 2-and-0 count (tonight) and he took a big hack and he swung and missed. It’s just a strike. With his ability, he’s going to put the ball in play later on in the at-bat.

“You can see, he’s ready to hit, it’s not like he’s just taking pitches just to take. He was taking too many pitches right down the middle. He can do damage with those. I think that first swing of the season (at Tropicana Field, when Rays outfielder Kevin Kiermaier robbed him of a homer) let everybody know that he’s ready to hit from the get-go.”

Watching from the opposing dugout last season, Cora noticed a tendency on the part of Betts to automatically take the first pitch — whether it was a ball or strike — before turning more aggressive in his third at-bat. So Cora issued a challenge: use that same aggressiveness in all of your at-bats.

As usual, Cora had the numbers to back up his case. He showed Betts what he could achieve by swinging at hittable pitches, regardless of the count. He had faith that Betts could make the adjustment.

“His ability to make contact,” gushed Cora, “is unreal.”

Sure enough, Betts isn’t being cheated with his new approach. After utilizing the Grapefruit League schedule to hone his more aggressive approach, the results are showing: since April 1, he’s hitting a blistering .538 (14-for-26) with four doubles, two homers, six RBI and five runs scored.

“It’s been an easy adjustment,” shrugged Betts. “It’s pretty much just ‘swing more.’ So when I’m in the box, that’s kind of what I’m thinking, just get some good swings off and see what happens.”

What’s happening is a Red Sox lineup that is only now hitting its stride — 32 runs scored in the last three games — is being paced by a newly aggressive leadoff hitter freed from convention.

****The Athletic***

Kory: Why Jackie Bradley's slow start looks a little different

Matthew Kory

There are two Jackie Bradleys. The first one looks like this:

That's Bradley making an out. He tends to do that with some frequency, especially when he's in one of his slumps. The second Bradley, the less common of the two, is Bradley hitting a home run. That looks like... well, that one hasn't been sighted yet this season, so the best we could do here at The Athletic Boston HQ is a grainy Sasquatch-type photo. For now we're holding out for a better picture.

Bradley is off to another tough start to a season. His three singles Wednesday night against the Yankees pulled his batting average up to .206 and his OPS up to .554. In the immortal words of Joe Girardi, it's not what you want.

If you were to describe Bradley in a single word, "mercurial" might not be a bad choice. Not in terms of overall performance. The man's defense is like a two-year old, relentless and never sleeping. No, we're talking hitting. I say mercurial because, well, maybe it's easier to show rather than tell. Look at these three months.

August 2015: .354/.429/.734 with five homers, nine doubles, and three triples

May 2016: .381/.474/.701 with eight homers and seven doubles

June 2017: .353/.431/.578 with four homers, nine doubles, and a triple

Those first two are silly, better-than-Mike Trout months while the third is just a normal Mike Trout-level month. Those are the only months in Bradley's career that he's posted an OPS over 1.000. Every other month has been below that. Which is fine. But what's weird is that every other month has been way below that. Bradley has never put up a month with an OPS greater than .900, but less than 1.000. He's got quite a few months around .800, which is good, and quite a few around .500, which isn't. The point of all this is Bradley is either really good or really not. He's a streaky hitter. He's mercurial.

I tell you that to tell you because: in Bradley's typical bad month, he looks over-matched. In September last season, he hit .172 with a .280 slugging percentage. Over 101 plate appearances he struck out 23 times while walking six. That's not a guy who is controlling the strike zone. Then last at July he put up a .596 OPS and struck out 32 times with five walks in 114 plate appearances. Again, that's a hitter flailing. When Bradley goes bad, he can't hide it.

That's what makes his start to the 2018 season so odd. Before last night Bradley was hitting .133. He had two doubles (still does) and no homers (yup). He's been a sinkhole at the plate. Last night's three singles were a nice start but won't change Bradley's sinkholitude on their own. Yet he has struck out just four times all season and walked three. That's quite reasonable. One might even call it good. And yet Bradley is still hitting .206. Weird. Why?

He's getting shifted more

Like many players, Bradley is getting shifted more. He's particularly susceptible to it too, as he's pulled 50 percent of his batted balls, and more importantly 62.5 percent of his ground balls this season. That's a lot of balls to hit into the teeth of a three fielder side of the infield.

He's hitting more ground balls

The Red Sox as a whole are trying to hit more balls in the air. Xander Bogaerts and Mookie Betts have both worked to add a bit of an uppercut to their swings, and yet Bradley is hitting more grounders this season than he ever has. Of course it is quite early, so we're talking about an extremely small sample size. Still, while ground balls go for hits more often on a percentage basis than do fly balls, they rarely go for extra bases, except for maybe an occasional double or two. And now with the shift, that's even rarer.

His average on ground balls is unlucky

All that noted, Bradley currently sports a BABIP (Batting Average on Balls In Play) of .233. It was .154 before last night's three singles. Bradley has never posted anything below .284 in a full season. Bradley hasn't been scalding his ground balls, as 81 percent of his grounders measure as medium speed according to FanGraphs. While that's reason to think there might be some positive regression headed Bradley's way, he can't keep hitting ground balls into a shifted infield and expect to end the season with a league average BABIP. He's going to need to hit the ball the other way to the left side of the infield, or in the air some more to find success against this kind of persistent defensive positioning.

His infield pop up rate is bad

Bradley has popped up to infielders more than you'd like, but it's simply too early to put any stock in this. It does continue to tell the story, along with the high ground ball percentage and the lower percentage of hard contact, of someone who isn't hitting the ball as well as he and the team would like, though that doesn't mean he won't hit it better tomorrow.

Ideally Bradley would put up five straight months of an .850 OPS (or better!) but that's not Jackie Bradley. With Bradley you get one amazing month, two awful months and two average months, or so. Thing is, as former manager John Farrell noted, if you don't stick with him through the awful months you don't get the benefit of the amazing month. Bradley's slow start looks like one of those awful months, but this isn't that. It's not great, but soon some more of those grounders are going to find holes.

Bradley won't continue to hit exactly like this for much longer. He's mercurial, remember?

'We've all got each others' back': Red Sox stay united as brawl charges up Yankees rivalry

Jen McCaffrey

It started in the third inning with a hard slide into second base and climaxed in the seventh with an all-out brawl.

In the midst of a 10-7 Red Sox loss on Wednesday night to the Yankees — featuring an injured David Price and not one, but two bench-clearing incidents — there was little doubt the smoldering embers of a rivalry between Boston and New York is once again white hot.

In the third inning, with runners on first and third and New York already up 5-1, Yankees second baseman Tyler Wade laid a bunt down the third-base line and Rafael Devers charged in, firing across the field to Brock Holt covering second for the force out of designated hitter Tyler Austin.

Austin, who'd reached on a single to left, slid into second base late with his spikes up, clipping Holt's lower right calf. The shortstop turned and barked at Austin for the dangerous slide. Austin moved in closer and benches cleared, but the drama quickly dissipated.

"I probably said something I probably shouldn't have to start it off," Holt said. "I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think he knows that now."

Added manager Alex Cora, "He overslid it and the spikes were up. Different rules compared to back in the day. Holt took exception."

Both teams headed back to their dugouts and play resumed, but the slide was vaguely reminiscent of one that injured Dustin Pedroia almost a year ago in Baltimore.

Last April, Orioles third baseman Manny Machado slid into Pedroia covering the second base bag. Machado's spikes jarred Pedroia's knee and the second baseman fell to the ground before limping off the

field. He wasn't the same the rest of the season, ultimately needing offseason surgery, from which he's still recovering.

Two days after the Machado-Pedroia incident, reliever Matt Barnes threw behind the back of Machado. Barnes was subsequently suspended four games and Pedroia issued an apology to Machado while saying the situation was "mishandled."

The scene was much different on Wednesday night against New York. There was no waiting to retaliate and there were certainly no apologies.

"I thought it was a hard slide into second, nothing remotely dirty about it," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said.

New York mounted a commanding 8-1 lead, but the Red Sox started to creep back, thanks in part to a J.D. Martinez grand slam in the fifth.

Two innings later, Joe Kelly entered the game in relief of Barnes.

Kelly retired the first batter he faced before Austin stepped to the plate. With the count at 2-1, catcher Christian Vazquez flashed four fingers to Kelly followed by his finger tapping the inside of his left thigh – the sign for a fastball inside.

Kelly's next pitch, a 97 mph fastball, smacked Austin in the left side of his upper back. He immediately slammed his bat to the ground, and walked toward Kelly.

When Kelly shouted, 'Let's go!' Austin took off his helmet and started running toward the mound.

"He was pissed," catcher Christian Vazquez said of Austin. "He breaks the bat. I know that hurts, 98 in the ribs in this weather. So, but like I said, it's part of the game."

The crowd of 32,400 rose to its feet and the park filled with a deafening roar.

Austin reached the mound and fell as Kelly took his first swing, grazing Austin with one punch as the melee ensued. Players from both benches and bullpens sprinted onto the field. Austin threw a punch over the top of the scrum toward Kelly's head, but missed and clobbered Sox third base coach Carlos Febles in the side of the head.

Holt tangled with Ronald Torreyes.

"I didn't grab anyone," Holt said. "As soon as you see (Aaron) Judge or (Giancarlo) Stanton come in there, I think they were one of the first two or first couple, I start backing up at that point."

Chris Sale helped pull Austin away. Judge was among those dragging Kelly away. Yankees hitting coach Marcus Thames ultimately danced Austin back to the Yankees dugout, while Eduardo Rodriguez stayed with Kelly near the netting. Kelly had a small gash on his neck and his jersey was ripped open, missing a button.

Kelly tried to mask the intention of the pitch in hopes of avoiding a suspension.

"Austin, [has] a lot of power to right side, right field," Kelly said. "[The] whole game plan is sliders in the dirt, sliders down and pitch him in.

The fracas on the field lasted about 15 minutes as 'Yankees suck' chants rained down and security guards lined the warning track. The umpires huddled mid-field to sort out ejections and misconducts.

Once the teams had gotten back to their respective dugouts, Red Sox manager Alex Cora called on Brian Johnson to enter the game.

As Johnson was warming up, the umpires were announcing ejections and Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin got word he'd been booted. He raced out onto the field in front of the mound to argue with the umpires, forcing Johnson to stop throwing. It was at that point that the song "Let It Go" from the Disney movie Frozen aptly played over the Fenway Park speakers.

Kelly, Austin, Nevin and Yankees reliever Tommy Kahnle were ejected when it was done.

Barnes recalled his similar situation on the mound against Machado a year ago.

"I mean listen nobody is out there trying to hurt somebody," he said. "And the situation like [Wednesday], I understand he's trying to break up a double play but you can't be going in trying to take a guy out especially when it's been enforced that you can't be doing that anymore. I wasn't a fan of it, I'm sure I'm not the only one who wasn't fan of it and you can't have guys going in trying to spike somebody."

There was no big comeback for the Red Sox after the seventh inning skirmish. But maybe something more important took place.

It's only 11 games into the season, but there were no fingers being pointed at teammates and no blame game bandied about like last year in Baltimore.

"It shows that we've all got each others' back," Holt said.

Thursday is the rubber game of this first series with Rick Porcello opposing against Sonny Gray.

Will the Yankees choose to retaliate now or let things simmer until the next round?

"You know that's coming," Vazquez said. "They feel like us. The clubhouse is our second home. It's wanting to protect our home. So it will be something soon. If not this series maybe in New York."

Two games down, seventeen to go. You could say this rivalry is back on.

Jennings: David Price insists he's OK amid concerns after early exit

Chad Jennings

David Price couldn't feel his left hand, but for a guy whose very livelihood depends on the ability to grip and manipulate with his left hand, he was awfully carefree about it.

The shortest start of his career lasted just one inning Wednesday night. He threw 35 pitches, and only 16 of them were strikes. It was the first time he started a big league game without returning for the second inning.

But there was no MRI scheduled, and Price said he expects to make his next start.

"I'm playing catch (on Thursday)," he insisted. "I threw a couple of baseballs in the eighth inning upstairs against the wall. My hand was thawed out from earlier, and I felt fine."

Officially, Price was pulled as a precaution because of "a sensation in his left hand," which was surely a new one on the infirmary report. Wednesday's game will be remembered for its benches clearing brawl, but it started with Price allowing four runs before he recorded an out.

The whole thing looked bad, and it seemed concerning, especially for a guy with a recent history of elbow trouble. But Price dismissed the concerns.

“My hand never really warmed up,” he said. “My arm felt fine. My arm felt really good. I had no clue where it was going.”

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It was 42 degrees at first pitch, so Price blowing into his hand between warmup pitches wasn't much of a red flag. First at-bat, his fastball sat at 91 mph. Again, not particularly unusual. He missed with two pitches out of the zone, and he caught the edge of the strike zone with two more. Christian Vazquez wanted the 2-2 pitch away, where Price already had spotted two called strikes, but he couldn't have thrown this pitch any more down the middle. Brett Gardner got just enough of it for an infield single.

The next batter was a four-pitch walk to Aaron Judge. Two of the four pitches were close. Another was so high Vazquez had to pop out of his crouch to catch it.

After the walk, Price looked at his hand and rubbed his fingers together as he stepped back onto the mound. Giancarlo Stanton walked in the box, Vazquez gave the signs, and Price stepped off the rubber. He wiped his fingers on his pants, tugged at his hat brim, blew into his hand and finally came set for a 92-mph fastball that missed badly inside.

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The only test Price expects on Thursday is the same one almost every other Red Sox pitcher will go through. He'll test his arm by playing catch, and he expects to pass that exam with flying colors.

There are no medical exams scheduled.

“As of now, no,” manager Alex Cora said.

Seemingly everyone in the ballpark could tell there was a problem. Price's fastball command had been sharp since late spring training, but it was missing from the beginning on Wednesday. It only took a while to decide it was an issue worth addressing, and not just a quirk of the climate.

“We don't know if it was the cold weather or if there was an issue there,” Cora said. “But he couldn't grip the ball. He felt it early in the inning or halfway through the inning, you saw the fastball command. We've been praising him about hitting his spots, and he didn't. You could see him walking around on the mound trying to get a grip and then feel the ball, and it wasn't there. Like I said, hopefully it's something that just happened today, the cold weather, and we move on.”

Even after two disabled list stints last season, this isn't a concern?

“I had no pain,” Price said. “I have no pain. Even when I came in and did all the stuff with the doctors, I still had no pain.”

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After missing on his first pitch to Stanton, Price tugged at his pants, shook his hand and prepared to throw another fastball. This one was again 92 mph, this time for a strike. Then another at 92 mph, this time way above the strike zone. And 92 mph again, this one on the outer half where Stanton crushed it to center field. He just missed a home run over the 420 sign in the outfield triangle and settled for a triple.

Price had thrown 13 pitches, and when the ball came in from the outfield, he tossed it to home plate to ask for another. As he did, Price again extended his fingers and looked at his palm before grabbing and twisting the edge of his glove.

Against cleanup hitter Didi Gregorius, Price got a borderline first-pitch strike call, but he missed far inside with his second pitch, missed inside with the third pitch, too. Again, he wiped his hand on his pants. After

he missed outside for ball three, there was more blowing into his fist, and when the next pitch was popped up, Gregorius slammed his bat while Price clenched his fist and kept it that way.

When he came set again, it was to face .056 hitter Gary Sanchez, who drilled a first-pitch cutter 368 feet, over the Green Monster, and well over J.D. Martinez, who never saw it.

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Price's pregame bullpen "wasn't too bad," he said. In his career, he'd occasionally experienced some level of numbness in his hand, but this time, it never went away. None of the blowing, wiping and clenching made a difference.

"The only time you feel really helpless on the mound are times like that," Price said. "Whenever you can't feel the baseball."

From the very beginning of spring training, the Red Sox treated their starting pitchers with restraint. They held back on early bullpens, put them through simulated games before exhibitions, and dialed back their innings. It was all in the name of protection.

Cora said Wednesday night's decision to remove Price was the same thing.

"As you guys know, we've been trying to take care of them from the get-go," Cora said. "As soon as he mentioned (the numbness) to (pitching coach Dana LeVangie), we took him out."

There wasn't a single pitch that flipped the switch and started the trouble, Price said. It was there from the beginning. His arm got loose. His hand did not.

"My whole hand," he said. "Didn't have any feeling in my fingertips. It was something I've felt before, but it didn't go away."

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Already losing 4-0 after five batters, Price's first pitch to Neil Walker missed down at his feet. More blowing, more wiping and more clinching his fist. Another fastball missed down and in, but Walker eventually hit a routine ground ball for the second out.

Price walked the next hitter, Tyler Austin, on five pitches. One hit the dirt, another nearly hit Austin's hip, another was a foot outside, and the last was inside again.

Vazquez went to the mound, Bobby Poyner got loose in the bullpen, and Price licked his fingers. He missed down and away, got a generous strike call at the top of the zone, blew into his hand again, wiped his fingers again, clenched his fist again, and missed a foot outside again.

A swinging strike at a pitch down the middle was a gift. As was a swinging strike three on a changeup at Tyler Wade's shins.

Price walked off the mound, looked toward the outfield, then looked back down at his hand.

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This is supposed to be the year of Price's resurgence. Recurring elbow issues limited him to 11 starts last season, and the year before – his first in Boston – was a disappointment by his standards. He led the league in innings, but also had his highest ERA since his rookie year.

But Price was dominant out of the bullpen in last year's division series. He had a fresh, optimistic outlook this spring. He pitched 14 scoreless innings in his first two starts this season

He'd talked for more than a month about feeling strong and healthy. And he talked that way again on Wednesday night. He still feels strong. He still feels healthy.

He just couldn't feel his hand.

"A little bit warmer weather, that's (all it needs)," Price said. "This could be Game 7 of the World Series. You've got to deal with it, and I didn't do that tonight."

****The New York Times***

Bad Blood Between the Yankees and the Red Sox Is Good for Baseball

Tyler Kepner

BOSTON — The N.B.A. set its playoff field on Wednesday, and the N.F.L. draft will soon be upon us. Few things move the sports conversation like global celebrities on the court or a new generation of franchise quarterbacks. But baseball is trying.

Right on time, the Yankees and the Boston Red Sox belted out a roar of relevance from rowdy Fenway Park on Wednesday night. Commissioner Rob Manfred didn't script it this way — if he had, the game would have been 90 minutes shorter — but his two glamour franchises, rolling around on the grass, in a game televised by MLB Network. Well, it was a beautiful sight for business.

"It's Red Sox-Yankees," Boston's David Price said. "That's what everybody wants. That's what they got."

The Colorado Rockies and the San Diego Padres also fought on Wednesday, with one of the game's best players, Nolan Arenado, at the center of the fray. The combatants at Fenway were bit players — the Yankees' Tyler Austin charged the Red Sox' Joe Kelly — but the uniforms mattered most. You'll be seeing Austin's primal helmet slam and Kelly's flying fists for a long time, as symbols of the feud between these rivals.

It's nice to know the new kids still feel the loathing. The rosters have turned over completely since the heyday of 2003 and 2004, all the one-name wonders — Jeter, Papi and A-Rod; Pedro, Roger and Curt; Manny, Mo and Tek — long gone. The personalities may never be as familiar and vibrant again, but these teams are worthy heirs.

Consider everything we have seen in this series: grand slams from Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez, overpowering heat from Chris Sale and Aroldis Chapman, home runs from Gary Sanchez, defensive wizardry from Didi Gregorius, 10 combined hits in the first two games from Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton.

In other words, the superstars have done superstar things. Yes, the games have been long; these teams know no other way. But the talent is undeniable. You won't find zany clubhouse characters like Johnny Damon or Kevin Millar, but the play on the field is still sublime — and feisty.

The benches actually cleared twice on Wednesday, in the third and seventh innings. Austin slid into second base in the third and spiked shortstop Brock Holt's lower calf. Holt just stood there, telling Austin what he thought about it. Austin got a little closer, and suddenly 50 players had swarmed the field. Nothing much happened, though.

"I thought it was over," Holt said. "We're not trying to fight those guys over there. They're big. I wasn't expecting anything to happen, something did happen, and it escalated quickly."

Since we're using "Anchorman" terms, after Kelly drilled Austin in the seventh, the teams were throwing down in fisticuffs — a Cliff Johnson here, a Troy O'Leary there (or something like that). Kelly, naturally, insisted the pitch got away from him. Give the guy credit, at least, for self-deprecating supporting evidence.

Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge put Kelly in a headlock after Kelly hit Austin with a pitch in the seventh inning. Credit Charles Krupa/Associated Press
"I walk a batter per inning," Kelly said, "so it's not like I have Greg Maddux command."

Catcher Christian Vazquez said he expected the Yankees to retaliate, either on Thursday or when the teams meet again May 8 to 10 in the Bronx.

"They feel like us," Vazquez said. "The clubhouse is our home. Let's protect our home. There will be something soon. If not this series, maybe in New York."

Yankees General Manager Brian Cashman, who has seen decades of this rivalry, defended Austin for charging Kelly after the obvious purpose pitch.

"In the heat of the moment, it's hard to control your emotions," Cashman said. "There's two competitive teams going at it and stuff happens and sometimes stuff shouldn't happen."

Aaron Boone, the Yankees' manager, mentioned the incident last April between the Red Sox and Manny Machado, the Baltimore Orioles star who injured Dustin Pedroia with a hard slide. That sparked an awkward follow-up in which Boston's Matt Barnes threw behind Machado, only to have Pedroia tell Machado, from the dugout, that he had nothing to do with it.

The Red Sox went on to win the division, of course, but the ordeal underscored at least some level of dysfunction or absence of leadership. That does not seem to be an issue anymore. In the code of the clubhouse, Kelly protected his teammate, and Holt liked what it suggested.

"It shows how close-knit we are in here," Holt said, "and the same goes for them, how close-knit they are."

The benches cleared twice in the Yankees-Red Sox game on Wednesday night in Boston. Video by MLB
Had the Red Sox been playing another team, the incident might have played out the same way; a spike to the calf hurts just as much from a Mariner as it does from a Yankee. But when a Yankee does it at Fenway, there are layers of historical resonance.

"Bench-clearing brawls are bench-clearing brawls," Holt said. "I think Red Sox-Yankees makes it bigger for people outside of the Red Sox and Yankees — fans and media and stuff like that, I think that's a big part of it. But I don't think it's any different for us."

The Red Sox and the Yankees do not really hate each other — do they? — but scenes like Wednesday's validate the passion of the fans, in those cities and far beyond.

Purists love seeing the Kansas City Royals and the Houston Astros in the World Series. Those championship teams played with athleticism and verve, and they were endearing to those who paid attention. If you really love baseball, you wouldn't mind seeing the Milwaukee Brewers knock off the Chicago Cubs, or the Arizona Diamondbacks upset the Los Angeles Dodgers.

But when the Yankees and the Red Sox are this good — and the Angels' Shohei Ohtani captivates fans with his two-way magic in greater Los Angeles — the sport thrives on a bigger scale. So while baseball will surely impose discipline for Wednesday's scuffle, it will do so with a wink.

A Brawl Erupts, and the Red Sox-Yankees Rivalry Catches Fire

Billy Witz

BOSTON — If there was any doubt that the saltiness had returned to the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry, it evaporated late Wednesday night when a 97-miles-per-hour fastball from Boston reliever Joe Kelly found its intended target: Tyler Austin's ribs.

Austin slammed his bat down, fired his helmet to the ground and charged after Kelly, and soon both benches and bullpens were empty.

It may not have quite matched Jason Varitek massaging Alex Rodriguez's face with his glove, Lou Piniella flattening Carlton Fisk at the plate or Pedro Martinez throwing Don Zimmer to the ground, but it was still the signature moment in the Yankees' 10-7 victory at Fenway Park.

It overshadowed Gary Sanchez's busting out of a miserable 1-for-33 slump with two home runs, David Price leaving after an inning with what was labeled "a sensation" in his left hand, and the Yankees bouncing back from a 14-1 thumping the previous night.

The brawl, which erupted in the seventh inning, marked a return to the type of animosity that had been largely absent from the rivalry in recent years — mostly because the teams have rarely been good at the same time.

But last season the Red Sox and Yankees finished atop the American League East for the first time since 2009 — and the Yankees, unable to chase down their rivals in the final weeks, had to stew over catching the Red Sox illegally using an Apple Watch to help relay stolen signs to their hitters.

"Typical Red Sox-Yankee game," Boston shortstop Brock Holt said. "About four hours long and a couple of bench-clearing brawls. We're right on track here."

The roots of Wednesday's brawl were laid in the third inning when Austin slid late into second base and his spikes caught Holt, who had moved away from the base after receiving a throw from third baseman Rafael Devers.

Austin slid into shortstop Brock Holt in the third inning, setting the stage for the brouhaha four innings later. Credit Charles Krupa/Associated Press

It was a tame slide by old-school baseball standards, but since baseball reformed its slide rules in the wake of Chase Utley's breaking Ruben Tejada's leg with a hard slide in the 2015 playoffs, it was hard not to see it as over the line.

Holt and Austin exchanged words and the benches and bullpens emptied, but the situation quickly cooled and the game resumed.

"I probably said something I shouldn't have to start the whole thing, so I'm sorry for that," said Holt, whose calf was cut by Austin's spikes. "I just wanted him to know that it was a bad slide and I think everyone on the field knows that it was."

Naturally, the Yankees disagreed.

Manager Aaron Boone said that while the slide may have violated the letter of the law, "to construe that as a dirty play or that you'd be offended by that, I don't buy that at all."

Austin, who was the Yankees' designated hitter on Wednesday night, struck out in his next at-bat against Heath Hembree in the fifth. At the time it looked like the Yankees, with an 8-1 lead, were on their way to a laugh.

But by the time Austin came to bat with one out in the seventh, the Red Sox were back in it. J.D. Martinez had belted a grand slam off Masahiro Tanaka to get the Red Sox within 8-6 in the fifth before the Yankees pushed another two runs across in the sixth to lead, 10-6.

Kelly retired Neil Walker to begin the seventh, then hit Austin with a 2-1 fastball.

As he charged the mound, Kelly waved, signaling for Austin to come get him. As they approached each other, Austin, who was being grabbed from behind by catcher Christian Vazquez, slipped and fell while trying to tackle Kelly, who landed a couple of punches on Austin.

Quickly, though, they were engulfed. Aaron Judge wrapped his arms around Kelly, and Giancarlo Stanton jumped to the center of the scrum as it veered toward the Red Sox dugout. The towering sluggers may have presented a more intimidating presence there than in the batter's box.

"In a fight, in a brawl like that you could have a bunch of guys swinging, you could have guys picking guys out cheap shooting," Stanton said. "Yeah, we're a good presence but we've still got to have eyes in the back of our heads right there."

Gary Sanchez hitting a two-run homer in the fourth inning. Sanchez broke out of a slump by smacking two home runs. Credit Maddie Meyer/Getty Images

As the scuffle continued, Austin charged into the center again and threw an overhand right that missed Kelly, who was still being held by Judge. The punch landed squarely on the head of Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles. Eventually, Austin was pulled out of the maw and escorted back to the Yankees dugout by hitting coach Marcus Thames.

"I felt like it was intentional and I didn't want to let anybody push myself around or do anything like that," Austin said. "That's why I went out there."

Austin and Kelly were ejected, along with Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin and reliever Tommy Kahnle. Nevin was irate when he found out he had been ejected, racing out to confront the umpires and pointing toward the Red Sox dugout. Kahnle was tossed for yelling at an umpire who tried to restrain him, according to Boone.

The injured Yankees pitcher C.C. Sabathia should also expect discipline for leaving the bench, which is prohibited for players on the disabled list. Sabathia pushed Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers and another Red Sox player to the ground.

The fracas drew an enthusiastic response from the crowd, which itself had a fight in the right field bleachers earlier in the game.

Once the field was cleared, players picked up their gloves and caps and the game resumed. There were no other incidents, and not much in the way of entertainment on the field until the ninth.

By the time the Red Sox came to bat in the final frame, with the game nearing the four-hour mark, much of the crowd had cleared out. But those who did stay were quickly on their feet when Jackie Bradley Jr. greeted Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman with a single and Vazquez doubled off the Green Monster.

Chapman retired pinch-hitter Sandy Leon on a fly ball to shallow right, and then struck out Mookie Betts with a full-count slider. That brought up Devers, who had hit a game-tying, ninth-inning homer off Chapman last year at Yankee Stadium. But after a wild pitch allowed Bradley Jr. to score, Chapman blew a fastball past Devers.

It was the final punch out of the night — but perhaps not for the series, or the season.

"They feel like us," said Vazquez, the Boston catcher. "The clubhouse is our home. Let's protect our home. There will be something soon — if not this series, maybe in New York."

****The New York Daily News***

Gary Sanchez breaks out of slump as Yankees beat Red Sox, 10-7, in game highlighted by brawl

Mike Mazzeo

BOSTON — Gary Sanchez busted out before the brawl.

In a game marred by fisticuffs, Sanchez — who entered in a 2-for-36 funk (.056) — broke out of his early-season slump in a big way, going 3-for-5 with two homers, a double and four RBI, and the Yankees claimed a 10-7 victory over the Red Sox on Wednesday night at Fenway.

Giancarlo Stanton followed a two-hit night on Tuesday with a 418-foot triple that drove home a pair, and an RBI single, also finishing 3-for-5.

Masahiro Tanaka allowed six runs on seven hits in five innings. He gave up two homers.

The Yankees had an 8-1 lead, but the Red Sox made it 8-6 with a five-run fifth. J.D. Martinez delivered the huge blow with a two-out grand slam. Tanaka had retired 10 in a row before the frame began. Mookie Betts took a close slider that could've been strike three for the second out before doubling.

The Bombers struck quickly for four runs against Sox starter David Price, who left after one inning due to feeling a sensation in his left hand.

PLAY OF THE GAME

Joe Kelly's seventh-inning fastball into the side of Tyler Austin that sparked a bench-clearing brawl between these two bitter rivals.

TURNING POINT

The first inning. Giancarlo Stanton (two-run triple) and Gary Sanchez (two-run homer) gave the Yankees an early 4-0 lead, which they were able to hold onto.

STAR OF THE GAME

Gary Sanchez, who started the season 2-for-36 and had been in an 0-for-15 slide before his breakout. It was Sanchez's eighth career multi-homer game.

STAT OF THE DAY

4. The Yankees have allowed four grand slams in their first 12 games.

Aaron Judge is off to a torrid start. He had two hits while extending his hitting streak to nine games.

M.I.A.

Tyler Wade and Miguel Andujar both went hitless.

UP NEXT

Thursday at Boston, 7:10 p.m. Sonny Gray (1-0, 3.60 ERA) vs. Rick Porcello (2-0, 2.84)

****The New York Post***

Yankees slug way past Red Sox (literally)

George A. King III

BOSTON — Their names are never going to be as big as those who preceded Tyler Austin and Joe Kelly in the latest but certainly and hopefully not the last brawl between the Red Sox and Yankees.

Still, when the blood rivals put their hatred for each other for all to see like they did Wednesday night at Fenway Park, it adds something that isn't made up like the marketing of Bryce Harper, Mike Trout and Aaron Judge or the latest idea to make social media bigger than the game.

So when Kelly drilled Austin in the upper body in the seventh inning of Wednesday's 10-7 Yankees victory in retaliation for the Red Sox believing Austin attempted to hurt shortstop Brock Holt on a slide into second base in the third, Austin slammed his bat to the ground and charged Kelly. With Kelly waving Austin on, the two moved toward the first-base line where both benches and bullpens had come to fight.

Kelly got Austin on the ground and connected high on his body as Sonny Gray and CC Sabathia got in the middle of the fray. Since he is on the DL and went on the field Sabathia is expected to be suspended.

"I was trying to slide into second base. I wasn't trying to hurt anybody," Austin said.

Yankees third-base coach Phil Nevin was ejected for jawing with someone in the Red Sox dugout he wouldn't identify. Kelly and Austin were also booted, as was Yankees reliever Tommy Kahnle who claims — and the team has video that backs it up — he was pushed by an umpire.

Manager Aaron Boone said he saw nothing wrong with Austin's slide into second.

"I didn't know what to expect. I didn't think they should have [thrown at Austin]," Boone said. "I thought it was a hard slide into second, nothing remotely dirty about it. And then to take matters into your own hands and hit one of our guys I thought it was an overreaction and not right."

As for the game, the muscle of the Yankees' order was the difference on a night when starters Masahiro Tanaka and David Price didn't have much. Handed an 8-1 lead when he took the mound for the home fifth, Tanaka gave up five runs, four of which came on a J.D. Martinez grand slam. Price lasted an inning in which he gave up four runs and three hits, one of which was the first of two Gary Sanchez two-run homers. Price was removed for precautionary reasons related to a left hand issue the Red Sox don't believe is serious.

The Yankees' order added some bite with the help of Sanchez, who went 3-for-5 and drove in four runs after starting the game in a 1-for-33 slide. Aaron Judge, Giancarlo Stanton, Didi Gregorius and Sanchez combined to go 8-for-17 and drive in nine runs.

Kelly, of course, didn't mean to drill Austin in the back with a 98 mph fastball because what pitcher ever admits that?

"Austin has a lot of power to right field. The whole game plan is sliders in the dirt and pitch him in. I threw a pitch inside and it hit him. One of those that got away," Kelly said. "I was ready to defend myself. If I feel like I'm getting attacked, then I'm gonna defend myself. It wasn't like a blowout. We were still in that game."

While Boone didn't believe the situation would carry over, Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez predicted the Yankees will retaliate for Austin getting drilled.

"You know that's coming," Vazquez said. "If they're like us, the clubhouse is our second home. We need to protect our home so there will be something soon. If not this series, maybe in New York."

Publicly, MLB will put on a serious face and hand out suspensions. Privately, those who understand how good it is for the game that the Red Sox and Yankees loathe each other will be smiling because hate between these blood rivals is good for business.

****The Bergen Record***

Yankees, Red Sox brawl as Joe Kelly throws at Tyler Austin in NY's 10-7 win

Pete Caldera

BOSTON — Turns out, a third-inning bench clearer at Fenway Park was just the undercard.

A full-fledged brawl between the Yankees and Red Sox broke out in Wednesday's seventh inning, with the Yanks' Tyler Austin at the center of each event.

At the plate, the Yankees outslugged their ancient rivals in a fight-marred 10-7 victory.

Gary Sanchez busted out of his slump with a pair of two-run home runs and a double, and Boston lefty starter David Price exited after the Yanks' four-run first inning with a possible injury to his pitching hand.

But there will be a further Yankee price to pay, with Austin looking at a suspension for charging the mound, igniting matters on a chilly night before 32,400 charged-up fans.

Yet, the Yankees felt they were the aggrieved party.

Lighting the match

The fight was on after hard-throwing Red Sox reliever Joe Kelly drilled Austin with a seventh-inning fastball to the left elbow.

It was obvious payback for Austin's questionable third-inning slide, when he hooked Red Sox shortstop Brock Holt at second base.

From the Yankees' perspective, there was "nothing remotely dirty about" the slide, said manager Aaron Boone. "I thought it was an over-reaction" on Boston's part.

From the Red Sox's dugout, Austin "over-slid" the bag and "the spikes were up," said manager Alex Cora. "Different (contact) rules now from back in the day. Holt took exception."

That initial, third-inning melee was mostly a shouting match between Austin and Holt.

"I probably said something I probably shouldn't have to start it off," Holt said of the shouting match that became a bench-clearer, but without incident. "I just wanted him to know it was a bad slide. I think he knows that now."

From Austin's vantage, "I play the game hard. So, I thought there was absolutely nothing wrong with that slide...I wasn't trying to hurt anybody, I wasn't trying to take him out."

The main event

With the Yankees leading 10-6 in the seventh, Austin absorbed Kelly's 2-and-1 fastball.

A seething Austin spiked his bat and slowly walked toward Kelly before throwing his helmet down and taking off after the right-hander motioned in a "bring it on" fashion.

Austin said it didn't cross his mind that Kelly might throw at him, until was brushed back with the previous pitch.

And Austin didn't need Kelly's invitation to meet at the mound.

"Once I got hit, it was going to happen," Austin said. "I felt like was intentional and I didn't want to let anybody push myself around or do anything like that. That's why I went out there."

Austin missed with a wild right hand, allowing Kelly to get in a few punches on the Yankees' designated hitter before players and coaches from both teams piled up near the mound.

"If I'm getting attacked, I have to defend myself," said Kelly, adding that the fastball on a 40-degree night got away. "It's not like I have Greg Maddux command."

New York Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge puts Boston

New York Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge puts Boston Red Sox relief pitcher Joe Kelly in a headlock after Kelly hit Yankees' Tyler Austin with a pitch during the seventh inning of a baseball game at Fenway Park in Boston, Wednesday, April 11, 2018. (Photo: Charles Krupa, AP)

Brawl game

At one point, Giancarlo Stanton was moving an entire pile of players and Aaron Judge seemed to have Kelly gripped at the waist to restrain him.

"No one ever likes getting hit by 98 (mph)," Judge said. "Everyone was pretty upset by it."

Austin, who apparently connected with a punch to Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles, had already been dragged from the scrum by Yanks' batting coach Marcus Thames, who pushed Austin into the visiting dugout to prevent him from rejoining the fray.

Austin knew he'd contacted someone in a Sox uniform, but said he was just defending himself.

Overall, "there was no reason for fisticuffs to have to happen based on that slide," said Yankees GM Brian Cashman.

The aftermath

Once order was restored, Austin, Kelly, Yanks reliever Tommy Kahnle and Yanks third base coach Phil Nevin were ejected.

Nevin was jawing at the Sox bench; Kahnle shouted at an umpire after being hard-pushed out of a pile by one of the men in blue according to Boone.

Upon hearing of his ejection, an enraged Nevin shot out of the Yanks' dugout to argue with crew chief Larry Vanover.

"I think it's over with" Boone said, not anticipating any carryover in Thursday's series finale.

Yankees manager Aaron Boone on Gary Sanchez and the bullpen struggles. Pete Caldera/NorthJersey.com

"Who knows?" said Stanton, who ran out to protect his teammates.

"That wasn't a dirty play," Stanton said of Austin's hard slide. "The cleats caught. You don't need to drill him for that. If you have to do it, do it on the first pitch."

Price tagged

After suffering a 14-1 beating at Fenway on Tuesday night, the Yankees jumped out right away on Wednesday.

Stanton delivered a two-run triple to the center field triangle – over 400 feet away - and Sanchez belted a two-run homer in a four-run first inning against Price.

Those were the first runs this season off Price (1-1), who was making his third start of the year.

But the lefty did not come out for the second inning for precautionary reasons, according to the Red Sox, due to feeling a "sensation" in his left hand.

Sanchez was in a 1-for-33 slide entering Wednesday.

Tanaka goes five

Making his third start of the year, Masahiro Tanaka was staked to an 8-1 lead before handing back five runs in the fifth.

Three batters after Mookie Betts lashed an RBI double, J.D. Martinez crushed a grand slam to center field. It was the Sox's second grand slam in two nights; Betts had belted one Tuesday off Yanks' reliever Chasen Shreve during a nine-run sixth inning.

But in the sixth, Stanton delivered a sharp, RBI single to score Gardner (2 hits, 2 walks, three runs) and Didi Gregorius – who played a wondrous defensive game at shortstop – delivered his second sac fly of the night for a 10-6 lead.

And the Yankees (6-6) snapped a nine-game winning streak by the Red Sox (9-2), with Sonny Gray going against Rick Porcello on Thursday night.

****The Newark Star Ledger***

Punches fly, benches clear as Yankees beat Red Sox | Rapid reaction

Brendan Kutty

BOSTON -- Tyler Austin slammed his bat. Come on, Joe Kelly begged.

Austin charged the mound, benches cleared, punches were thrown, and the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry hit a boiling point -- with so many more chances for it to get out of hand left in the season.

The Yankees won, 10-7, as tension simmered on an otherwise freezing Wednesday night at Fenway Park.

But the final score isn't what will be remembered.

What will stick in the minds of most will be how just 12 games into the season, the feud between the Yankees and the Red Sox -- so tepid since the fireworks of the Alex Rodriguez-Pedro Martinez era -- reignited at a time where both teams expect to win a World Series.

The Yankees improved to 6-6 as they jumped out to a seven-run lead through 4 1/2 innings.

Boston made it close, scoring five runs off Masahiro Tanaka in a fifth inning highlighted by J.D. Martinez's grand slam that made it 8-6.

A pair of insurance runs in the sixth put it away for the Yankees, who finally saw Gary Sanchez break out for two homers and a double. Aaron Judge had two hits and Giancarlo Stanton walked and singled.

The Yankees grabbed a 4-0 lead in the first inning off Red Sox ace David Price, who was pulled immediately after. Boston said Price was pulled after feeling a sensation in his left hand and that doctors would check him out further.

THE FIGHT

Kelly rocked Austin in the back with a 97.7 mph fastball. Kelly had also come way inside on the pitch before.

The bad blood stemmed from the third inning, when Austin made a borderline dirty slide at second base. He went after shortstop Brock Holt's foot that was on the bag and he might have caught Holt with his cleat. Austin and Holt got into each other's faces near the bag and the benches cleared but nothing happened.

That's not how it happened in Round No. 2.

Austin whipped his bat to the dirt and took a couple steps toward Kelly after getting hit.

Kelly told him to bring it and Austin charged. Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez bumped Austin from behind en route to Kelly, sending Austin to the ground and Kelly atop him.

That's when the benches and bullpens cleared. Aaron Judge, CC Sabathia and third base Phil Nevin particularly found themselves in the middle of things. Judge put Kelly in a headlock. Sabathia ran over first baseman Mitch Moreland and pitcher Chris Sale. Nevin screamed at everyone.

Eventually, Nevin was tossed. It appeared Kelly and Austin were also thrown out, though no official announcement had been made.

Wouldn't be shocking if Austin was looking at a multi-game suspension. At one point during the brawl, he connected on an overhand right with the skull of what appeared to be third base coach Carlos Febles.

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED

Tanaka went five innings, giving up six runs on seven hits, two walks and three strikeouts. He surrendered two homers, including Hanley Ramirez's first-inning solo shot that cut the Yankees lead to 4-1.

Tanaka was good most of the night until the fifth. He left a 88-mph slider over the plate to Martinez, who hammered it over the center-field wall, driving Fenway Park wild.

Sanchez hit a two-run blast in the first, scored after doubling in the third and hit a two-run homer in the fourth. He entered the night with two hits in 36 at-bats and many wondering when he'd finally snap his slump.

Aroldis Chapman pitched the ninth and let a run score on a wild pitch with Jackie Bradley Jr. on third base.

NEXT

Thursday: Yankees RHP Sonny Gray (1-0, 3.60 ERA) at Red Sox RHP Rick Porcello (2-0, 2.84 ERA).

Friday: Yankees LHP Jordan Montgomery (0-0, 4.82 ERA) at Tigers RHP Mike Fiers (1-0, 0.00).

Saturday: Yankees RHP Luis Severino (2-1, 3.50) at Tigers LHP Francisco Liriano (1-1, 2.13)

****Associated Press***

Beantown Brawl! Yankees fight to 10-7 win over Red Sox

BOSTON -- The fuse has officially been lit in the newest chapter of the ramped-up Yankees-Red Sox rivalry.

Zim vs. Pedro. A-Rod vs. Varitek. Munson vs. Fisk.

And now, Tyler Austin tangling with Joe Kelly.

In a matchup between clubs that have long clashed, Austin rushed the mound after being hit by a pitch from the Red Sox reliever, triggering a bench-clearing brawl Wednesday night as New York ended Boston's nine-game winning streak with a 10-7 victory.

"It's Yankees-Red Sox. That's what everybody wants. That's what they got," Boston starter David Price said.

Austin slid spikes-first into shortstop Brock Holt at second base in the third inning. No surprise, the sides saw it differently

Four innings later, the Red Sox retaliated.

"Two competitive teams going at it and stuff happens," Yankees general manager Brian Cashman said. "But sometimes stuff shouldn't happen and there was no reason for fisticuffs to have to happen based on that slide at second base."

Gary Sanchez hit two home runs in a game that twice saw the benches empty and a fight that resulted in four ejections.

And no telling what might happen in the series finale Thursday night at Fenway Park.

"I think it's probably over with," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "Hopefully put this to bed."

A day after the Red Sox romped 14-1, the benches cleared briefly in the third after Austin's spikes clipped Holt's leg on a slide into second base. Holt took issue with the contact and they exchanged words before being separated.

"I probably said something I shouldn't have to start the whole thing, so I'm sorry for that," Holt said. "But I just wanted him to know that it was a bad slide, and I think everyone on the field knows that it was, and I think he knows that now, too."

Said Austin: "I thought there was absolutely nothing wrong with that slide. I had no thought that they were going to throw at me."

With the Yankees leading 10-6 in the seventh, Kelly nearly hit Austin with an 0-1 pitch.

"I thought it was over after that," Austin said.

Far from it.

Two pitches later, Kelly caught him on the side with a 98 mph heater. Austin slammed his bat on the plate, threw it down and took four steps toward the mound while hollering. Kelly waved Austin at him, and things quickly got out of hand.

"It escalated," Holt said.

Kelly hit Austin a couple of times, and the Yankees designated hitter wound up with a swollen lip.

Trying to hit Kelly, Austin instead tagged Red Sox third base coach Carlos Febles.

The scuffle spilled across the field before it broke up in front of the Boston dugout on the first base side, with Yankees sluggers Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton pushing the pile. Yankees hitting coach Marcus Thames used both hands to shove Austin all the way across the infield toward the New York dugout.

Kelly had visible red marks on his neck after the game.

"I was ready to defend myself," he said. "Someone comes on my property and in my backyard -- I've got two dogs and if you come on my property and I feel like I was getting attacked then I'm going to have to defend myself."

Austin, Kelly, Yankees reliever Tommy Kahnle and third base coach Phil Nevin were ejected.

This was the second bench-clearing brawl of the day in the majors. Colorado star Nolan Arenado charged the mound after being a pitch from San Diego's Luis Perdomo threw a pitch behind him.

"It made me wonder, too, if they were in their clubhouse watching the Padre-Rockie brawl and planted the seed for them and led them to think that that's why they should do," Cashman said.

New York and Boston have a history of furious fights.

Thurman Munson collided with catcher Carlton Fisk in 1973 after Gene Michael missed a bunt attempt. Three years later, Lou Piniella bowled into Fisk at the plate, and Red Sox pitcher Bill Lee separated a shoulder in the ensuing fighting.

After Roger Clemens threw a pitch under Manny Ramirez's chin during the 2003 AL Championship Series, Yankees bench coach Don Zimmer charged Pedro Martinez, who hit Karim Garcia with a pitch earlier. Martinez picked up Zimmer and threw him to the ground.

"The only thing I would had done different than Joe Kelly tonight, is I would've hit Tyler Austin at his previous at bat. Other than that, Kelly executed perfectly," Martinez tweeted.

"Sliding with the cleats up is a no-no in baseball. That means fight fight fight!" he posted.

A year later, Boston's Bronson Arroyo hit Alex Rodriguez with a pitch, A-Rod shouted at the pitcher, and Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek punched Rodriguez in the face, setting off a scuffle.

Before the melee, there was some baseball.

The Yankees scored four runs off Price (1-1) in the first inning before the lefty ace exited the game with a tingling sensation in his pitching hand. Price was shaking his hand during the inning.

New York jumped on Boston's bullpen, adding four more runs over next three innings.

Masahiro Tanaka (2-1) went five innings, yielding six runs. J.D. Martinez hit a grand slam and Hanley Ramirez homered for Boston.

Aroldis Chapman gave up two hits and a run on a wild pitch in the ninth, but got three outs to end the game.

Sanchez drove in four runs and Stanton had three hits and three RBI.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Yankees: OF Aaron Hicks (right intercostal strain), was 1 for 3 with a double in his second rehab start for Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre. LJ Mazzilli was 1 for 4, a day after he was acquired from the Mets organization. Boone said Hicks may rejoin the Yankees on Thursday.

Red Sox: Price said he had "no pain" in his hand or arm when he was checked out by doctors. The plan is to have him play catch on Thursday and have it reevaluated.

ERRORLESS STREAK ENDS

Boston's errorless streak to begin the season ended when catcher Christian Vazquez's attempt to stop Brett Gardner from stealing second skipped into center field. Gardner advanced to third and scored on Stanton's single.

Red Sox committed no errors in their first 10 games, the franchise's longest streak to begin any season. No other team since at least 1913 has begun a season with streak of 10 or more errorless games.

UP NEXT

Yankees: RHP Sonny Gray (1-0, 3.60 ERA) will make his third start of the season Thursday. He is 1-4 with a 4.93 ERA in six starts against Boston.

Red Sox: RHP Rick Porcello (2-0, 2.84 ERA) has won each of his two starts this season. He has allowed two earned runs or fewer over six-plus innings pitched in each of his six career starts against New York at Fenway.