

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, April 14, 2018

**** The Boston Globe***

Eduardo Rodriguez shuts down Orioles, Red Sox roll again

Peter Abraham

On a staff that includes Chris Sale, David Price, and Rick Porcello, that Eduardo Rodriguez would be the first Red Sox starter to reach 100 pitches this season was not expected.

Particularly given that Friday night's start against the Baltimore Orioles was only his second since coming off the disabled list.

But with two on and two out in the sixth inning on Friday night, manager Alex Cora left Rodriguez in to face lefthanded hitting Chris Davis. Whatever happened, it would be the last hitter for Rodriguez.

"We thought that matchup was good for us," Cora said.

Davis worked the count full but Rodriguez struck him out looking at a cut fastball. He walked off the mound to loud cheers from the crowd at Fenway Park.

The Sox went on to a 7-3 victory before a crowd of 32,610.

At 11-2, the Sox are off to their best start since 1918. That team went on to beat the Cubs in the World Series.

Rodriguez may be no Babe Ruth, who was 13-7 with a 2.22 earned run average 100 years ago. But the lefty is pitching with some of the swagger the Bambino would appreciate.

Now that his right knee is sturdy again after surgery, Rodriguez is able get into his four-seam fastball with confidence and throw it high in the strike zone past hitters.

Of the 13 swing and misses Rodriguez produced against the Orioles, nine were with the fastballs.

"Elevated fastball, that should be a weapon for him, something he uses," said Cora, noting that the Orioles have a lot of power but also strike out a lot.

Rodriguez allowed one run on five hits. He struck out eight with two walks and finished with 104 pitches. It was a marked improvement from his first start when he lasted only 3⅓ innings against the Rays and put seven men on base.

"This was more normal. I just thought about pitching and my tempo was good," Rodriguez said.

The Sox backed Rodriguez and three relievers with another good offensive night. They have scored 52 runs in the last six games.

As the Sox built a healthy lead, Rodriguez put together an impressive outing.

Trey Mancini started the game with a single to right and went to third when Jonathan Schoop drove a ball off the wall in left field. Andrew Benintendi made a quick play to hold Schoop at first.

Baltimore got a run on a sacrifice fly by Adam Jones, but that was it. Rodriguez allowed only one runner past first base in the next five innings.

Rodriguez's return adds depth to what was already a strong rotation. Red Sox starters have a 1.97 earned run average and are averaging 9.4 strikeouts per nine innings.

"It's huge any time you can get a guy like him with a good arm. He showed it today with all the strikeouts," Mookie Betts said. "He fell right in line with what's been going on."

Baltimore starter Chris Tillman came into the game with a 3.03 ERA in 21 career starts against the Red Sox. But he allowed four runs in the first inning and was out of the game in the third.

With two on, J.D. Martinez's sacrifice fly gave the Sox their first run. Rafael Devers, hitless in his previous 12 at-bats, went the other way with a double to left field.

Eduardo Nunez followed with a three-run homer to left field. He said it was only his second hit off a fastball this season.

But this time he was all over an 89-m.p.h. pitch that was up in the strike zone.

Nunez has hit .310 with an .866 OPS in 50 games for the Sox since being acquired from the San Francisco Giants last season. He has 33 RBIs.

Tzu-Wei Lin [2 for 3 with a walk in his first start of the season] had his first major-league double with one out in the second inning. He scored when Betts doubled to left.

Devers and Nunez singled to lead off the third inning. When Tillman hit Jackie Bradley Jr. with a pitch, Orioles manager Buck Showalter called in righthander Pedro Araujo.

Only one scored and that was on a wild pitch.

Tillman (0-3) has allowed 22 hits and 10 walks over 11½ innings and struck out only three. He is 1-10 with an 8.28 earned run average since the start of last season.

Rodriguez left the mound with a 7-1 lead. Then the biggest weakness of the first-place Sox — middle relief — became a factor.

Heath Hembree allowed a two-out two-run double by Manny Machado, the ball smoked to center field. Hembree has allowed five runs on eight hits in eight innings.

Smokin' Joe Kelly, pitching for the first time since Wednesday's fight against the Yankees, was cheered like Marvin Hagler at the old Garden when he came in for the eighth inning. Kelly punched out Jones then retired the next two hitters on groundouts.

Matt Barnes handled the ninth inning.

Hanley Ramirez says he expects quick return

Nick Cafardo

Hanley Ramirez is very confident he will not miss extended time because of a bruised left wrist.

"No way," said Ramirez, who was hit by a pitch in the first inning on Thursday and left the game.

Ramirez said the fastball from Yankees righthander Sonny Gray hit his right wrist first and then his left. His left wrist is the issue.

“It hurt a lot at the time but it’s healing,” he said. “I’ll be fine.”

Ramirez received treatment on Friday and was held out of the game, a 7-3 victory against the Orioles.

“He’s doing OK,” manager Alex Cora said. “Day to day. I called him this morning and he knew he wasn’t going to play. Keep him off his feet . . . and see where he’s at [Saturday].”

Ramirez is hitting .357 with a .964 OPS and leads the Sox with 12 RBIs. He also has played well at first base.

Hand and wrist injuries are obviously worrisome for hitters. Xander Bogaerts was hit on the right hand last July and slumped for two months.

“There’s always a concern when you’re talking about hands [or] fingers,” Cora said. “There’s nothing major there. He’ll be fine mentally and he can keep swinging the bat the way he has been doing it so far.”

As for Bogaerts, he has missed the last five games recovering from a cracked bone in his left foot. He has not yet resumed baseball activities.

“Feeling better but that’s about it,” Cora said.

Pomeranz improves

Drew Pomeranz made his second minor league rehabilitation start. The lefthander went 5⅓ innings for Double A Portland against Binghamton. He allowed two runs on four hits with three walks, four strikeouts, and a home run.

Pomeranz threw 53 of 86 pitches for strikes. He faced Tim Tebow twice. The vaunted former quarterback struck out looking and grounded into a double play.

“It was fun. Attacked him like any lefthanded hitter,” Pomeranz told reporters in Portland.

The outing was an improvement for Pomeranz, who walked six in 4⅓ innings for Triple A Pawtucket on Sunday.

Pomeranz, who is on the disabled list with a forearm strain, said he felt fine physically and is ready to return to the majors. The Sox have tentative plans to activate Pomeranz during the upcoming road trip.

“I got some good work in. Definitely an improvement from the last one,” Pomeranz said. “I was a little more aggressive this time. . . . I was getting after it with all my pitches.”

Steven Wright, who is out recovering from knee surgery, has been pitching in extended spring training. He is scheduled to pitch this weekend and from there could start a minor league assignment.

Once Wright is activated off the disabled list, he will start serving his 15-game suspension for violating Major League Baseball’s domestic violence policy.

Kelly quibbles

MLB chief baseball office Joe Torre suspended Joe Kelly for six games on Thursday for intentionally throwing at Tyler Austin of the Yankees in the seventh inning on Wednesday night.

In a similar incident involving the Padres and Rockies, also on Wednesday, San Diego pitcher Luis Perdomo was suspended for five games for throwing at Colorado’s Nolan Arenado.

Kelly reacted to the decision via Twitter.

“Makes sense,” he wrote. He also used the thoughtful face emoji to express his disbelief.

But an industry source said Kelly received an additional game because his pitch actually hit Austin. Perdomo did not hit Arenado.

Kelly appealed the suspension and remains on the active roster.

Quick thinking

Mookie Betts made an unusual play in the fourth inning.

Adam Jones hit a popup behind first base that landed inside the foul line and bounced toward the stands. Jones jogged to second, believing he had a ground-rule double.

But the ball landed on the tarp and Betts reached over to grab it and threw Jones out at second.

“My instinct was grab it, make a play and ask questions later,” Betts said.

Orioles manager Buck Showalter challenged the call, saying the ball was lodged in the tarp, which would have made it a dead ball and given Jones second base. The call stood after a video review.

Hairy issue

Brock Holt had long hair when he and Blake Swihart helped deliver pizza and ice cream to patients at The Jimmy Fund clinic on Friday. But Holt had a buzz cut a few hours later. “Time for a change,” he said. That Holt started the season 1 for 16 was probably a motivating factor . . . UMass-Lowell lacrosse player Noelle Lambert threw out one of the first pitches. The redshirt sophomore from Londonderry, N.H., lost her left leg in a moped accident in 2016 but returned to play and recently scored her first goal since the injury . . . In an inspirational pregame ceremony, the Sox honored a large number of survivors and heroes of the Boston Marathon bombings five years ago. Those walking proudly across the outfield to loud cheers included Heather Abbott, Jeff Bauman, Celeste and Sydney Corcoran, Dic Donohue, Patrick Downes, Marc Fucarile, Jessica Kensky, Paul and J.P. Norden, Gillian Reny, and the family of Martin Richard . . . There was a moment of silence before the game in honor of Yarmouth police officer Sean Gannon, who was killed in the line of duty on Thursday.

Best may be yet to come for Red Sox and Yankees

Alex Speier

It’s getting really good.

After three fascinating games between the Red Sox and Yankees, it’s impossible to say where the season will go. The Red Sox’ strong early start (10-2) and the Yankees’ sideways opening (6-7) could be a harbinger, or it could be an aberration. We don’t know. There’s a long history this century of season series between the two teams enduring sharp turns and reversals.

There’s a reason for such rollercoaster-style jostling: When both teams are loaded with talent, things can change dramatically. And with both clubs now armed with young cores that are coming into their own, it would seem that plenty of drama is on tap for years to come.

Last year, the Red Sox’ position players seemed downtrodden in comparison to their Yankees counterparts. Then, even as the Red Sox won the division, they seemed reliant on an advantage from their front-of-the-rotation starters in order to do so. The Red Sox lineup seemed incapable of matching New York’s brute force offense led by Aaron Judge and Gary Sanchez – a notion further reinforced when the Yankees landed Giancarlo Stanton during the winter.

Now, the view looks a bit different after the Red Sox crossed the plate 27 times in three games and two wins against the Yankees while running their streak of consecutive games with at least six runs to five.

(They had just one such streak of that duration in all of 2017.) Andrew Benintendi went 4-for-8 with a couple of extra-base hits, reached base six times, and didn't strike out. Mookie Betts had five hits, four extra-base hits, and drove in seven. While Rafael Devers (0-for-12, five strikeouts) was a non-factor and Xander Bogaerts was sidelined by his ankle injury, the Sox showed a striking mix of ability and confidence.

As everyone got a chance to observe during the series bench-clearing exploits on Wednesday, there is a size disparity between the two teams. There is likewise still a power differential between them, with some of the balls that disintegrated off the bats of Judge, Sanchez, and Stanton offering suggestions that the Yankees will put up a bunch of football scores this year as well.

But what the last three games suggested is that the dynamic isn't going to be one-sided. With the members of both teams' young cores under team control for years to come, we're at the new starting point of all kinds of tales-of-the-tape that will serve as the basis for a rising intensity over the rest of this year and beyond.

"Our young core all has the ability to hit .300-plus with 20-plus homers," said David Price. "Beni, Mookie, Bogey, Devers – they're special. They might not be as big as those guys, big in stature like they are, but they pack a punch. They're tough outs. Guys that hit a whole bunch of home runs, a lot of times there's some kind of hole. I don't know what the hole is with Mookie. I don't know what it is with Beni. Raf, maybe it's throwing fastballs over the top of his head, but he still got on top of 104 last year that was at his neck and took that pitch oppo. Their at-bats are far beyond their years. It's really special."

"Today's young players, they're different than when I came up. They're really good when they come up. They're stars their first year, their second year. That didn't happen before, not with this many people," noted Sox bench coach Ron Roenicke. "I think [the Red Sox core is] just so good and so talented, it doesn't take that learning curve of three or four years before they know they belong. They're producing."

The same is true of a bunch of New York's hitters. Judge (6-for-11, two walks and a homer), Stanton (6-for-12 with a double and triple), and Sanchez (4-for-13, two homers) all showcased their ability to make ferocious contact.

All of those players are already recognizable and formidable participants to the rivalry. Meanwhile, all six starters from the series – Chris Sale, David Price, and Rick Porcello on the Sox' side; Luis Severino, Masahiro Tanaka, and Sonny Gray for the Yankees – remain under team control for years to come, so long as Price doesn't opt out after this season. As such, the matchups that were so entertaining over these three games are going to be repeated dozens of times in years to come, familiarity likely to breed both respect and an element of competitive contempt.

As entertaining as the just-concluded three-game set at Fenway was, it represented just a beginning. With the Red Sox and Yankees brimming with top-to-bottom talent that promises a ferociously competitive competition for divisional supremacy, there's a lot more in store.

"Now it's on," said one member of the Red Sox organization in the wake of Wednesday's fight night. "Should be a fun year."

*** *The Boston Herald***

Familiarity with last year's Red Sox helps Alex Cora now

Adam Kurkjian

Every little bit helps.

When Alex Cora was serving as the Houston Astros bench coach during last year's American League Divisional Series against the Red Sox, he paid close attention to the players he would soon lead as manager.

Under Astros manager A.J. Hinch, Cora pored over scouting reports, looking for holes in the games of the players Houston would eventually vanquish in a 3-1 series win en route to a world championship.

When it came time for Cora to interview for the Sox manager opening shortly after, those tidbits came in handy.

"It gave me a head-start for the interview process. It was fresh eight games in a row (including the last four of the regular season)," Cora said. "I felt I had a pretty good idea about the team. (The Astros) do a good job out there scouting guys, like everybody else. It seems like last year everything was working for the Astros. Having that information firsthand, the timing was perfect from my end, being interviewed right away, right after that. It was fresh in my mind. I had some ideas if I get the job how I was going to improve a few things that were going on here."

Following the dismissal of previous manager John Farrell, Cora was introduced as the new skipper on Nov. 5. The new voice in the locker room shared his opinions with the Sox to a positive effect. When a player receives constructive criticism, it can sometimes be met with either skepticism or outright dismissal. But, according to Cora, that was not the case with him.

"They've been receptive. They want to get better," Cora said. "We get caught up on numbers and sabermetrics, and when you tell them this information, they love it because they want to get better."

It's hard to argue with the results. The Sox came into last night's game with the Orioles with a 10-2 record and a 2 1/2-game lead in the AL East. It's a small sample size, but the Sox are 5-0 in one-run games and have looked better at the plate in recent games to go along with strong starting pitching.

So whatever changes or suggestions Cora brought over from that series last season, consider them working for all parties involved.

"If (the players) do better, obviously for them it's a plus. Obviously," Cora said. "If they're doing better for us, it's amazing for the organization. So they've been great."

Red Sox notebook: Andrew Benintendi starting to come around

Adam Kurkjian

Maybe Alex Cora could feel a little affirmation in how he handled Andrew Benintendi the last few days, but the Red Sox manager did not speak on that.

Rather, Cora highlighted Benintendi's ability to remain patient at the plate when the left fielder isn't getting pitches he wants.

Even though Benintendi had begun to scratch out of a hitting slump to start the season, Cora sat his No. 2 hitter for Wednesday's loss to the Yankees. As has been the case so far in his young managerial career, Cora favored rest over rhythm, a move that can sometimes backfire.

But Benintendi went 2-for-5 with an RBI in Thursday's 6-3 win, and maintained his share of the American League lead in walks with his 12th in last night's 7-3 win over Baltimore. Before going 0-for-4 against the Orioles, Benintendi had been 5-for-13 in his last three games with two doubles, a triple and four RBI.

The walks, Cora said, sprout from how pitchers are attacking Benintendi and how he has stayed within himself.

“It seems like in spring training everything he saw was up and in and he was putting good swings on it,” Cora said. “From the get-go, everything’s down and away, down and away, away, away, away. He’s made some adjustments hitting the ball the other way. If it’s not where he feels where he’s going to do damage with it, he’s not swinging, which is great.

“We get caught up in the whole Mookie (Betts) being aggressive in the strike zone and all that stuff. That’s a by-product, too. If it’s not where you want it, just take it and take a walk. You’re not going to do damage with those pitches. He’s still hunting for a pitch in a certain area just like in spring training, but he hasn’t gotten too many of those.”

Wrist watch

The Sox had a scare Thursday when first baseman and No. 3 hitter Hanley Ramirez took a pitch off his right wrist and left the game in the first inning.

But, according to Cora, Ramirez, who came into last night’s game tied for the AL lead with 12 RBI, did not suffer anything too serious. An MRI exam came up negative, but the bruise did put Mitch Moreland in Ramirez’ spot against the O’s.

“He’s doing OK, day-to-day,” Cora said. “I called (Ramirez yesterday) morning. He knew he wasn’t going to play, so keeping him off his feet. Hopefully, I’m going to try and stay away from him and see where he’s at (today).”

No worries

Rafael Devers has not dealt with a ton of adversity in his short major league career. Heading into last night, he had gone hitless in his last three games for just the third time in 69 games over the past two seasons. He broke out last night by going 3-for-5 with a double and two runs scored.

Even before that, Cora had shrugged off Devers’ struggles.

“He’s 21, you know? He’s going to react. He’s going to look at the sky and slam the bat and all that, but we’re not concerned,” Cora said. “Actually impressed with the way he has handled this and played defense. The play (Thursday), that was a missile. And then he tried to throw to first and he gets two errors and all of a sudden. . . . But he’s been amazing defensively. He’s locked in. You can see, he’s always looking in the dugout. He’s looking at his card, which is a good sign for a kid.

“He’s an offensive player. He’s 21,” said Cora. “He’s not hitting for three days or whatever it is and he’s still doing what he’s supposed to do. So he’s OK.”

Wright on mound

Cora said pitcher Steven Wright (suspension/shoulder) threw five innings on Wednesday in Fort Myers and will throw again this weekend.

The manager also said Tyler Thornburg (shoulder) is throwing up to 94-95 mph and is in a more “aggressive program.”

As for Xander Bogaerts (ankle), Cora said the shortstop is feeling better and will “most likely” travel with the team on the nine-game road trip that starts Tuesday in Anaheim.

Eduardo Rodriguez, Eduardo Nunez carry Red Sox past Orioles

Adam Kurkjian

For most of the first inning last night, Baltimore Orioles starter Chris Tillman either missed the plate badly or served up tee-ball-quality strikes.

When a pitcher does that, anything but a crooked number on the scoreboard has to be considered a waste.

Eduardo Nunez, however, took full advantage.

The Red Sox second baseman crushed one over the Monster and out of Fenway Park for a three-run homer to set the table for a 7-3 win.

The victory improves the Sox to 11-2 on the season, matching their franchise-best start in 1918. They had no trouble scoring runs despite Hanley Ramirez missing the game due to a right wrist contusion suffered Thursday against the New York Yankees.

Each Sox batter reached base at least once, and Rafael Devers broke out of a mini-slump with a 3-for-5 night.

Sox starter Eduardo Rodriguez (1-0, 3.72 ERA) was solid in his second appearance of the season. He had a sloppy first inning when Adam Jones had a sacrifice fly to left that plated Trey Mancini. But Rodriguez limited the damage and struck out the side in the second.

He lasted six innings and allowed one earned run and five hits with eight strikeouts and two walks. He closed his night by striking out Chris Davis for the third time to a rousing ovation from the Fenway crowd.

“His cutter was a lot better (than his first start last Saturday). Elevated fastball, that should be a weapon for him,” Sox manager Alex Cora said of Rodriguez. “(It’s) something he didn’t use his last one. ... He keeps learning, but you can see the stuff is there. He’s electric.”

Tillman was wild from the opening pitch, walking Mookie Betts to start the first. After Andrew Benintendi grounded back to Tillman for the first out, Mitch Moreland, starting in place of Ramirez, singled to center. J.D. Martinez hit a sac fly to center to score Betts, and Devers followed with a double to left to move Moreland to third.

Nunez, who joked earlier in the day that he had yet to get a hit off a fastball all season, then brought everyone home with his blast off Tillman to give the Sox a 4-1 lead.

Tzu-Wei Lin and Betts both doubled in the second to push the lead to 5-1, but Tillman avoided more trouble when Martinez flied out to right with runners on first and third.

The opportunities continued for the Sox in the third, as Tillman loaded the bases and was mercifully pulled. But reliever Pedro Araujo only allowed one run off a passed ball that scored Devers.

Araujo kept the Sox at bay for his two innings of work, but they added a seventh run in the sixth when Moreland sprinted in from third on a wild pitch by Mike Wright Jr.

Heath Hembree came on in the seventh for the Sox and Manny Machado promptly pulled the Orioles to within 7-3 with a line-drive double to center.

The Orioles got no closer, as Joe Kelly and Matt Barnes closed things out.

Betts, who threw out Jones trying to stretch a single into a double in the fourth inning, had a nonchalant response to a question about the team’s hot start.

“We’re just taking it one game at a time,” Betts said. “It doesn’t even seem like we’re 11-2. It just seems like each day is a new day and new game.”

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 7, Orioles 3: Beat goes on for Boston against Baltimore

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- It's been an even century since the Red Sox enjoyed their only other start like this.

That fateful 1918 campaign served as a painful benchmark for four generations of Boston fans, the last World Series winners in franchise history until a long-awaited breakthrough in 2004.

But here the Red Sox sit with 11 wins in their first 13 games yet again, this time courtesy of a 7-3 decision over the Orioles on Friday night at Fenway Park.

Eduardo Nuñez opened things up with a three-run homer in the bottom of the first inning and starting pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez turned in six strong innings as Boston moved to 11-2 on the year. Rafael Devers added three hits and Tzu-Wei Lin reached base three times in his 2018 debut, as a Red Sox lineup without Hanley Ramirez (right wrist) and Xander Bogaerts (left ankle) still managed to score at least six runs for the sixth straight game.

"We have so many good players," Nuñez said. "We have a deep lineup. It's not just about one guy."

Adam Jones lifted a sacrifice fly to left to give Baltimore a 1-0 edge in the top of the first, one that would last all of six batters in the bottom half. J.D. Martinez answered with a sacrifice fly of his own to center before Nuñez did the night's real damage, driving a three-run homer to the Monster Seats that made it 4-1. Chris Tillman threw only half of his 24 pitches in the inning for strikes, a harbinger of the trouble to come for the Orioles starter.

"(Nuñez) was joking before the game – he hasn't had a hit on a fastball the whole season," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "He was able to turn on one. That was good to see."

Back-to-back doubles by Lin and Mookie Betts in the second and a passed ball that allowed Devers to score in the third gave Boston two more single runs, with Tillman on the wrong end of a 6-1 deficit and giving way to Pedro Araujo. Mike Wright Jr. gifted the Red Sox another run with a wild pitch in the sixth, and three Boston relievers managed to combine for the last nine outs.

"Our starters have been huge for us," Nuñez said. "They just keep the game in line all the time. There's a great opportunity for the offense to pick it up a little bit."

Rodriguez improved considerably from his season debut against Tampa Bay on Sunday, recording seven more outs while using just a dozen more pitches. He became the first Boston starter to crack the 100-pitch mark, firing a cut-fastball on his 104th to freeze Chris Davis for a strikeout looking that ended the sixth. Rodriguez fanned eight against two walks and scattered five hits, lowering the earned-run average for Red Sox starters to a tidy 1.97.

"Everybody is always telling you something every time you start about who you're facing," Rodriguez said. "You just go ask them and they tell you all the time, especially these veteran guys over here. I take advantage every time I go out there and pitch."

Rodriguez struck out the side in the second and worked a 1-2-3 fifth before sputtering a bit in the sixth. Baltimore put two on with two outs for Davis, the left-handed slugger against the lone left-handed pitcher Boston wanted to use on this particular night. Rodriguez exceeded the 99 pitches thrown by Rick Porcello the previous evening in a 6-3 win over the Yankees, eventually turning things over to Heath Hembree, Joe Kelly and Matt Barnes.

“It was where they were in the lineup,” Cora said. “Chris was his last hitter. We thought the matchup was good for us.”

“It depends on who we’re facing,” Rodriguez said. “They swing a lot. I was trying to stay around the plate.”

Rediscovered changeup has been key for Porcello

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Carlos Beltran, a veteran of 20 big-league seasons and 11,031 plate appearances, had picked up on something.

Rick Porcello’s changeup had gone missing.

The Houston Astros were set for an American League Division Series matchup with the Red Sox last season, and Porcello had been named the Game 4 starter. The right-hander needed 70 pitches to complete just three innings, and a 5-4 defeat eliminated Boston from the playoffs.

Beltran and the Astros eventually went on to capture the World Series, and Porcello was left to ponder a 2017 season in which he finished among the league leaders in all the wrong categories. The 38 home runs he allowed were tops in baseball, and the 236 hits piled up by the opposition ranked second. Porcello entered spring training looking for a fresh start under Alex Cora, who was hired from Houston to serve as the new Red Sox manager.

“[Beltran] felt that the velocity was there, the movement was there, but that pitch made him a different pitcher compared to previous years,” Cora said. “He pitched well against us. He battled in Game [Four]. But I think the changeup is the difference-maker compared to last year.”

Porcello threw changeups on a career-low 8.3 percent of his offerings in 2017. He’s more than doubled that through three starts this season, using the changeup a career-high 17.4 percent of the time while allowing just 14 hits and walking one through 19 2/3 innings. The 2016 A.L. Cy Young Award winner was brilliant on Thursday night against the Yankees, turning in seven scoreless frames of two-hit ball in a 6-3 victory.

“I’m contributing to the team in a positive way,” Porcello said. “That’s the biggest thing. I’m three starts in, we’re 12 games in — a lot of baseball to be played. But definitely want to continue to build off the start.”

One of Porcello’s six strikeouts against New York came in the sixth inning, as he returned to the mound after waiting out a 45-minute rain delay. Porcello recorded the inning’s first two outs before falling behind, 2-and-1, to Yankees outfielder Brett Gardner. Catcher Sandy Leon called for back-to-back changeups, and Gardner swung through both of them to end the inning.

“The changeup felt real good,” Porcello said. “Everything felt good. Sandy called a hell of a game. I can’t say enough about the pitch mix he was putting down back there.”

It’s not the first time Cora has consulted a prior scouting report to help his current players. Porcello’s more diversified mix and the increased frequency of swings at pitches in the strike zone by Mookie Betts has helped both players enjoy a strong opening two weeks to the season. Both topics were broached in early conversations between Cora and the players in question after he was formally hired at the 47th Boston manager in November.

“Having that information first-hand, the timing was perfect for my interview right away right after that,” Cora said. “It was fresh in my mind. I had some ideas how, if I got the job, I was going to improve a few things that were going on here.”

Betts said after Tuesday's 14-1 win over the Yankees that Cora "must really pay attention to detail" to break down each player's strengths and weaknesses so thoroughly. Cora said his tweaks in philosophy through 12 games have been well received by members of his roster.

"They want to get better," Cora said. "If they get better, for them, it's a plus obviously. If they're doing better for us, it's amazing for the organization. They've been great."

*** *MassLive.com***

Red Sox convert Trey Ball, 7th pick in 2013 draft, to reliever where 'velocity plays up from left side'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- The Red Sox have converted Trey Ball from a starter to a reliever and he's dominating in his new role.

Ball, the seventh-overall pick in the 2013 draft, has hurled 6 2/3 scoreless innings over three relief outings for Double-A Portland. He has allowed two hits and two walks while striking out six.

Watch out. He potentially could help Boston later on this year if he continues to progress and dominate.

The 6-foot-6, 185-pound lefty hurled 2 1/3 scoreless innings last night to earn a hold. He threw 26 of his 33 pitches for strikes. He has thrown 71 percent strikes over his three appearances. He hurled 2 innings in each of his other two appearances.

"He's left-handed so that's obviously an advantage," said Brian Bannister, Red Sox vice president of pitching development and assistant pitching coach. "And then he's developed a good cutter-slider with some power to it. Out of the pen he throws a little harder. He starts hitting those 92, 93, 94 velos, which plays up from the left side.

"But he really has just been aggressive in that role," Bannister added. "I think we've all seen him kind of thrive in it. Some guys like to have their stuff play up, they like to be out there more often. And I think it's a role he can do really well in."

He also pitched in relief during the Arizona Fall League in 2016.

Ball, who turns 24 on June 27, went 7-12 with a 5.27 ERA, 1.75 WHIP and .322 batting average against in 25 outings (24 starts) for Portland last year.

Red Sox vice president of player development Ben Crockett and minor league pitching coordinator Ralph Treuel made the decision to move him to the bullpen.

"(They) felt like it was best for him based on being around him last year," Bannister said. "And so far I think he's rose to the challenge.

"I think above all, it lets his natural athleticism shine through," Bannister added. "He was always a really good athlete. And I think he's more athletic in that role."

Ball was being scouted both as an outfielder and pitcher before the 2013 draft.

"Today's game, the lines between starters and relievers are getting so blurred," Bannister said. "It's not what it once was. I mean, you can come up here and have a lot of success pitching in multiple types of roles."

Alex Cora encouraged by Eduardo Rodriguez's strong start: 'You can see that the stuff is there'

Conor Ryan

BOSTON -- When it comes to Eduardo Rodriguez, it's never been a question of talent.

A deceptive southpaw with plenty of swing-and-miss offerings in his pitching arsenal, Rodriguez has the stuff to be a top-of-the-rotation starter year in and year out.

But when it comes to efficiency -- well, that can be a different story.

Rodriguez's so-so season debut on April 8 against the Rays was a bit of a perfect storm for the lefty -- who threw 92 pitches over just 3 2/3 innings of work.

Not offering much in terms of his secondary pitches limited Rodriguez's ability to put away hitters, but Alex Cora was also quick to laud Tampa's lineup for its ability to extend at-bats with its stingy play at the plate.

"I think, against the Rays, if I'm not mistaken, (there were) 15 two-strike foul balls," Cora said. "That's a credit to their offense. ... I don't think he was that bad in the first (start). The only thing is that he was a one-pitch pitcher, so it was tough for him to be efficient."

Whereas just about everything went south for Rodriguez in his season debut, plenty of factors swung his way Friday in his second start against the Baltimore Orioles.

In full command of both his slider and cutter, Rodriguez capitalized against an Orioles lineup that's much more willing to take its hacks at the plate, holding Baltimore to one run over six innings of work and fanning eight in what was a 7-3 win for Boston at Fenway Park.

"This is a different offense," Cora said of Baltimore. "They hit for power, but at the same time, they hit out of the zone and they swing and miss. But that's what we want. I want him to attack. ... He's still a work in progress.

"He's still young, although he's been in the big leagues for awhile. He keeps learning, but you can see that the stuff is there. He's electric."

Rodriguez -- who has now racked up 15 strikeouts over 9 2/3 innings of work this year -- has now surrendered one or fewer runs in 27 of his 67 career starts (40.3 percent).

While the first batter Rodriguez faced Friday, Trey Mancini, singled to lead off the game and came around to score, none of the remaining 23 Orioles that stepped to the dish against Rodriguez even reached second base.

"His cutter was a lot better, elevated fast balls," Cora said. "I think that should be a weapon for him. Something that he didn't use in his last (start). Obviously, it didn't start the way we wanted -- 0-2, fastball down and away, Mancini puts the ball in play. But overall, a lot better than the first one."

Mixing in his cutter and slider obviously helped keep Baltimore off balance Friday, but Cora also credited his starter for spotting his pitches to keep the Orioles guessing -- namely his fastball.

"Front door to lefties. Back door to righties," Cora said of Rodriguez's stuff. "But they become a lot better when he's able to elevate and have them looking somewhere else. That's the key with him. Obviously, he has the changeup.

"We didn't throw too many today. But when he's able to expand up and then being able to dot that back door cutter. It's tough to hit. You can't cover both sides of the plate with that."

Eduardo Rodriguez bounces back with quality start, Boston Red Sox strike early in win over Orioles

Conor Ryan

BOSTON -- Eduardo Rodriguez's first start of the 2018 season might as well have been a microcosm of his career.

The potential? Certainly there. But the execution? Certainly lacking.

That outing against the Rays on April 8 saw Rodriguez fan seven batters and allow three runs -- a strong stat line if not for the duration (3.2 IP) and workload (92 pitches).

"He was a one-pitch pitcher today," Cora said of Rodriguez after the game.

Such wasn't the case in Rodriguez's second start of the year Friday night.

Mixing in his slider, Rodriguez kept the Baltimore Orioles off balance for most of the night -- surrendering just one run over six innings and striking out eight en route to a 7-3 win for Boston at Fenway Park.

Rodriguez became the first Red Sox starter to log over 100 pitches in an outing this season, finishing with 104 to secure his first win of the season.

While Rodriguez held his own on the mount, Boston's lineup struck early -- with Eduardo Nunez connecting on his second home run of the year, a three-run bomb, to push the Red Sox out to a 4-1 lead through one inning of play.

Boston's bats may have left 11 runners on base Friday, but every Sox player in the order reached base at least once.

With the win, the Red Sox improve to 11-2 on the season -- matching the 1918 squad for the best start in franchise history through 13 games.

The rust still appeared evident on Rodriguez following a 19-pitch first inning -- culminating in a sac fly from Adam Jones to give the Orioles the early lead.

That was ultimately the most that Baltimore mustered against the Sox southpaw, as Rodriguez tossed five shutout innings and retired 13 of the next 15 batters he faced in a bounce-back effort.

As Rodriguez settled in on the mound, Boston's bats gave him some breathing room.

A four-run first inning put the Red Sox ahead for good, with J.D. Martinez knotting the contest at 1-1 off a sac fly out to center field.

Nunez provided the big blow, taking a high fastball from Orioles starter Chris Tillman and golfing it into the Monster Seats for his three-run blast. Nunez, who exited Thursday's contest against the Yankees due to his lingering knee issues, reached base three times against Baltimore.

Boston tacked on runs in the second and third inning off of an RBI double from Mookie Betts and a passed ball from Orioles reliever Pedro Araujo, while a wild pitch from Mike Wright Jr. allowed Mitch Moreland to cross home from third for the Red Sox' seventh run of the game in the bottom of the sixth.

Tillman -- winless in his last 26 appearances dating back to May 7, 2017 -- labored against Boston's batting order, surrendering seven hits and six earned runs over just two innings of work.

Baltimore closed out its scoring in the top of the seventh, with Manny Machado drilling a hanging slider from Heath Hembree into deep center field for a two-run double.

Hitless in his last three games, Rafael Devers got back on track Friday, finishing 3-for-5 at the plate with a double and two runs scored.

The Red Sox will be back at it Saturday, with Hector Velazquez set to take the hill for the 1:05 p.m. start.

Drew Pomeranz rehab start: Boston Red Sox LHP allows 2 runs in 5.1 innings

Christopher Smith

Red Sox left-handed starter Drew Pomeranz allowed two runs, both earned, in 5 1/3 innings during a rehab start this evening for Double-A Portland against Binghamton.

He potentially could rejoin Boston's rotation next week in Anaheim or Oakland.

He allowed four hits (one homer), three walks and struck out four. He threw 86 pitches (53 for strikes). That's 62 percent for strikes.

He faced Tim Tebow twice. He struck him out looking in the second inning and got him to ground into a double play during the fourth inning.

Red Sox honor Boston Marathon bombing victims, survivors with pregame ceremony at Fenway

Conor Ryan

BOSTON -- With the five-year anniversary of the 2013 Boston Marathon days away, the Boston Red Sox held a pregame ceremony prior to Friday's matchup with the Baltimore Orioles -- paying tribute to both the victims and survivors of the bombings and the subsequent events that struck the city on April 15-19, 2013.

As part of the ceremony, the families of victims Martin Richard, Lingzi Lu, Sean Collier, Krystle Campbell and D.J. Simmonds were honored on the field at Fenway Park -- walking from deep center field to the mound, receiving standing ovations along the way.

Other individuals impacted by the marathon bombings -- including survivors Heather Abbott, Patrick Downes, Jess Kensky, Sydney Corcoran, Gillian Reny, Erika Brannock, Jeff Bauman and many others were also recognized on the field.

In addition, a moment of silence was held in memory of fallen Yarmouth police officer Sean Gannon, who was killed in the line of duty Thursday.

From Friday through Sunday, the Red Sox Foundation 50/50 raffle will be donated to 11 different Marathon-related charities -- including the Martin Richard Foundation, the Krystle Campbell Memorial Fund, the Officer Sean A. Collier Memorial Fund, the Lingzi Foundation and other organizations.

The Red Sox also announced the start of a weekend-long series of charitable endeavors as part of One Boston Day -- held on April 15 as a "celebration of the resiliency, generosity and strength of the people that make Boston a great city."

Check out the pregame ceremony and tribute in the video above.

Wright: Knuckleballer pitches 5 innings in extend spring training game, nearing rehab assignment

Christopher Smith

BOSTON -- Steven Wright (knee) pitched 5 innings in an extended spring training game in Fort Myers on Wednesday.

He'll pitch in another extended spring training game, then the Red Sox will decide if he's ready for a rehab assignment.

The knuckleballer is returning from season-ending knee surgery last May.

"He's making strides," manager Alex Cora said. "He's been covering first. He's been doing everything. It's not controlled. It's just a regular game."

Wright still must serve a 15-game suspension when activated from the DL for violating MLB's domestic violence policy. He'd need to return to Fort Myers once the suspension goes into effect and work out there until the final six games of the suspension.

He's allowed to make a rehab start (or starts) during the final six games of the suspension.

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

Red Sox Journal: Hanley Ramirez sits out series opener

Jennifer Toland

BOSTON — As expected, Hanley Ramirez was not in the lineup when the Red Sox opened a four-game series against the Baltimore Orioles on Friday night at Fenway Park.

In the first inning of Thursday night's game against the Yankees, Ramirez was hit by a pitch on the right wrist. He came out of the game. X-rays were negative and Ramirez was diagnosed with a bruise.

"He's doing OK," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "[He's] day to day. I called him this morning. He knew he wasn't going to play, so he was keeping off his feet. We'll see where he's at [Saturday]."

Mitch Moreland, who replaced Ramirez as a pinch-runner on Thursday, made his fifth start of the year at first base in place of Ramirez against the Orioles. He batted third in the order.

Ramirez, of course, is off to a terrific start with a .357 batting average, two home runs and 12 RBI, and he has hit safely in nine straight games with an at-bat.

He has 13 career home runs against Baltimore, including four last season, so the Red Sox would like to have his bat in the order this weekend.

Last season, Xander Bogaerts also suffered a wrist injury after being hit by a pitch and it affected him at the plate the second half of the season. Considering that, Cora was asked if there was any extra concern regarding Ramirez.

"There's always a concern when you talk about the hands, the fingers," Cora said. "Those are your tools; they make you who you are. Hopefully, there's nothing major there and he'll be fine mentally and he'll be able to swing the bat the way he's been doing so far."

Benintendi heating up

Andrew Benintendi shares the A.L. lead in walks (11) with the Yankees' Aaron Judge.

"If it's not where he feels he's going to do damage with it," Cora said, "he's not swinging, which is great. If it's not where you want it, take it and take a walk."

Benintendi leads the A.L. with five multi-walk games.

Benintendi, who finished second in the 2017 A.L. Rookie of the Year voting, began this season 0-for-13 with two walks, but, entering Friday's game, had since gone 9-for-26 with nine walks and hit safely in six of his last seven games.

"He's done a good job," Cora said.

Pomeranz makes rehab start

Left-hander Drew Pomeranz, who began the season on the 10-day disabled list with a left forearm flexor strain, made his second rehab start on Friday for Double-A Portland.

In their home opener, the Sea Dogs and Pomeranz faced the Binghamton Rumble Ponies and Tim Tebow. The 2007 Heisman Trophy winner entered the game batting .167 in five games for Binghamton.

Pomeranz struck out Tebow in the second inning.

Pomeranz threw 86 pitches in 5 1/3 innings. He gave up four hits, including a home run, and two earned runs, walked three and struck out four. He exited the game with the Sea Dogs up, 4-2.

In his first rehab start on April 8 for Triple-A Pawtucket, Pomeranz threw 85 pitches in 4 1/3 innings and allowed two hits, two runs and six walks.

Cora said injured right-handers Steven Wright (left knee) and Tyler Thornburg (right shoulder) each threw Wednesday in Fort Myers.

Wright pitched five innings and "felt OK," Cora said. "He's making strides." Thornburg's fastball velocity is up to 94-95, Cora said, adding "his off-speed command is not there. He's still struggling with that, but he's in a more aggressive program."

Bomb victims honored

In a pregame ceremony, the Red Sox commemorated the five-year anniversary of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing while honoring many survivors of that horrific day (April 15, 2013) as well as the families of those who lost their lives, Martin Richard, Krystle Campbell, Lingzi Lu and Sean Collier. ... Also before the game, there was a moment of silence for Yarmouth, Mass., police officer Sean Gannon, who was fatally shot on Thursday afternoon.

****Redsox.com***

Red-hot Sox go to 11-2 thanks to E-Rod (8 K's)

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Looking ready to do his share for a stacked starting rotation, Eduardo Rodriguez pitched the red-hot Red Sox to a 7-3 victory over the Orioles on Friday night at Fenway Park.

The 25-year-old lefty, who has always been touted for his potential, mixed his arsenal nicely in his second start since coming off the disabled list, allowing one run while striking out eight over six innings.

Rodriguez gave up a run in the first and then stifled the Birds the rest of the way, finishing his outing by freezing Chris Davis on a cutter to end the sixth inning.

"Everything was working for me today," Rodriguez said. "The cutter, the slider, the changeup. Everything was pretty good."

If you're looking for the biggest reason the Sox are off to an 11-2 start for the first time since 1918, just focus on the starting rotation, which is now 8-1 with a 1.97 ERA.

"Yeah, they're just throwing up zeros and we just have to go score a couple of runs," right fielder Mookie Betts said. "And with our offense, we shouldn't have too many troubles scoring a couple of runs."

Of late, the starting pitchers have been able to work from ahead. That was again the case in this one, as Eduardo Nunez belted a three-run homer deep into the Green Monster seats in the bottom of the first to pin the Orioles and starter Chris Tillman into a 4-1 hole.

Nunez's second homer of the season was a lot less strenuous than his first -- an inside-the-parker at Tropicana Field on Opening Day.

"I hit a homer, and didn't have to run 100 percent to home plate, that feels better," Nunez said.

The defeat extended Tillman's winless streak to 21 starts.

By contrast, Rodriguez became the sixth different starter to win a game for the Sox this season, and Drew Pomeranz -- who won 17 games last year -- could return by next week.

"He got in a groove," Orioles catcher Caleb Joseph said of Rodriguez. "He's done it to us before. Really using that back-door cutter this time, that was a nice pitch. It looks like he's been learning that from David [Price]."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Devers busts out: Third baseman Rafael Devers had been in an 0-for-12 drought during the past three games when he stepped to the plate in the bottom of the first with two outs. He smoked a 1-1 fastball down the line in left for a two-out double that set up the three-run shot by Nunez. Devers went 3-for-5 on the night.

"Devers going the other way," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We talked about him struggling before the game. All of a sudden, he stays back, drives a ball the other way."

SOUND SMART

The Red Sox are making the big inning habitual. They've had a single inning of four-plus runs in each of the past six games. They've also scored six-plus runs in each of the past six games. And in those six games, the Sox have outscored their opponents, 52-27.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

In one of the quirkiest plays you'll ever see, Adam Jones led off the top of the fourth with a bloop down the line and into short right field that first baseman Mitch Moreland lost track of. The ball bounced in fair territory and then caromed all the way to the tarp. Rather than giving up on the play and assuming it was a dead ball, Betts pulled the ball out from the back part of the tarp and fired to second, where he nailed Jones on a close play.

Orioles manager Buck Showalter challenged the play because he felt the ball was lodged in the tarp, which would have made it a dead ball. The replay official couldn't definitively determine that the ball was lodged behind or under canvas on the tarp. The call stood, and the Red Sox had their out.

"If it went in between, obviously I wouldn't be able to get to it," Betts said. "Because it was just sitting up [on the tarp], I guess my instinct was just to grab it and make a play and ask questions later."

UP NEXT

After turning in a strong start for the Red Sox on April 1 (5 2/3 innings, one run) in a win over the Rays, Hector Velazquez is back in the rotation to face the Orioles on Saturday. The righty is making his second

career start at Fenway. Alex Cobb will be on the hill for the Orioles, making his Baltimore debut. First pitch is scheduled for 1:05 p.m. ET.

Nunez hits 3-run HR in 1st as Sox strike early

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Eduardo Nunez was poking fun at himself on Friday afternoon, noting he had only one hit off a fastball in the first 11 games of the season.

But it was Nunez who turned on heat at the most opportune time in Friday night's 7-3 victory over the Orioles, clocking a three-run homer against struggling Orioles right-hander Chris Tillman with two outs in the bottom of the first.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

Just like that, the Red Sox had a 4-1 lead on a night they would improve to 11-2 for the first time since 1918.

"I just hit one fastball for a base hit this year [before Friday], and it was against Tampa Bay on Sunday," Nunez said. "And this was my second one. All the hitting this year for base hits were a slider or a changeup."

As an offense, the Red Sox have made it a habit to jump out quick of late. In their past three wins, they've held a lead of at least four runs by the third inning.

It is a good way to play when you have a starting rotation that is 8-1 with a 1.97 ERA.

"Yeah, our starting has been huge for us," Nunez said. "They just keep the game in line all the time so there's a great opportunity for the offense to pick it up a little bit."

Perhaps overshadowed a bit by the stellar starting pitching, the offense has been prodigious for the Red Sox of late.

Over the past six games, they've outscored the opponent, 52-27. During that same span, they've scored six runs or more in each game.

"They keep grinding at-bats," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We don't swing and miss too much. It actually looks like we can do damage with two strikes. They're still hunting for good pitches, trying to stay off the edges of the strike zone."

It seems to be someone different each night coming up with the big hit. This time it was Nunez, who belted his second homer of the season, but first that left the park. Who could forget Nunez roaring around the bases at Tropicana Field with that inside-the-park homer on Opening Day?

"That feels good, I hit a homer and didn't have to run 100 percent to home plate," Nunez said. "That feels better."

Though not necessarily known for his power, Nunez clubbed eight homers in 38 games with the Red Sox in 2017 after being acquired in a trade with the Giants in July.

Nunez has been holding down second base for the Red Sox with Dustin Pedroia on the disabled list. Pedroia is expected to be out until at least next month.

The Red Sox re-signed Nunez to a one-year contract on Feb. 18. The deal includes a player option for next season.

Wright, Thornburg making progress rehabbing

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- With the pitching staff nearly back to full strength for the Red Sox, the two rehabbing players to keep an eye on are knuckleballer Steven Wright and reliever Tyler Thornburg.

Both have been making solid progress, though there's no firm date on when they will re-join the Red Sox.

[View Full Game Coverage](#)

Wright underwent a cartilage restoration procedure on his left knee 11 months ago.

"With Steven, he pitched [extended Spring Training], I want to say two days ago," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "He felt OK. He's making strides. He went five innings. His next one is this weekend, still in Fort Myers. He's been covering first. He's been doing everything. It's not controlled. It's just a regular game. After that one we'll probably make a decision. If he comes out well, then he'll go to a rehab assignment, and we'll go from there."

One thing to note is this: While Wright could start a Minor League rehab assignment, he must serve a 15-game suspension once the Red Sox activate him for violating terms of Major League Baseball's Domestic Violence Policy.

Wright is also able to resume a Minor League rehab assignment during the final six games of his suspension, per rules of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

At this stage, Wright appears more likely to be used as a reliever when he returns to the Red Sox. The rotation already has Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello and Eduardo Rodriguez, and Drew Pomeranz could be back by next week.

Thornburg could give the bullpen a big boost when he returns. There has been some inconsistency with Cora's setup crew.

"Thornburg pitched two days ago again [in extended spring]," Cora said. "Velocity is way up. Still 94-95. Offspeed command is not there. He's still struggling with that. But he's in a more aggressive program. I want to say he was supposed to pitch today or [Saturday]. He's been aggressive this week. There's a lot of workload. He wanted to, and he felt comfortable with it."

Pomeranz stretched to 86 pitches

In what might have been the last start of his Minor League rehab assignment, Pomeranz threw 5 1/3 innings at Double-A Portland on Friday, allowing four hits and two runs over 5 1/3 innings. Facing Binghamton, Pomeranz walked three and struck out four. He threw 86 pitches, 53 of them for strikes.

Pomeranz had a career year for the Red Sox last season, going 17-6 with a 3.32 ERA. He suffered a mild flexor strain in his left forearm in the second inning of his first Grapefruit League start on March 2.

Once Pomeranz returns, he joins a rotation that already includes a strong group of Sale, Price, Porcello and Rodriguez.

Hanley still day to day

As expected, Hanley Ramirez was not in the lineup the day after he was belted on the right wrist by a fastball from Yankees righty Sonny Gray.

There's a chance Ramirez -- who has a contusion -- could be back by Saturday.

"There's always a concern when you're talking about hands, fingers. Those are your tools," Cora said. "Those are what make you who you are. We know about his history and where he's at mentally. Hopefully, it's something that there's nothing major there, he'll be fine mentally and he can continue to swing the bat the way he's been doing so far."

Lin will get a look

Brock Holt played the first three games at shortstop after Xander Bogaerts was placed on the disabled list. But Tzu-Wei Lin is getting a look there on both Friday and Saturday.

Holt, who was out of the lineup on Friday, will play second on Saturday and Eduardo Nunez will take a rest.

"Like I said, it's matchups and who's on the mound for us and all that stuff. We're comfortable with Brock when he's playing short. We feel like our analytic department is putting guys in the right spot defensively, and they have to make the routine play," Cora said. "We're not asking them to be someone they're not. Brock can make the routine play. He can turn the double play and he puts [together] a good at-bat. We'll see how it goes. It's two games for Lin, go out there and catch the ball and have good at-bats."

****WEEI.com***

Joe Kelly gets standing ovation from Fenway Park crowd

Rob Bradford

It has been one of the most remarkable two-week turnarounds in recent Red Sox history.

This has nothing to do with wins and losses, or playing good or bad. The story of Joe Kelly's past 15 days is all about public perception.

Flash back to March 29 at Tropicana Field, when Kelly four-run implosion -- during which he retired just one batter -- paved the way for the Red Sox' Opening Day loss. In the days that followed there wasn't a player who was catching more slings and arrows from the New England fandom than the relief pitcher.

Then we had Friday night.

Two days after Kelly had hit Yankees designated hitter Tyler Austin, waving him on to fight just in front of the mound before briefly taking Austin down to the ground, the relief pitcher officially completed a turnaround for the ages.

Upon coming in to pitch what seemed like a seemingly innocuous eighth inning -- with the Red Sox holding a four-run lead -- Kelly was greeted with a standing ovation from the Fenway Park crowd. The "Joe Kelly Fight Club" t-shirts were one thing, but this was next level.

"That standing O was freaking badass," Kelly told WEEI.com. "It got me hyped. It's one of those moments I will remember forever."

Kelly went on to pitch a perfect inning, striking out Adam Jones before getting ground outs from Pedro Alvarez and Chris Davis to ground out.

"I thought it was awesome," said Red Sox reliever Matt Barnes. "I told the guys out there in the bullpen, 'That's sick!' Stuff like that gets you fired up. I thought it was cool."

Kelly is still awaiting word on his appeal regarding the six-game suspension Major League Baseball handed down for his role in Wednesday night's brawl.

Red Sox 7, Orioles 3: This team has officially separated itself

Rob Bradford

Well, we still haven't seen the Blue Jays.

It was no secret that everyone who followed the great game of baseball knew the Red Sox and Yankees were almost certainly going to be atop the American League East, with a sizable drop-off to a third-place team. Fair.

But after watching New York come to town for three games, and then getting a glimpse of the Orioles Friday night, Alex Cora's team has to be considered king of the early-season hill without much debate. That was cemented thanks to the Red Sox' 11th win in 13 tries this season, a 7-3 decision over Buck Showalter and Co. in the first of a four-game set. (For a complete recap, [click here](#).)

The Yankees are legitimate. But when you match up what they've delivered thus far - from the top of the rosters to the bottom - the Red Sox would seem to clearly have an edge. Better starting pitching. Deeper lineup. More trustworthy closer. And New York's one perceived advantage, the set-up men, haven't been much more reliable than what the Sox have carted out.

That leads us to what the Orioles are selling.

Perhaps this game wasn't a fair representation considering they were starting a pitcher, Chris Tillman, who was winless in his last 20 starts. Make that 21 after allowing six runs over two innings.

Like Toronto, Baltimore's rotation isn't horrific, as is evident by the final three starters of the series -- Alex Cobb, Dylan Bundy and Andrew Cashner. Then throw in Kevin Gausman and you have at least a chance to win in four of the five spots. The Orioles also are bringing back an offense that has always been difficult to deal with (although they did come in with the third-lowest batting average in the American League at just .216).

Still, while these teams can be good, the Red Sox are clearly -- as of now -- better.

Even without two of their hottest hitters, Xander Bogaerts and Hanley Ramirez, the Red Sox offense continued to keep the line moving. No team in baseball has scored more runs over the past six games than the Sox, having now totaled 52 since April 7.

It was, however the presence of Eduardo Rodriguez that truly defined how the Red Sox may be separating themselves.

After a lackluster first outing, the lefty came back to give up just one run over six innings, striking out eight along the way. Rodriguez punctuated his night by fanning Chris Davis with the starter's 104th pitch of the night (marking the first time a Red Sox starter had thrown more than 99 pitches).

This version of Rodriguez represents something none of the other American League clubs can come close to -- a bottom-of-the-rotation pitcher who has the capability to live in the rarified air of the top of most rotations. And if it does continue, then the only mystery will be the effectiveness of a pitcher who won 17 games a year ago, Drew Pomeranz.

Maybe once we see the Blue Jays the conversation will change. They are, after all, 9-5 after beating Cleveland Friday night. Yet while a nice surprise, comparing them to what we've witnessed with the Red Sox seems somewhat of a reach.

Things can change in a hurry. Another David Price injury. Nobody steps up to become Craig Kimbrel's set-up man. There are avenues to stumbling upon a downturn.

As we sit here, however, it's the Red Sox in this division and then everybody else.

- With their 11th win in 13 games, the Red Sox matched their best 13-game start in franchise history (also 1918).

- The Red Sox starting pitchers are 8-1 with a 1.97 ERA, having allowed one or no runs in 10 of 13 starts this season, and three runs or fewer in all but one outing.

Drew Pomeranz pitches well in showdown with Tim Tebow, Rumble Ponies

Rob Bradford

Drew Pomeranz said earlier in the week that his goal Friday was to not worry about anything other than pitching. The strategy seemed to work.

The lefty was still regretting how he approached his previous rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket, suggesting worries about his flexor tendon and rusty mechanics had gotten the better of him. But this time, while pitching for Double-A Portland, Pomeranz appeared to look more like the pitcher who won 17 games in 2017.

Pomeranz threw 86 pitches (56 strikes) over 5 1/3 innings, allowing two runs on four hits. The lefty did walk three while striking out four.

The two runs off of the lefty came via a two-run homer off the bat of Binghamton's Peter Alonso in the third inning.

Also of note was that Pomeranz faced the Rumble Ponies' Tim Tebow twice, striking out the outfielder in his first at-bat, while inducing a double-play grounder the second time around.

The starter's fastball velocity was improved from his last outing, sitting between 88-90 mph, with Pomeranz's curveball sitting as his best pitch.

The expectation is that Pomeranz will rejoin the Red Sox' rotation on the team's upcoming West Coast road trip.

David Price shows no ill effects from numbness, will start Tuesday for Red Sox

John Tomase

David Price let 'er rip during a long-toss session on Thursday afternoon and it was clear to observers he'd be fine to make his next start. Price didn't even need the reassurance.

Hours after leaving a 10-7 loss to the Yankees after just one inning with numbness in his left hand, Price was confident he'd be fine. The Red Sox announced after Thursday's 6-3 victory that Price will make his next start on Tuesday when the Red Sox open a series in Anaheim.

"I knew that (Thursday) morning whenever I woke up," Price said. "I knew it last night before I went to sleep. There was never any thought in my mind that last year reoccurred or anything like that. My hand was just literally numb and I couldn't feel it."

Red Sox fans understandably held their breath when Price departed. An elbow injury last year limited him to 11 starts and the Red Sox worked hard all spring to slowly ramp up his workload so he'd be ready to go this season. He was outstanding in his first two starts, throwing 14 shutout innings, but he allowed four runs on Wednesday.

Price offered to pitch out of the bullpen this weekend, but manager Alex Cora decided to push him back a day from his scheduled turn on Monday, because the weather on Patriots Day is supposed to be wretched.

"I told him I was fine for Monday or I could come back on Saturday or Sunday, go sit in the pen if needed," Price said. "I told him I'd go out there any one. He thought Tuesday would be better weather-wise. Monday looks really bad right now, so Tuesday is what he went with."

So what happened on Wednesday? Price isn't sure. He noted that he has always had circulatory issues in the cold.

"I talked to the doctors last night," he said. "They talked about a couple different things that we could try. It's something I've always had, even whenever I was a little kid. My hands and my feet are two things that are always cold. Whenever it's cold outside, it intensifies that."

Price is 1-1 with a 2.40 ERA in three starts.

****NBC Sports Boston***

Drellich: Don't downplay Red Sox victories because of calendar, opponents

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — They keep banking 'em.

Any discussion of the Red Sox' fast start, 11-2 now, will automatically invite some level of skepticism because of the calendar. Cold weather, bad opponents, a long schedule ahead. All true.

Those banked wins add up, though. They don't go away. If the first-place Sox hit a rough stretch — when they hit a rough stretch, rather — the early W's accumulated will help them keep the division lead. They'll have a cushion that most other teams won't. Already, the rest of the American League East is looking up. The Yankees have to deal with a five-game deficit in the loss column. It's too early, perhaps, for the teams to think along these lines. But it's never, ever too early to value separation.

The most exciting moment of Friday night's 7-3 win over the Orioles may have been the ovation Joe Kelly got in the seventh inning, pitching for the first time since he was given his suspension (which remains unserved as he appeals). Fenway Park had a healthy crowd size, but coming off a charged Yankees series that wrapped Thursday, the juice just wasn't there against a mediocre Orioles team. There were still "Yankees suck" chants coming down, a reflection of a schedule that's left the Sox with one intriguing opponent thus far, with those Yankees.

So, in a manner similar to those first games against the Rays and Marlins, the Sox just took care of business on Friday.

It is important business, though, if not the most compelling baseball you'll watch all year. This isn't a warm-up act. September games and pressure-packed moments in the throes of a pennant race are better remembered, always. But they count no differently. The stretch run is great to keep an eye on, to prepare for. But if you can avoid the need for a stretch run all together and win the division with a relative ease, that's a better position to be in.

The Sox the rest of the way have to go 82-67 to match 93 wins for a third straight year. That's still a strong level of play, a .550 win percentage. But the more heavy lifting they do in the early-going, the easier an inevitable losing streak will be to stomach. It's April, it's early, but the wins matter.

David Price's circulation, numb hand not matters of weakness

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — Drop the David-Price-didn't-want-to-pitch act. Don't play dumb about the importance of being able to feel a baseball in your throwing hand. Stop pretending that all Price needed was a pair of those dollar-store hand warmers that burn a hole in your mittens.

You're right: If a baseball player loses a tooth, they're probably not staying in the game. So if you want to go down the road of how tough baseball players are compared to, say, hockey players, have at it. But you're not touching on the real issue.

Release point, finger-pressure and hand placement on the ball are all essential to pitching. So, when you hear David Price had numbness in his pitching hand on Wednesday when he lasted just one inning, how can you leap to a conclusion that he was just being soft, or weak, or that he didn't want to face the Yankees?

You want someone to throw a baseball they can't properly grasp? OK, you saw the results for one inning and four runs. They were hitting Price hard because he had no grip.

Price said Thursday night he has a circulation issue, and it's not new.

"I talked to the doctors last night," Price said. "They talked about a couple different things that we could try. It's something I've always had, even whenever I was a little kid. My hands and my feet are two things that are always cold. Whenever it's cold outside, it intensifies that."

You have probably heard about blisters affecting pitchers, including Price in the past. Some guys seem to be more prone to blisters than others. You get why those are disruptive, right? You can visualize a raw, torn piece of skin on someone's hand, and how that would be not only painful, but make it impossible to do what you hope with a baseball.

An absence of feeling in the hand can be an impediment to pitching, too.

Price's next scheduled start will be in much warmer weather, with an extra day of rest. He's been pushed back from Monday on Patriots Day at home, when the weather is supposed to be bad, to Tuesday in Anaheim.

In the long view, it is crucial that the Sox find a way to address Price's circulation, if at all possible. The games he'll be judged on most will be in October. It can be a bit chilly here, you know.

They have months to make sure Price can get through a playoff start, which will, of course, be handled differently.

Even if you hate that Price wasn't asked to get shellacked by the Yanks for another four innings Wednesday, remember that he and the Sox had reason to worry something else was amiss, too. Numbness could be caused by a nerve issue, or a variety of ailments.

"I knew it was nothing dealing with anything that went on last year," Price said Thursday, referring to his elbow troubles. "I knew it was solely circumstances, and we'll come out of this one feeling the way I thought I was going to feel."

Regardless of that kind of confidence, a pitcher who can't feel his hand should raise an alarm for a manager, for a training staff, and should prompt a quick exit.

Cora was asked before Thursday's game if a nerve issue could be at play, and he wasn't sure. Price revealed the circulation matter after the game.

Price didn't get an MRI, Cora said. That's fine, so long as the Sox and Price have a firm, well, grip on the situation. They very likely know more than they're letting on publicly, as is often the case with health matters. And if they don't know everything they can yet, they absolutely need to dig in. No stone should be unturned with Price's health.

But when it comes to Wednesday, remember, there's no reason Price would want to bow out of a game after all the crap he went through — and indeed, occasionally brought on himself — in his time in Boston.

The Red Sox are 10-2 after a 6-3 rubber-match win over the Yankees on Thursday. The rotation has a 2.01 ERA on the season. Price has contradicted himself in the past. He's made mistakes in leadership. But he's never appeared someone who doesn't want to be on the mound.

Get a grip.

*** *NESN.com***

Red Sox Notes: Eduardo Rodriguez, Eduardo Nunez Play Big Roles In Boston's 7-3 Win

Lauren Campbell

The Boston Red Sox began their four-game set with the Baltimore Orioles with a win that included strong pitching, offense and a heads-up play by right fielder Mookie Betts.

Sox skipper Alex Cora was asked after the game what he thought of Betts' play to throw Adam Jones out at second and his answer was simple:

"He's the best right fielder in the league for a reason."

For the second time in four games, Boston put up seven runs on their opponent, resulting in the victory. This time around, it was the O's who were at the losing end of a 7-3 score at Fenway Park on Friday night.

Sox starter Eduardo Rodriguez threw six stellar innings after giving up a run in the first. The lefty picked up his first win of the season, after his first start resulted in a no-decision where he pitched 3 2/3 innings.

"Everything was working for me today," Rodriguez said after the game. "The cutter. The slider. The changeup."

On the offensive side, it was Eduardo Nunez who broke the 1-1 tie in the first inning with a three-run Green Monster home run. He finished the night with two hits, a walk and three RBI.

"(Nunez) was joking before the game he hasn't had a hit on a fastball the whole season," Cora told reporters after the game. "He was able to turn on one. That was good to see."

Rafael Devers also had himself a night, going 3-for-5 at the dish while scoring two of Boston's seven runs. Coming into Friday's game, the third baseman was in an 0-for-12 slump.

Here are some other notes from Red Sox-Orioles:

— Rodriguez is the first Red Sox starter to throw 100-plus pitches this season, logging 104 through six innings.

— The victory Friday night makes the Red Sox 6-1 on their current homestand.

— Friday marked the sixth consecutive game Boston scored at least six runs.

— Joe Kelly received a standing ovation as he made his way to the mound for the eighth inning and fans in the crowd sported shirts showing their support for the relief pitcher.

— The Red Sox are 11-2 for the first time since 1918.

— For what it's worth, utility man Brock Holt was sporting a new look before Friday night's game.

— Since being acquired by the Red Sox in a trade with the San Francisco Giants, Nunez has hit .310 with 33 RBI in 50 games for Boston.

— Starting pitcher Drew Pomeranz, who started the season on the disabled list, made a rehab start with the Portland Seadogs. He threw 5 2/3 innings, giving up four hits, two earned runs, three walks and struck out four. The southpaw threw 86 pitches, 53 of them for strikes. One of his strikeouts was former NFL quarterback, Tim Tebow.

Red Sox Wrap: Eduardo Rodriguez Has Solid Start In Boston's 7-3 Win Over Orioles

Lauren Campbell

The Boston Red Sox continued their hot start to the season in their first of a four-game set with the Baltimore Orioles.

The Sox erased an early 1-0 deficit, and with some solid pitching from starter Eduardo Rodriguez, and second baseman Eduardo Nunez accounting for three of the teams' six runs, Boston was able to secure the 7-3 victory over the O's on Friday night at Fenway Park.

The Red Sox plated six runs through the first three innings, which gave Rodriguez plenty of breathing room, but with eight strikeouts through six innings of work, the lefty certainly wasn't dependent on the red-hot offense.

With the win, Boston improves to 11-2, while Baltimore falls to 5-9 on the season.

Here's how it all went down:

GAME IN A WORD

Strong.

From the pitching to the offense, the Sox are the team to beat in the American League East. Rodriguez was solid through six while the offense provided plenty of support for him to work with. The team established a lead early, making it difficult for Baltimore to play catch-up.

ON THE BUMP

— Rodriguez bounced back from his first start where he only pitched 3 2/3 innings. He was spectacular on the mound, pitching six innings, giving up five hits and striking out eight.

The lefty had a shaky first inning, giving up a leadoff single to Baltimore's left fielder Trey Mancini, who would move to third on another single before eventually scoring on an Adam Jones sacrifice fly.

But E-Rod put that behind him quickly. After getting himself into a bit of a jam in the sixth with runners on first and second with two outs, he was able to freeze first baseman Chris Davis on a beautiful slider that caught the inside edge of the plate for strike three.

— Heath Hembree came in for the seventh and struggled after quickly getting the first out, allowing two runs on three hits.

Orioles right fielder Craig Gentry and Mancini singled before third baseman Manny Machado plated both runners with a double that went over the head of Jackie Bradley Jr. Hembree got out of the inning without Baltimore causing anymore damage after the reliever got second baseman Jonathan Schoop to strike out swinging.

— Joe Kelly came in for the eighth to a huge ovation from the Fenway faithful and pitched 1-2-3 inning to keep the score intact.

Kelly, who was suspended for six games for his part in Wednesday's brawl with the New York Yankees, is appealing the suspension.

— Matt Barnes came in to close out the game in the ninth inning and collected the three final outs to secure Boston's 11th victory of the season.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— The bats were hot early for the Sox after going down 1-0 to start the game, tagging starter Chris Tillman for six runs through three innings. After Mookie Betts led the first inning off with a walk and Mitch Moreland reached on a single, Nunez was able to plate three runs with a home run that went into the Green Monster.

— Boston plated a run in both the second and third innings to widen their lead to five.

Tzu-Wei Lin and Betts hit back-to-back doubles, with Betts' two-bagger scoring Lin.

Rafael Devers and Nunez had back-to-back singles in the third before Jackie Bradley Jr. got hit with a pitch, ultimately ending Tillman's night. Devers was able to score on a passed ball by O's catcher Caleb Joseph to give the Sox a 6-1 lead.

— Boston extended its lead to six runs in the sixth thanks to an Alex Cora challenge at first base.

Andrew Benintendi led off the inning with a walk after Moreland hit a ground ball to Schoop in what looked to be a routine double play. Cora challenged the out call at first and was successful as Moreland beat out the throw, which would ultimately lead to the run scored. J.D. Martinez followed up with a ground rule double that bounced into the Boston bullpen, bringing the red-hot Nunez to the plate.

Nunez took ball four, but Joseph let it by him on Mike Wright Jr.'s wild pitch, bringing Moreland home for Boston's seventh run.

— Benintendi, Bradley Jr. and Christian Vazquez all went hitless on the night.

— After going hitless in Thursday night's win against the New York Yankees, Betts collected a hit and drove in a run.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox will resume their four-game set with a Saturday matinee at Fenway Park. Hector Velazquez will take the mound for Boston and will be opposed by Alex Cobb. First pitch is slated for 1:05 p.m. ET.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 7, Orioles 3 – Firing on all cylinders

Sean McAdam

If you're looking for the principle reason for the Red Sox' 11-2 start to the season, look no further than the starting rotation.

After Eduardo Rodriguez checked the Baltimore Orioles on a single run over six innings in the Red Sox' 7-3 victory over the O's, the Red Sox starting rotation is now 8-1 with a 1.97 ERA. In 10 of the 13 games to date, Red Sox starters have allowed one or no runs, and in all but one, they've yielded three or fewer.

The sub-2.00 ERA is made all the more remarkable when you consider that the Red Sox are still without their second-best starter from a year ago, Drew Pomeranz, and have received good outings from spot starters Hector Velazquez and Brian Johnson.

That 1.97 ERA is far and away the best in the American League. And yes, a good chunk of those starts came against weak-hitting lineups like Tampa Bay and Miami. But the pitchers are providing the Sox with a chance to win nearly every time out.

"They're going out and putting up zeros and we just have to go out and put up a couple of runs," marveled Mookie Betts.

All you need to know about the Red Sox' 7-3 win over Baltimore in quickie fashion, with BSJ analysis and insight:

BOX SCORE

HEADLINES

Rodriguez takes a step forward in second start: Last Sunday, Rodriguez was essentially working with one pitch — his fastball — and couldn't put Tampa Bay hitters away, forcing him to be lifted after just 3.2 innings. On Friday night, using his full repertoire, Rodriguez attacked with his fastball — both up and down in the zone — and used his cutter and a few changeups to keep the Orioles off-balance. He allowed a run in the first inning, but yielded just three hits over the final innings while racking up eight strikeouts and issuing only two walks.

Offense on a roll: On the first road trip, and even into the first few games of the homestand, the Red Sox were winning a lot of low-scoring games. Not anymore. On Friday, they scored seven more runs and over the last six games, they've scored a total of 54, an average of nine per contest. In each of those games, the Sox have scored a minimum of six runs. And while Xander Bogaerts carried the team early, of late, it's been more of a shared responsibility. In Friday's win, Rafael Devers broke an 0-for-12 slump with three hits and Eduardo Nunez chipped in with two hits, including a three-run homer.

Betts continues to set the pace at the top of the lineup: Mookie Betts had a walk and a run-scoring double, giving him at least one RBI in each of the last five games. Since the start of April, he's hitting .410 with an RBI per game and 15 runs scored in the last 10 games. The decision by Alex Cora to keep Betts atop the order and urge him to be more aggressive in that role has paid dividends already.

TURNING POINT

Rodriguez had some struggles in the first inning with two hits and a sacrifice fly resulting in a run. But once the Sox got him four runs in the bottom of the inning, it allowed him to pitch more aggressively. He struck out the side in the bottom of the second and three-of-four in the third inning.

TWO UP

J.D. Martinez: There are signs Martinez is getting ready to bust out after a slow start. One good sign: his first four at-bats resulted in him hitting the ball hard either up the middle or to the opposite field, evidence

that his timing and swing are coming around since those are his power spots. He continues to take advantage of RBI opportunities, delivering a sacrifice fly in the first and now has 11 RBI in 12 games.

Eduardo Nunez: Nunez looked hobbled in the series finale against the Yankees, unable to get loose with his ongoing knee issues. But he had a big night at the plate Friday, smacking a three-run homer in the first and adding a single and run scored in his next at-bat.

ONE DOWN

Heath Hembree: Hembree was just getting some work in in the seventh with the Sox comfortably ahead 7-1 at the time, but he allowed the Orioles to get back into the game with three hits and two runs allowed.

QUOTE OF NOTE

“He’s the best right fielder in the league.”

— Alex Cora on Betts. Cora was referring to the alertness that Betts showed in fishing a ball out of the top of the right-field tarp and throwing out Adam Jones at second to open the fourth inning.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

This represents the best 13-game start (11-2) to a season for the Red Sox since 1918. After rebounding from a 1-0 deficit in the first, the Red Sox have six comeback wins in 13 games this season.

In the last six games, the Red Sox have outscored opponents by almost a two-to-one margin: 52-27.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Orioles play the second of the four-game series Saturday afternoon, with Hector Velazquez (1-0, 3.12) taking on Alex Cobb, who will be making his debut for Baltimore.

Final: Red Sox 7, Orioles 3 — Rodriguez, Devers pace 11th win in 12 games

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox’ offense continued to click Friday with a 7-3 thumping of the Baltimore Orioles, Boston’s 11th win in the last 12 games. It was also the sixth-straight time the Sox scored six runs or better.

After the Orioles took a 1-0 lead off of Eduardo Rodriguez in the top of the first, the Sox answered with four runs of their own in the bottom of the inning, then added on with solo runs in the second and third before the O’s knew what hit them.

Rafael Devers, who had gone hitless in the three-game series with the Yankees, broke out with a three-hit, two-RBI night. Eduardo Nunez added two hits, including a three-run homer. J.D. Martinez also added two hits and a run batted in.

Rodriguez, in his second start, limited the Orioles to that single first-inning run. He walked two and fanned eight to capture his first victory in his second start of the season.

WHO: Red Sox vs. Baltimore Orioles

WHEN: 7:10 p.m.

WHERE: Fenway Park

WHAT’S UP: The Red Sox took two-of-three from the Yankees and have won 10-of-12 overall, sitting in first place in the A.L. East. The Orioles are coming off a brief homestand against Toronto, during which

they dropped 2-of-3. They're 5-8 and 5.5 games behind the Sox in the division. This is the first of a four-game series and the first meeting between the teams this season.

STARTING PITCHERS: LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (0-0, 7.36) vs. RHP Chris Tillman (0-2, 8.68)

TV/RADIO: NESN/WEEI 93.7

IN-GAME OBSERVATIONS

9:45: Not exactly efficient, but an improvement over last outing for Rodriguez nonetheless. He needed 104 pitches to get through six innings.

9:34: Four at-bats for Martinez tonight and in each one, he's hit the ball hard either to center field or right – a good sign that perhaps he's starting to come on at the plate. When Martinez is dialed in, most of the damage he does comes either up the middle or to the opposite field.

9:03 Rodriguez is overpowering the Orioles at times with his four-seamer, with which he's hitting 94 mph. His last two strikeouts came on that pitch. He's struck out four of the last five hitters he's faced and seven in the first five innings.

8:15 Short night of work for Chris Tillman who allows five runs on seven hits, walks two, hits a batter and leaves the bases full with no out in the third.

8:12: Rafael Devers came into tonight 0-for-12, but in pre-game comments, Alex Cora said he liked the way Devers was dealing with the slump. Sure enough, Devers doubled to left in the first and just singled to right to open the third.

7:53: With the Orioles shifted around on Moreland and no one near the third base bag, Betts was halfway down the line, looking as though he was contemplating a steal of home.

7:48: Impressive top of the second for Eduardo Rodriguez, who strikes out the side on just 13 pitches. Efficiency was an issue for Rodriguez in his debut last Sunday, but he's been sharper tonight.

7:36: Three-run homer into the Monster Seats for Eduardo Nunez, who did not look good in the Yankee series.

7:28: J.D. Martinez counters the sacrifice fly from Adam Jones in the top of the inning. Martinez hasn't begun to get locked in at the plate, but still has 11 RBI in 13 games — largely because of how often Mookie Betts and Andrew Benintendi have been on base.

LINEUPS:

RED SOX

Betts RF
Benintendi LF
Moreland 1B
Martinez DH
Devers 3B
Nunez 2B
Bradley CF
Vazquez C
Lin SS

ORIOLES

Mancini LF
Machado SS
Schoop 2B
Jones CF
Valencia DH
Davis 1B
Beckham 3B
Gentry RF
Joseph C

NEWS AND NOTES

Predictably, Hanley Ramirez was out of the lineup, a day after being hit on the right hand by a pitch from Sonny Gray. Alex Cora intends to stay away from him Thursday night, with the hope that he will be available to the team again on Saturday. The Sox are mindful of what happened with Xander Bogaerts last season. Bogaerts was hit in the hand in early July and his swing was impacted for the remainder of the season. X-rays were negative for Ramirez. With Ramirez on the bench, Mitch Moreland was at first with J.D. Martinez serving as the DH.

RHP Steven Wright, who last threw on Wednesday, is expected to pitch again either Friday or Saturday in extended spring training. Wright is showing improvement with his knee and has been able to cover first and get off the mound to field his position. After his next start, the Sox will map out a plan which will probably involve Wright being sent out on a rehab assignment with an affiliate.

RHP Tyler Thornburg has shown better velocity of late in extended spring training, with his fastball measured at 94-95 mph. He still needs to improve the command of his off-speed pitches.

3B Rafael Devers is going through a cold spell — hitless (0-for-12) in the Yankee series and just 3-for-21 on the homestand, but Cora isn't concerned. "I'm actually pretty impressed with the way he's handled (the slump) and played defense," he said.

Rick Porcello rediscovers that sinking feeling again

Sean McAdam

Rick Porcello spent much of spring training attempting a pitching reboot.

He used a specially-designed target to ensure that his pitches were sufficiently down in the strike zone. He worked on back mounds with former Red Sox starter Derek Lowe, hoping to recapture his sinker with some subtle mechanical adjustments. And while he was reluctant to talk about it much, he spent some time reading some sports psychology books to sharpen his focus and mental approach.

What Porcello wanted, chiefly, was to again become the pitcher he had been in 2016, when he won the American League Cy Young Award, and less like the pitcher who last year led the league in hits allowed and homers. Too often last season, Porcello tended to blend his two fastballs together — the two-seamer rode up in the zone and the four-seamer wasn't elevated enough.

The result? Too many, inviting center-cut fastballs. Worse, he often couldn't rely on his changeup to provide hitters with a different look.

That was then. And now, three starts into 2018, it's as if he rediscovered out to stay out of the middle of the plate.

"I feel," proclaimed Porcello, "like me."

Just ask the Yankees, who managed all of two hits over seven innings, only one of which left the infield, in a 6-3 Red Sox victory. Porcello limited the Yankees to one baserunner — he grazed Giancarlo Stanton with two outs in the fourth — over the first six innings, a stretch that included a 48-minute rain delay.

His pitch count at an economical 60, Alex Cora didn't think twice about sending him back to the mound when play resumed.

In the seventh, when Aaron Judge launched a rope over the head of center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr.'s head for the first hit against him, Porcello barely noticed that his no-hit bid had been spoiled.

"We were too far away from that," said Porcello, smiling at the notion. "Our bullpen was thin; I was just trying to get outs."

Which Porcello did, seemingly with ease. It was three up, three down in each inning but the fourth through the first six. There were lots of ground balls — evidence that his two-seam fastball was operating at peak efficiency. There was the odd strikeout — five mixed in through the first six frames — and, tellingly no walks.

And this was no easy lineup he was matched against. But with a quick tempo and strong command, Porcello was undaunted.

"Everything was working," gushed catcher Sandy Leon. "He was getting ahead in the count, getting early outs. He kept making pitches. He's keeping the ball down. Almost every pitch is working; last year, (sometimes) he'd have two pitches. Now, you can call almost every pitch on any count and he's going to execute (whatever I put down). Rick has been good. He likes to compete, he likes to fight every time he's on the mound."

Working the bottom of the zone with his sinker and up in the zone with his four-seamer, Porcello tried to give the Yankees different looks, liberally mixing in his changeup and slider

"They have a lot of good fastball hitters," said Porcello, "and they hit them in the zone real good. So we tried to expand and get them to chase a bunch. (The slider) was a good pitch for us tonight."

"He was excellent," concluded Cora.

In three starts, Porcello has pitched into at least the sixth each time and sports a 3-0 mark with a 1.83 ERA. It's early, far too soon to declare his makeover a certified success, but the early returns have been encouraging.

If you're searching for omens, the last time Porcello ripped off a bunch of victories to start a season, that, too, was 2016, when he began 5-0.

He may not be looking to specifically replicate that season, but the Red Sox would surely welcome it.

****The Athletic***

For married Boston Marathon bombing victims, bond with Red Sox continues to help healing process

Jen McCaffrey

Patrick Downes and Jessica Kensky walked out of the center field garage at Fenway Park on Friday night, hand-in-hand, as part of a Red Sox pre-game ceremony to commemorate the five-year anniversary of the Marathon Bombing.

Of the 264 people injured at the finish line on April 15, 2013, 17 lost limbs. Of those 17, Kensky and Downes were the only married couple, albeit by just seven months.

The couple has been through it all since that day. Dozens of surgeries, including the amputation of both Kensky's legs, hours of rehabilitation and physical therapy each day, extended stays in Boston hospitals and Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Charlestown, and a government clearance for a long-term stay at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.,

The support from family and friends has been unparalleled. The number of nurses and doctors they've seen has reached into the hundreds.

One unexpected constant through it all has been the support they've received from the Red Sox.

"I grew up in Cambridge and my dad always joked that I was born with a Red Sox hat on and a glove on my hand," Downes said. "Baseball has always been my favorite sport so following the Red Sox is just part of who I am."

That's what's made the relationships he and Kensky have formed with Red Sox players, personnel and front office members the last five years all the more meaningful in the midst of healing.

Immediately after the bombing, Downes was sent to Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center while Kensky was transported to Boston Medical Center. Each endured hours of surgeries in the infancy of their new lives as amputees.

While the couple battled for their lives, the city remained distraught, scared and on edge. The Red Sox, who played on the morning of the Marathon and were headed to Cleveland for a three-game series when the attack happened, then returned home early Friday morning to Boston. Their game that night was postponed with the city on lockdown before the lone surviving perpetrator was captured.

The game the following day, when the Red Sox honored the survivors and the police and other officials who helped end the manhunt, was just the beginning of Downes' recovery through the Red Sox. It was the game when David Ortiz told the crowd, "This is our (bleeping) city. Stay Strong," in his pregame speech.

"I get emotional thinking about it because I can still remember being in my hospital bed at Beth Israel when the team came back for the first game," Downes said, pausing to clear his throat. "My father got invited to the game by a friend and he asked me if it was OK to go because he hadn't really left my bedside along with my mother and brother. And I was like 'Of course you've got to go.' When Papi was on the field and they brought out all the first responders and you could see Fenway just erupt, I was just dissolved to tears in my bed because I felt so proud to be a part of that and to think all those people were supporting us. That moment could have easily come and gone but the Red Sox have been incredible."

The Red Sox kept in frequent contact with Downes and Kensky with little fanfare, particularly senior director of fan services and entertainment Stephanie Maneikis and community partnerships and player relations manager Kathryn Quirk.

Six months after the bombings, the Red Sox were in the postseason on their way to the 2013 World Series championship. The team's success eased some of the pain and distracted Downes and Kensky from the difficulties of their new lives.

"When Papi hit the home run to right against Detroit [in the American League Championship Series] Jess remembers me hopping up and down on one leg and dropping my crutch because I was out of my mind with excitement," Downes said. "There was something incredibly special about what it did for the city to have something to cheer for and unite around that wasn't sad. It was just a gift that will forever be a part of our lives."

As the years passed, the Red Sox didn't forget them.

Downes was still at Spaulding when he turned 30 so his brother and friends organized a surprise field trip to Fenway Park for his birthday with the Red Sox's help.

“They got us a suite so that it was wheel chair accessible, it was comfortable and they had lobster rolls as far as the eye can see,” Downes said. “They stacked the place with all this good food. And it was just incredible — it was depressing to celebrate your 30th birthday in a rehab hospital but that’s what life had in store — but they just made it so special for a few hours.”

Downes and Kensky lived and rehabbed at Walter Reed for three years as they learned how to adjust to their new lives. While there, they formed close ties with combat veterans who understood the struggles of lives with amputated limbs. There were no questions or stares, they looked like everyone else working to walk again.

While they were still at Walter Reed, Downes and several of his newly formed military veteran friends were invited to throw out the first pitches at Fenway, and Ortiz went out of his way to check in on Downes and Kensky.

“Out came Papi to catch my first pitch and it was good because he was a nice big target,” Downes quipped. “But I threw it to him and we went to meet and the first thing he said was ‘How’s Jess?’ because Jess was still at Walter Reed recovering and it was just for him to remember, for him to ask, that was really sweet. And just him being a good human.”

While there have been gracious gestures from the Bruins, Patriots and Celtics, Downes and Kensky have formed a particularly close bond with the Red Sox.

“Stephanie Maneikis and Kathryn Quirk text us all the time, always inviting us to games and not just inviting us but making it really special,” Downes said. “They know that getting around is harder now, so they make parking available for us and they escort us to seats that they know we’ll be comfortable in. We’ve gotten to know some of the players and their families and see them as humans and not just as these things to idolize, superstars, which they still are. But every time we think, ‘OK that was cool, the attention is going to wane a little bit,’ they just keep bringing us back for more.”

“[Sox president] Sam Kennedy, I’ve gotten to meet his family and talk baseball but also his mom was a teacher and my parents are teachers and talk education,” Downes said. “So it’s like what was always this larger-than-life personality in the Red Sox now feels like real people who we now have these relationships with. It’s amazing.”

Among the players Downes and Kensky have befriended over the last few years are Dustin Pedroia and Brock Holt. Pedroia and Kensky especially connected because they both grew up in the same area in northern California and are around the same age. Pedroia attended Arizona State while Kensky was at University of Arizona.

“I think something struck a chord with him so he went home and told his wife Kelly and so it just started a relationship,” Downes said of Pedroia. “We took a picture with Kathryn Quirk tonight on the field and she texted it to Kelly and Kelly is texting us just to check in.”

Downes and Kensky attended the birthday party of one of Pedroia’s sons and that’s where they met Holt and his wife.

“We just kind of started talking to them and figured out, learned their story,” Holt recalled. “We kind of gravitated toward them because they had [their service dog] Rescue with them and we had just kind of gotten [our dog] Tank and we were talking about Labs and everything and my wife is obsessed with Labs and dogs and we started talking to them there and built a relationship from that night on. We got their numbers and exchanged and kept in contact with them and it just kind of built from there.”

“They’re great people, we’re lucky to know them and happy our paths cross.”

Holt, who also does volunteer work through the team for the Jimmy Fund, understands the importance of providing a support system for those in need.

“I can’t even begin to imagine what they’ve had to go through and I know their story from the beginning to everything they’ve kind of gone through to this point,” Holt added. “There’s no way I’d be able to do what they’ve done and keep their faith and love for each other. And I think that in and of itself is what’s helped them get through what they’ve been through. But I’m sure the more people you have in your corner, the easier it makes it.”

On Friday night, Downes, Kensky and their “Boylston Street family” — as they call the other survivors and victims’ families — watched the game from a suite down the left-field line.

“We didn’t know any of these people beforehand, we may never have met them,” Downes said. “But we just feel this incredible bond with them. We really feel each other’s pain when someone is having a hard time. We delight when someone’s reached a new milestone or celebrating something.

“But to be here and to joke around, J.P. Norden is throwing cashews at me and Jeff Bauman’s daughter is running around playing with our service dog,” he said. “We just feel so lucky to have each other. And I’m embarrassed to say I don’t even really end up watching the game because I’m so busy talking to people and goofing around and making fun of each other. And I think the Red Sox get that and they get we want to be together and have this opportunity to give each other hugs and sit with whatever emotions are coming up.”

Despite the enormous challenges they’ve faced over the last five years, they’ve chosen to focus on the relationships they’ve developed.

“When think of Boston Strong, I think of the blue and yellow (the BAA colors) and I think of the Sox symbol and they came to symbolize us,” he said. “We needed something to rally around and they gave it to us. And they keep welcoming us back for more.”

Jennings: Early signs suggest Alex Cora is fitting in nicely as Red Sox manager

Chad Jennings

For about 10 seconds, Alex Cora lost his cool.

He threw no punches and seemed hardly to raise his voice, but Cora did draw a box with his fingers and tell Yankees third base coach Phil Nevin to get back in it. He waved dismissively with the back of his hand to shoo a former All-Star off the field. He got his name into the New York tabloids.

“I don’t want to say I overreacted,” Cora said. “But that’s not me. I think for 10 games, or whatever I’ve managed, you guys see me very calm over there. But ... I took exception. I made a signal. I know everybody saw it. Out of character for me, but I still didn’t like the fact that he was pointing at me and screaming.”

It’s been two months since Cora opened his first spring training as a big league manager, and two weeks since the Red Sox soaked him with beer after his first big league win, but this three-game series against the Yankees might have been Cora’s most revealing moment yet.

Baseball’s most heated rivalry drew fresh blood from Joe Kelly’s neck. Two high-powered lineups took turns scoring in bunches. There were injuries, ejections, suspensions, a near no-hitter, and a mid-game interview in front of a national television audience.

Throughout, Cora showed himself to be a manager of unusual candor, unflinching conviction, and perhaps a little more intensity than even he expected.

When the benches cleared on Wednesday, Cora got into his verbal spat with Nevin only after he'd clung for dear life trying hold back all 300 pounds of CC Sabathia.

"It's always been my same role (during a fight)," he said. "Don't throw a punch and grab somebody. I just picked the wrong one."

Or maybe he picked the right one; the one that showed his reaction was more instinctual than calculated. Push had come to shove, and Cora was in there with his players, doing the exact same thing he would have done if he were still a light-hitting utility infielder.

Players notice things like that. Fans notice things like that. And the Yankees noticed when Cora marginalized Nevin's objections in the heat of the moment.

But it wasn't only the fight.

Cora started this series by answering a question about Sunday's come-from-behind win against the Rays when the Red Sox scored six runs in the bottom of the eighth then failed to defensively replace J.D. Martinez in the ninth.

"I'm going to be honest with you," Cora explained. "We scored six runs, and we were so excited about it, and the manager missed that one."

This series started with the Red Sox manager admitting a mistake.

"I ask our guys to be genuine, transparent and responsible," Cora said. "So, if I am asking them to be that way, I better be that way. Because if I say something else, they know I am not telling the truth."

Players notice things like that, too.

"It's just somebody being real and being honest," Jackie Bradley Jr. said. "When you have that type of person, when you have open communication, it feels good that you can talk to somebody man-to-man."

Last year's Red Sox were too easily defined by tension and too often plagued by questions of leadership. It's surely unfair to place the blame squarely on former manager John Farrell, but it was telling that the Red Sox fired Farrell despite back-to-back division titles.

Here's what their longest-tenured player, Dustin Pedroia, said at the start of spring training:

"For whatever reason, I think that our overall outlook was really result-oriented (each) day," Pedroia said. "I think that can wear on you as an everyday player and as a pitcher. Baseball is so hard. If you fail seven out of 10 times, you're really good. I think if you're really result-oriented that day, the only day that you can go home and get a good night's rest is if your team wins by 10 and you go 4-for-4 with four home runs. It's not realistic."

And here's what their newest player, J.D. Martinez, told MLB Network two days ago:

"The moment I got here, it's a very loose clubhouse," Martinez said. "That's one thing I noticed right off the bat was how loose everybody was, and how relaxed, and the mindset. Everybody's just kind of having fun. I think that's kind of what we've been doing since the start of the season."

That's not strictly because of Cora. The Red Sox also were banged up last season, David Price was vocal about his recurring frustrations, and the clubhouse was without David Ortiz for the first time in 15 years.

This year's team is healthier, Price is happier, and the clubhouse has adjusted to the changing personnel.

But Cora's impact is difficult to ignore. He's a first-year manager with only one year of experience as a big league bench coach. He managed in Puerto Rico and spent time as a broadcaster, but Cora was hired with intangibles difficult to pin down.

Smart baseball man. Good communicator. Well-versed in analytics. He talked a big game in spring training about keeping the bigger picture in focus.

But it's one thing to say those words in Fort Myers or put them into action against the Rays and Marlins. It's something else to stick by them at Fenway Park against the Yankees.

When the Red Sox batted around on Tuesday, though, Cora lifted Chris Sale after six innings and 87 pitches. He wasn't interested in pushing his ace any further just to make some statement of dominance.

On Wednesday, Cora had Andrew Benintendi on the bench, because Cora had looked ahead and decided that was the best night to give his left fielder a breather. His lineups often are set four to seven days ahead of time so that he's not only considering each day's matchups, he's also considering future matchups. Bigger picture, remember?

"It's not that we're trying to rest guys most of the time," Cora said. "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."

During an in-game interview with MLB Network on Wednesday – when Price had lasted just one inning, and the Red Sox already were trailing by four runs – Cora went beyond the usual platitudes to express confidence in his team. He explained why he had confidence.

"One thing for sure," he said. "(With the score) 5-1, (Masahiro Tanaka)'s up in the zone. If we get a few scoreless innings here, we're back in the game."

It was genuine, in-the-moment analysis. Not particularly in depth, but more specific than the usual rah-rah comments given to sideline reporters. Sure enough, the Red Sox scored six runs off Tanaka, but they couldn't get enough of those scoreless innings to complete a comeback.

Thursday's finale was another win, Cora's 10th in his first 12 games as manager. He refused to apologize pregame for the fireworks the night before, and after a 45-minute rain delay mid-game, he let Rick Porcello return to the mound in pursuit of a no-hitter that lasted until the first batter in the seventh.

"I think you can go through all the cliches," Sale said this week. "It's a long season. We've got a lot of games left. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But you see the morale in here. You see the energy, the confidence, kind of the easiness. It allows you to go out there and just play. There's no pressing the panic button early. We're just going out there and playing the game, and I think we have a lot of trust and a lot of faith in one another."

That faith doesn't necessarily begin or end with the manager, but Cora has set a tone that was never more evident than this series against the Yankees. He was at ease when the situation called for a steady hand, and he was fiery when the moment couldn't abide a passive attitude. Cora might have found his gestures toward Nevin to be out of character, but they didn't come from any sort of façade.

"Honesty is key," Bradley Jr. said. "Everybody likes when someone is pretty honest. We, as players, like when our manager is honest."

In Cora, the Red Sox have a manager confident in his own truth, and honestly, there's never been a better 12-game start in franchise history.

****The Baltimore Sun***

Orioles right-hander Chris Tillman's early exit in 7-3 loss to Red Sox raises concerns

Eduardo A. Encina

Chris Tillman's early exit Friday night at Fenway Park left the Orioles looking for answers. Manager Buck Showalter knows how hard Tillman works in between starts, catcher Caleb Joseph thought Tillman's arsenal of pitches was crisp and Tillman himself said he felt healthy and thought his delivery mechanics had improved over his previous start.

So what gives? Tillman — the anchor of the Orioles rotation from 2013 to 2016 — isn't right, and he hasn't been since a nagging shoulder landed him on the disabled list late in the 2016 season.

In Friday night's series opener against the Red Sox, Tillman suffered his shortest outing of this young season in the Orioles' 7-3 loss to American League East-leading Boston, unable to get an out in the third inning three batters in. And for the most part, he looked completely out of whack.

As a result, the Red Sox improved to 11-2 while the Orioles lost for the third time in four games to slip to 5-9.

After unconventional preparation process, Alex Cobb ready to make his Orioles debut
Despite his success pitching in an Orioles uniform and the team's faith that Tillman had shaken last year's struggles when they signed him in February, the right-hander understands his rotation spot could be in jeopardy, knowing he has to find a way to get better results.

"I've got to get better, period," Tillman said. "I'm not happy with the way it's going and I just have to get better. It's not fair to the team. It's not fair to the bullpen. I need to pick these guys up pretty shortly, and it's got to happen now. I want to pitch better. I have to."

When the Orioles signed Tillman, 29, to a one-year, \$3 million deal during spring training, they did so because they believed the right-hander had put last season's struggles in the past. The team didn't consummate an agreement until arriving at a figure it would be comfortable buying out if Tillman struggled extensively out of the gate.

On Friday, Tillman allowed 10 of the 16 batters he faced to reach base, giving up six runs on seven hits, two walks and a hit batter. Perhaps worse than that pitching line was Tillman's pitch chart, which displayed an incredible lack of command. He fell behind in the count to nine of 16 batters and struggled working from behind.

"I've seen all the work that he and [pitching coach] Roger [McDowell] and [bullpen coach] Alan [Mills] and everybody all season do," Showalter said. "When you get to a point like that, a guy who's had success like he's had, there's some other answers there. We've got to find them, solve them, because we need to him to pitch better than that."

"You keep thinking, 'If he could get a good start under his belt and then take off,' because we know what he's capable of. But physically he feels fine. There's a lot more going on there than just mechanics."

Orioles hope to be 'back on our feet' with bullpen after tumultuous two weeks

Friday's outing marked Tillman's shortest start since Aug. 3, when he also lasted two-plus innings and allowed seven runs (five earned) on six hits and two walks. But Tillman's ERA is now 11.91 three starts into the season. He hasn't won a decision since May 7 last season, going a franchise-record 21 straight starts without a win. He has allowed 22 hits and 10 walks over 11 1/3 innings this season for a 2.82 WHIP (walks and hits per inning pitched).

"I felt like my last start was worse mechanically than this one," Tillman said. "It comes down to execution. When you miss with the first one, you've got to try to get back into the count and you fight an uphill battle"

at that point, especially against a team like this. You've got to stay ahead and work with the count in your favor."

Since 2016, his fastball velocity has steadily declined — his four-seamer averaged 89.6 mph Friday — which isn't a major concern if he can execute his other pitches, which Tillman has been unable to do this season.

He pitched mainly with his fastball Friday, never finding his feel for the pitch, and leading to some sharply hit balls by the Red Sox. Of the 13 pitches Boston batters put in play, four of them were hit with exit velocities of at least 104 mph. In 57 pitches, Tillman induced just two swinging strikes.

"I know the results aren't there," Joseph said. "You're looking for that one ground ball, first and third with one out to turn a double play, and get you out of the inning and get some momentum going his way. A lot of it's confidence. A lot of the game is confidence. Hitting defense, pitching. When you pitch with confidence, it seems like good things happen and so you've got to find a way to get Chris some confidence. It's not as bad as it seems out there, I guess. It doesn't make sense. The stuff is there. Limit the mistakes, get ahead of guys and try and find some luck here and there."

Tillman has had success against the Red Sox in his career, entering the night 10-4 with a 3.03 ERA in 21 career starts against them. He was also 5-1 with a 2.39 ERA in nine career starts at Fenway Park

The most damaging hit off Tillman wasn't a good one – Eduardo Núñez's three-run homer over the Green Monster to put the Red Sox up 4-1 in the first inning had a hit percentage of just 49 percent. It came after Tillman issued a leadoff walk to Mookie Betts, a one-out single to Mitch Moreland, a sacrifice fly to J.D. Martinez and a double to Rafael Devers.

Núñez's at-bat offered a good microcosm of how Tillman struggled. His first pitch was a curveball that sailed high way out of the strike zone, followed by a 1-0 slider that was fouled off and a four-seamer that caught the heart of the plate and was sent over the high wall in left field.

Orioles notes: Donnie Hart called up from Norfolk to provide lefty relief reinforcement
Back-to-back doubles by No. 9 hitter Tzu-Wei Lin and Betts extended the Orioles' deficit to 5-1 in the second. After opening the third inning allowing consecutive hits to Devers and Núñez and then hitting Jackie Bradley Jr. with a pitch, Tillman was pulled by Showalter.

He left the game with the bases loaded and reliever Pedro Araujo's first pitch got past catcher Caleb Joseph for a passed ball to score the sixth run charged to Tillman.

Mike Wright Jr. allowed the Red Sox's final run in the sixth. The Orioles scored in the first on Adam Jones' sacrifice fly and in the seventh on Manny Machado's two-run double.

"It's not good," Tillman said. "Physically I felt good. Mechanically, I felt better. I just wasn't able to execute. I think it comes down to executing pitches. I feel like I consistently fell behind. Once you fall behind, you're trying to get back in the count and you're catching too much of the plate when you're working back into counts. ... You come back, work between starts and come back and get the next one. ... But obviously we've got some work to do and we have to get better."

****Associated Press***

Nunez hits 3-run HR, Red Sox top Orioles 7-3 for 11-2 start

BOSTON -- Eduardo Rodriguez's second start of the season went considerably better than his first, and the Boston Red Sox kept rolling to their best start in 100 years.

The left-hander struck out eight over six stingy innings, Eduardo Nunez hit a three-run homer and the Red Sox beat the Baltimore Orioles 7-3 on Friday night, improving to 11-2 for only the second time in team history.

Rodriguez lasted just 3 2/3 innings Sunday in his season debut against Tampa Bay, allowing three earned runs and five hits. Five days later he got himself out of an early jam in the first, holding the Orioles to one run on five hits and two walks with a mix of pitches he didn't show in his initial outing.

"That's what we want. I want him to attack," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "He keeps learning, but you can see it -- his stuff is there. He's electric."

Rafael Devers went 3 for 5 and scored twice for the Red Sox. J.D. Martinez had a pair of hits and drove in a run with a sacrifice fly during a four-run first inning, which put Boston in command on the way to its 11th victory in 12 games.

Mookie Betts added an RBI double in the second.

The Red Sox had already matched their best 12-game start with a 6-3 win over the Yankees on Thursday night. With this victory, Boston reached 11-2 to equal the 1918 club that went on to win the World Series.

Adam Jones hit a sacrifice fly in the first and Manny Machado had a two-run double in the seventh. Chris Tillman (0-3) struggled through the first two-plus innings for Baltimore, which lost for the third time in four games.

Tillman "came out a little crisper in the second inning, but just couldn't get the ball where he needed to get it," Baltimore manager Buck Showalter said. "Never really had a lot of things working in his favor. It was a struggle from the start."

Trey Mancini scored the only run Rodriguez yielded after leading off the game with a single and scoring on Jones' sacrifice fly. Rodriguez settled down from there, striking out the side in the second and shutting out the Orioles for five straight innings.

Baltimore's only lead didn't last long. Betts reached on a leadoff walk, advanced to third on Mitch Moreland's one-out single and scored on a sacrifice fly by Martinez. Devers followed with a double, putting two on for Nunez, who drove a 1-1 pitch from Tillman into the seats atop the Green Monster.

Tillman faced three batters in the third before getting pulled with the bases loaded and nobody out. He was charged with six runs, seven hits and two walks. He did not have a strikeout for the second time in three starts.

Tillman was removed after hitting Jackie Bradley Jr. with a pitch. Pedro Araujo's first pitch got past catcher Caleb Joseph, and Devers raced in for another run to make it 6-0.

BALL OF CONFUSION

Jones led off the fourth with a hit down the right-field line, but ended up getting thrown out at second on an alert play by Betts. The ball bounced onto the rolled up tarp and stayed there for Betts to grab and throw to second in time to get Jones, who thought the ball was out of play and slowed up after rounding first.

The Orioles challenged and lost when the replay was reviewed.

"I pretty much just finished the play," Betts said. "My instinct was just to grab it and make a play and ask questions later."

STILL STRONG

The Red Sox held a pregame ceremony featuring survivors of the Boston Marathon bombings on April 15, 2013. The ceremony also included families of some of the victims and was the first of three days of events marking the five-year anniversary of the day two homemade bombs exploded near the finish line, killing three and wounding 260.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Orioles: Recalled LHP Donnie Hart from Triple-A Norfolk. ... DH Mark Trumbo (right quad strain) will resume a rehab assignment next week after a setback in one game with Double-A Bowie on Tuesday night. ... RHP Gabriel Ynoa was getting an MRI on his pitching shoulder.

Red Sox: 1B-DH Hanley Ramirez, who left Thursday's game with a bruised left wrist after getting hit by a pitch in the first inning against New York, was not in the lineup. ... Cora said LHP David Price, who left in the first inning Wednesday with tingling in his pitching hand, will start Tuesday night when the Red Sox open a three-game series at the Los Angeles Angels.

UP NEXT

Orioles: RHP Alex Cobb, who signed as a free agent in March, makes his Orioles debut. Cobb went 10-12 last year with a 3.66 ERA for Tampa Bay in his first full year back after missing nearly two seasons because of Tommy John surgery.

Red Sox: RHP Hector Velazquez (1-0, 3.12) gets his second start after holding Tampa Bay to one run over 5 2/3 innings on April 1.