

The Boston Red Sox Friday, May 19, 2017

*** *The Boston Globe***

Hector Velazquez's debut isn't what Red Sox were hoping for

Peter Abraham

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Red Sox arrived at their hotel in San Francisco at 4 a.m. Thursday after beating the St. Louis Cardinals in 13 innings on Wednesday night.

The only player to get a decent night of sleep was pitcher Hector Velazquez, who traveled ahead of the team for what would be his major league debut against the Oakland Athletics.

But rested did not equate to ready. The Athletics hit Velazquez hard and beat the Red Sox, 8-3, before a crowd of only 12,016 at Oakland Coliseum.

After seven competent seasons in the Mexican League and five strong starts for Triple A Pawtucket this year, the 28-year-old Velazquez was deemed ready for the majors.

He was not. Velazquez allowed six runs on nine hits over five innings. Five of the hits were for extra bases, three of them home runs.

“Thought there might be a little bit better command in the strike zone,” Sox manager John Farrell said. “He’s a guy that we felt like had a very efficient and pretty basic delivery and the ability to repeat a release point. There were some pitches that stayed up in the middle of the plate and they made him pay for it.”

No roster move was made after the game, but Velazquez may not be around for long. The Sox have a day off on Monday and by Wednesday could have David Price ready to come off the disabled list.

Price is scheduled to pitch for Pawtucket on Friday in what could be his only rehabilitation start.

“We’ve got some flexibility in the rotation,” Farrell said. “David’s pitching [Friday]. That’s going to be another important piece of information to all this that we’ll gather.”

Velazquez actually seemed set up for success at the outset.

He was facing an Oakland team averaging only 3.85 runs, 14th in the American League. The Athletics also were without their best hitter, first baseman Yonder Alonso, because of a sore left knee.

The Sox then gave Velazquez a 2-0 lead in the first inning as they quickly got to Oakland ace Sonny Gray. Hanley Ramirez had an RBI single and Chris Young a sacrifice fly.

All those advantages didn’t matter as Oakland scored three runs in the first inning.

Matt Joyce walked with one out and scored on a home run to center field by former oft-injured Red Sox infielder Jed Lowrie. Khris Davis followed with another home run, his 12th of the season.

Both of the home runs were no-doubt shots.

“Out of the gate I felt a little bit emotional it being my first big league game,” Velazquez said via an interpreter. “My adrenalin was a little up there. Getting under control was a little hard. I had a bad inning.”

The Sox were able to tie the game in the fourth inning when Mitch Moreland hit a long home run to left field. But Velazquez allowed three more runs in the bottom of the inning.

Ryon Healy singled and scored on a double by Trevor Plouffe. Chad Pinder then homered to left field. Throughout his time on the mound, Velazquez was overmatched.

Velazquez was told on Tuesday he would get that start. His wife and some friends were in the crowd.

“I tried to work hard to get to this point,” Velazquez said. “If I were to get another opportunity, I’d try to make the most of it.”

Rotation depth continues to be a significant problem for the Red Sox. Velazquez was the third starter to be called up from Triple A Pawtucket this season. He, Kyle Kendrick and Brian Johnson have a 10.80 earned run average in four starts with the Sox losing three of those games.

The Sox arrived at spring training with questionable depth and obtained Velazquez from a Mexican League team in an attempt to improve that. That the cost was only \$30,000 now seems revealing.

“The depth is something we’ve talked about all year long,” Farrell said. “No matter what time of the year it is, you’re trying to build it as best possible. But we’ve got to keep searching in the event that we need those sixth, seventh, eighth starters. Those guys are important and right now we’re still searching.”

Gray (1-1) worked six innings, allowing three runs on four hits. He walked two and struck out eight.

The Sox were held to six hits. Dustin Pedroia was 2 for 4.

John Farrell pushed all the right buttons in 13-inning win

Peter Abraham

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Red Sox played 13 innings against the St. Louis Cardinals on Wednesday night. Manager John Farrell made eight pitching changes and at various points of the game used 15 players in the bottom three spots of the lineup.

Every button he pushed was the right one. Sox pitchers held the Cardinals scoreless over the final 11 innings in a 5-4 victory.

“There were a couple of times I forgot where the pitcher was hitting,” Farrell said Thursday before the Sox played the Oakland Athletics. “We were making so many double switches that the pitcher went from hitting ninth to seventh to eighth.”

“That’s why the energy and emotion in our clubhouse after the game was such. There were so many guys who got into that ballgame. That was, I think, a key win for us.”

Trailing, 4-0, the Sox got a two-run homer by Jackie Bradley Jr. in the seventh inning. They scored two more runs in the eighth, the second on a sacrifice fly by slumping rookie Andrew Benintendi.

The Sox then won it on Chris Young’s pinch-hit RBI single with two outs in the 13th.

It was the fourth time in the game Young had prepared to hit.

“I was swinging [in the batting cage] the whole game because there were several situations I could have come up,” Young said. “I was just trying to stay ready.”

Young hit the second pitch he saw into center field to drive in Mitch Moreland from second base.

“You’re up there trying to battle,” he said.

Every reliever pitched well. But Farrell pointed to Fernando Abad’s two scoreless innings as being key. A mop-up man much of the season, Abad retired five of the six batters he faced.

Tommy Pham drew a walk off Abad in the 12th but was thrown out trying to steal second by Christian Vazquez.

A day later, Farrell was able to smile about it.

“After it’s all said and done, you kind of look back, yeah, that was kind of fun,” he said. “But at the time, it’s nerve-racking as hell. You’re having to think about and plan for anywhere from Plan A to Plan H because there’s so many situations.”

The Sox took both games from the first-place Cardinals.

“To come in here and win a series and claw our way back the way we did, it was big for us,” Bradley said. “The bullpen was just amazing.”

Werner appointed

Red Sox chairman Tom Werner was named to Major League Baseball’s new competition committee. The 16-man group will report to commissioner Rob Manfred and the owners regarding on-field issues including measures to improve the pace of play.

There are no current players on the committee but Hall of Famers Roberto Alomar and John Smoltz are, along with active managers Joe Girardi, Mike Matheny, Dave Roberts, and Buck Showalter.

Werner is one of five ownership-level committee members. There are five executives including Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein.

Moves made

Infielder Chase d’Arnaud was designated for assignment to make room on the active roster for righthander Hector Velazquez, who started on Thursday.

D’Arnaud was claimed off waivers on April 27 and played in only two games. He pinch ran and played one inning in the field on May 7 and pinch hit on May 9. He scored a run on both occasions.

Velazquez wore No. 76 for his debut. That number was last worn by infielder Jonathan Diaz for five games in 2013.

Big day for Price

Triple A Pawtucket’s game at Buffalo on Friday night will have plenty of eyes on it. Lefthander David Price makes his first — and possibly only — rehabilitation start as he returns from an elbow injury.

“[Friday] is a big day,” Farrell said.

The goal for Price is to throw 85-90 pitches over six innings. That would stretch him out sufficiently for the Sox to activate him from the disabled list on Tuesday or Wednesday.

“Nothing’s changed in that regard. I wouldn’t rule out next week,” Farrell said.

Third baseman Pablo Sandoval is scheduled to start his rehab assignment. Infielder Brock Holt also is expected to play.

Sandoval has been on the disabled list since April 24 with a sprained right knee and will need perhaps a week of games — if not more — to get ready.

Holt is working through concussion-type symptoms related to vertigo. He has played 11 minor league games but has twice had to stop playing because of symptoms. The hope is he will play left field or third base on Friday.

The Red Sox have to stay patient with Holt. As with any head trauma, the quality of his life takes precedence over baseball.

Night shift

ESPN picked up the Red Sox' June 11 game at Fenway Park against the Tigers. It will now start at 8:05 p.m. . . . The Sox moved righthander Steven Wright to the 60-day disabled list. He is out for the season following surgery on his left knee. The 40-man roster is now at 39 . . . Marco Hernandez, who separated his right shoulder on May 3, has seen a specialist and all indications are he will need surgery. "We feel there like there's going to have to be some kind of repair," Farrell said . . . David Ortiz, now on a book tour, told Dan Roche of WBZ television there was no chance he would return to play. Ortiz also said he hopes to arrange a position with the Red Sox at some point in the future.

Andrew Benintendi is in a real slump, but some good may come of it

Nick Cafardo

OAKLAND, Calif. — After going 26 consecutive at-bats without a hit, super child Andrew Benintendi was out of the lineup as the Red Sox began a four-game series against the Athletics Thursday night.

Benintendi, 22, is struggling for the first time in his major league career. He is struggling this badly for the first time in his life. He certainly never had a drought like this at the University of Arkansas or in high school or in the minor leagues. But it happens. In fact, it's supposed to happen.

Eventually teams refine their scouting reports. They look at their videos of the mistakes pitchers make and stop repeating those mistakes. It's some of that, and some of the fact that Benintendi, like any hitter, can lose his mechanics. There's no rhyme or reason as to why. It just happens, like catching a cold. You have no idea how you got it, you only know you have it and you try to make it better.

Benintendi not only has the longest active drought in the majors for a non-pitcher, his average has dropped from a high of .339 to .280. He claims he's had slumps before but not like this.

"Not like this kind of slump where I'm not squaring up the ball," Benintendi said. "I don't remember anything like this."

It looked so easy before. We were comparing Benintendi to Fred Lynn, to Carl Yastrzemski. Those comparisons are still relevant, and Lynn and Yaz had their share of slumps along with superb seasons.

"This will make him a better player," said Red Sox assistant hitting coach Victor Rodriguez. "Everybody comes up and has to face adversity, and you learn from that. If guys didn't have slumps we'd have guys hitting .400 and .500. It's how you come out of it, how you solve it. That helps you the next time and the next time. This kid will come out of it and he'll make someone pay. He's really good."

But this notion that everything has come easy for Benintendi makes him cringe.

"It's never been easy," he said. "And nothing came easy. I was just squaring up balls better. Right now I'm just doing whatever I can to move a runner, a sac fly, a walk, doing whatever I can. And I never take anything for granted. You can be doing well and then it can turn. It's a long season, so I have time to figure it out."

And this notion it's good to fail every once in a while?

“It sucks now, but hopefully whenever it ends I’ll learn from it and avoid those long slumps, which are the ones that frustrate you,” Benintendi said.

What stands out to manager John Farrell is that he doesn’t sense that Benintendi is overwhelmed by this and he doesn’t think he’ll handle Benintendi the way he did Jackie Bradley Jr. Farrell sat down his struggling center fielder for three out of four games last week so he could work on his swing with hitting coach Chili Davis and Rodriguez.

Benintendi did drive in a run in Wednesday’s 13-inning win over the Cardinals with a sacrifice fly, though he went 0 for 5.

“We’re just trying to pick a spot for him to give him a breather,” Farrell said. “Against Sonny [Gray, Oakland’s Thursday starter], who has had more success against lefthanders this year, I felt like tonight might be a good spot to pick for him. I will say this, he’s still taking some good swings in this stretch. He had a big sac fly [Wednesday] night for the tying run. My thought would be he’d be back in there tomorrow and we’ll see where we are on Saturday.”

As for Benintendi’s demeanor, Farrell said, “He’s a competitor and he’s got a little bit of frustration right now, but as far as getting to the point where it’s taking him out of his game, that’s not happening. He’s a remarkable guy in terms of staying even-keeled. He hasn’t gotten too far ahead of himself. Very poised and composed young guy.”

After a quick turnaround because of travel, Benintendi knew he wouldn’t be playing. He knew this would be a day to step back, take a mental break. He intended to go into the cage with Davis and work on his swing, and he just wanted to find something, a trigger that would end the first frustrating stretch of his major league career.

Benintendi knows this won’t be the last time he struggles. He just wants to stretch out the gaps between good and bad.

Sam Travis is back to hitting like a top prospect

Alex Speier

Not quite a year removed from the ACL blowout that cost him the final four months of last season, Sam Travis — after some early struggles this year — gives every indication that he is now back.

The same couldn’t be said at the start of his season with Triple A Pawtucket. Travis looked like a player driven to make up for lost time, rushing to do everything that he could not do following his June surgery. The resulting .233/.313/.333 line for April — with strikeouts in nearly one-third of his plate appearances — was anything but representative of the talents that have him on the doorstep of the big leagues.

“When he’s not all pull-oriented and starts working to right field more, that’s when you start to see the true potential with his bat,” said PawSox manager Kevin Boles. “He’s an aggressive hitter by nature. We know that. [But] he was expanding the zone quite a bit. The effort level ticked up quite a bit.”

Travis acknowledged that his approach at the start of the year was uncharacteristic. Instead of waiting for pitches to drive, he started hunting for them. The results were poor.

“Everyone likes to get off to a good start, get the season rolling. When you don’t get off to a hot start, you might try to do too much. I was just trying to do too much,” said Travis. “I was definitely chasing some pitches . . . When you’re chasing the pitcher’s pitch, that’s what he’s trying to get you to do. You get yourself out. When you stick to your plan, stick to your approach, get good pitches to hit, things are going to turn around. It all goes back to thinking middle, thinking right-center, letting the ball get deep. You try to hit it out of his hand, you’ll be out front. You recognize pitches, let the ball get deep, and things will work out.”

Things are indeed now working out for the 2014 second-round selection. Back in the rhythm of the season, Travis is once again sending rockets all over the field. The latest evidence came on Thursday, when the 23-year-old went 5 for 6 (his first career five-hit game) with two doubles.

Thanks to a scorching stretch that has yielded four straight multihit games, six in eight contests, and seven in his last 10 games, Travis is now hitting .299 with a .359 OBP and .479 slugging mark — including marks of .368/.410/.632 in 14 games this month, with three of his four homers. After a period of reacclimation in his return from injury, he now looks like himself.

“When you miss that amount of time, very rarely do you just step back in. You’re still trying to find out who you are,” said PawSox hitting coach Rich Gedman. “I think Sam is probably stronger than he’s ever been, but he wasn’t baseball strong yet. Little by little, it looks like the muscles are starting to loosen up. His swing isn’t getting cut off. His baseball swing is starting to show up a little more . . . He wanted to be right back where he was. To me, it just takes time. You can see the field starting to open up for him again.” That approach, in turn, once again has him looking like a hitter who may be able to contribute to the Red Sox should the need for a righthanded bat arise — though with the need for further defensive development.

“He knows he can’t just be a one-dimensional player. He’s going to have to play defense. We’re seeing some signs of improvement. Could it continue to get better? Yes. It has to,” said Boles. “[But] he works harder than anybody we have. He’s on a mission.

“The sky is the limit with him. You see some limitations, but he’ll work through barriers. He doesn’t want to be OK. He wants to be really good. He wants to be great.”

Chavis in a groove

Michael Chavis’s three-homer game for High A Salem on April 19 turned heads, but what the 21-year-old has done since then is no less impressive. Through 29 games, he’s enjoying one of the best seasons in the minors, hitting .343 with a .427 OBP, .648 slugging mark, and seven homers — a staggering step forward for a player who hit .231/.294/.399 over two seasons in Single A Greenville in 2015 and ’16. A player who has always shown considerable raw power is, for the first time in his career, showing an approach to take advantage of it.

How to explain his leap forward? Perhaps no one is in better position to evaluate that question than Nelson Paulino, Chavis’s hitting coach with Greenville in 2015 who is now working again with the third baseman in Salem. Paulino suggested that an improved, more compact swing coupled with greater body control and an increased willingness to focus on driving the ball from gap to gap has allowed Chavis to wait for his pitch rather than expanding the strike zone early in counts.

“He’s a power hitter, but I’m trying to help him, especially now, to stay to the big part of the field. When he focuses on the big part of the field, he can make adjustments easily on breaking balls,” said Paulino. “He’s more selective right now. During the game, he’s focused every [at-bat]. He knows how the pitchers are trying to get him out. He’s being more selective. That’s the reason his swing path is much better now.”

A year ago, Paulino worked with Yoan Moncada and Rafael Devers in Salem, one year after working with that duo (along with Chavis) in Greenville. The hitting coach sees similarities to what those top prospects did in stretches in 2016 and the impact Chavis has shown during his run this season.

“Devers, Moncada, and Chavis now, yes, there are some similarities,” said Paulino. “It’s a good groove I see Chavis in right now.”

Tracking Devers’s arc

Devers is still sizzling in Double A Portland, with a .336 average, .406 OBP, and .588 slugging mark along with seven homers in 33 games. In its own right, that is a remarkable performance. Given that Devers is just 20, it is stunning.

Dave Cameron of Fangraphs identified 43 minor leaguers in the last 10 years who opened their age-20 seasons in Double A. Of those, Devers's early offensive numbers were ahead of all at the same age and career stage except for Carlos Correa and Giancarlo Stanton — both of whom not only reached the big leagues but excelled by the middle of that season.

In his own unique way, Xander Bogaerts off to a great start

Alex Speier

It was a pitch that should have been nearly impossible to hit — a four-seam fastball whistling just above the upper limit of the strike zone at 100.5 m.p.h. With an 0-2 count against Cardinals reliever Trevor Rosenthal, a best-case scenario for such a pitch seemed like a foul tip that Yadier Molina couldn't corral.

Before the eighth inning of Wednesday's game, batters had attempted 28 swings against pitches that shot over the middle of home plate either in the upper third of the strike zone or above it at 100-plus m.p.h. Of those 28 swings, half (14) resulted in either swinging strikes or foul tips, 10 had produced foul balls, and two had produced harmless flyouts. There had been one hit — a Jose Martinez double against a 100.6 m.p.h. Aroldis Chapman heater that was just above the strike zone — but truthfully, the odds of doing anything with a Rosenthal heater in the spot where he threw it seemed terrible.

But Xander Bogaerts saw things differently. The Red Sox shortstop scorched a triple to right-center on the pitch, because of course he did.

"That's incredible," Jerry Remy immediately observed in the NESN broadcast booth after seeing Bogaerts slice the Red Sox' deficit to one run, and eventually erase it when he scored on Andrew Benintendi's sac fly — critical runs in the Red Sox' eventual 5-4, 13-inning win. "Watch the hands of Xander Bogaerts get on top of a 100 m.p.h. fastball."

There are few batters in baseball who can do what Bogaerts did. His excellence this year is of a highly unusual sort.

It was Bogaerts' second triple of the game, because of course it was. It seems entirely appropriate that one of the 24-year-old's signature games of this season should represent a rarity — just the eighth multi-triple game by a Red Sox since 2000. After all, his season to date has been equal parts brilliant and odd.

Baseball is in the Era of Three True Outcomes. Games are grinding to a halt as hitters seem geared for little beyond taking aim at homers (thus taking defense out of the equation as a variable), walking, or striking out. The old-school value of flipping balls into play has become a lost art.

Against that backdrop, Bogaerts has been ... different. He has yet to hit a homer this year in 149 plate appearances, with his 46 hits representing far and away the most of any player who has yet to go deep. (Dee Gordon is second at 39.) He has walked in just 7.4 percent of plate appearances, ranked in roughly the bottom third of the league. His 12.1 percent strikeout rate, however, ranks him among the upper 10 percent of players who are the most difficult to strike out this year.

Everything about his offensive approach has been just a little bit backward. He's swung at just 54 percent of pitches in the strike zone, the fourth-lowest rate among regulars, but he's been aggressive with pitches outside of it, swinging at 28.2 percent of such pitches — a roughly middle-of-the-pack mark in the big leagues. He's hitting .281 with a .313 slugging percentage when in hitters' counts, compared to marks of .375 and .589 when the pitcher is ahead in the count.

Bogaerts is hitting .338 in two-strike counts — when he theoretically should be on the defensive — matching his mark in the no-strike and one-strike counts. How to explain what he's been doing?

"Bogey to me has always had good plate coverage so he doesn't expose himself to one side of the plate or the other," Sox manager John Farrell recently observed. "He's got the willingness to stay up the middle, go

to right field, I think it keeps him on some breaking balls, keeps him on some fastballs that are away. So to me I think the ability to get some base hits late in the count [is] there for him.”

For a player who ranks fifth in the American League in average (.338) and sixth in OBP (.396), and who is creating all kinds of headaches for opposing pitchers by hitting .481 on pitches on the inner third of the plate in the strike zone and .321 on pitches on the outer third, the Red Sox will not quibble about the lack of home run pop, particularly as his season kicks into another gear. In 15 games in May, he’s hitting .365/.420/.571 with 10 extra-base hits in 15 games.

In Bogaerts, the Sox see a player who has raw power – in 2012, he became the first Red Sox teenager to hit 20-plus homers at any level since Tony Conigliaro, while last year, he hit 21 homers. Yet right now, Bogaerts has a higher average, OBP, and slugging mark than he posted last year, and he continues to offer added value as one of the better baserunners in the game.

The result? Though he exhibits traits that are atypical in baseball, Bogaerts is nonetheless performing at a level that makes him one of the more valuable – and most unusual – shortstops in the game.

“What I don’t want Bogey to do is abandon the current approach just because he’s got a homer run total that doesn’t reflect who he is,” said Farrell. “I’m sure the [slugging] will be there. We’re seeing a guy in this current two-week stretch where he’s begun to take off even more. There’s been great impact to the pull side on select occasions but we’re not even [a quarter of the way through] the season yet and while you’re looking at nearly a .340 average there’s a lot more positives going on than negatives.”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox notebook: John Farrell gives slumping Andrew Benintendi the night off

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — Stuck in the midst of an 0-for-26 streak, Andrew Benintendi was held out of the Red Sox lineup for just the second time all year.

Just like John Farrell did with Jackie Bradley Jr. when the center fielder was starting to slump, Farrell put Benintendi on the bench for last night’s series opener against the Oakland A’s and replaced him with Chris Young.

Young was 1-for-3 with a sacrifice fly in the Sox’ 8-3 loss.

“We’re just trying to pick a spot for him and give him a little bit of a breather,” Farrell said Benintendi before the game. “Against Sonny (Gray), who’s probably had more success against lefties within the number of starts this year, felt like tonight might be a good spot to pick for him.

“I will say this: He is still taking some good swings in this stretch. A big sac fly last night for the tying run. My thought would be he’d be back in there (tonight) and we’ll see where we are Saturday with (Sean) Manaea going. (We could use) a left-hander with Chris Young being in the mix a little more.”

Benintendi was 0-for-4 with a sacrifice fly in the Sox’ 5-4 extra-innings win against the St. Louis Cardinals on Wednesday. His 0-for-26 stretch has been spread out through seven games. He’s walked four times and struck out four times, all while batting from the cleanup spot.

“I think right now the way pitchers have adjusted an attack plan, there’s been some at-bats where he’s maybe caught in between speed a little bit,” Farrell said. “He’s a little bit late on some fastballs and out front on some offspeed, which is not uncommon.

“We’re talking about a week and he’s got about 10 weeks in the big leagues, so he’s bound to have a little bit of an ebb and flow to his game. Tonight’s more of just a little bit of a breather.”

Benintendi was due for a day off anyway, having played in 38 of the Sox’ first 39 games this year. It helps to have a solid alternative in Young, who had a pinch-hit single to drive in the go-ahead run in the 13th inning Wednesday night and is hitting .270 with an .816 OPS since signing a two-year deal with the Red Sox before the 2016 season.

But with Benintendi being just 22 years old and still trying to establish himself, there’s always the chance benching him for too long could shatter his confidence.

“No, as far as that, no,” Farrell said. “He’s a competitor, and certainly he’s got a little frustration, but as far as it getting to the point of taking him out of his game or becoming that much more prevalent, no.

“He’s a pretty remarkable young guy when it comes to staying even-keeled. Whether it’s been when things have gone really well, he hasn’t gotten too far ahead of himself. And much like right now, where maybe the last week it’s been maybe a little bit hit and miss, so no, a very poised and composed young guy.”

Arms a plenty

The Red Sox now are carrying 13 pitchers.

Hector Velazquez was activated last night to make his first major league start after posting a 1.55 ERA at Triple-A Pawtucket, and took the loss after allowing five earned runs over six innings.

Steven Wright, out for the season because of shoulder surgery, was moved to the 60-day disabled list to make room on the 40-man for Velazquez. Utility man Chase d’Arnaud was designated for assignment to make room on the 25-man roster.

The Sox could have optioned Robbie Ross Jr. or Ben Taylor but prefer the bullpen depth.

“Given the number of innings our bullpen has pitched of late, the uncertainty of how deep Hector could go tonight, we felt like carrying an extra pitcher was the way to go after 13 innings last night,” Farrell said.

Check out Price

The Red Sox are anxiously awaiting results from David Price, who will make his first and perhaps only rehab start with Pawtucket tonight. The PawSox are in Buffalo facing the Toronto Blue Jays’ Triple-A affiliate.

“It’s a big day for him,” Farrell said. “We’ll see how he comes out with the number of pitches thrown. I would think just with the game environment there might be a little bit more adrenaline. . . . But honestly, the way he has been throwing the baseball in controlled settings, I can’t imagine there would be any more energy and effort created because it’s been mid-to-low 90s in those settings. He’s done a fantastic job as far as replicating the adrenaline as best as possible.”

First option

Mitch Moreland entered last night’s game just 3-for-25 with 12 strikeouts in his past eight games, but went 1-for-3 last night with a solo homer. He’s played every game this season and is on pace for 673 plate appearances. Before this year, he’s never had more than 518.

The Sox’ only other option at the moment is to use Josh Rutledge.

Could there be another option down in Pawtucket? First base prospect Sam Travis is starting to make some noise. He was 5-for-6 with two doubles and three RBI yesterday and has now collected multiple hits in four

straight games and in seven of his past 10 contests. He's hitting .368 with a 1.042 OPS since the start of May. . . .

Right-hander Kyle Kendrick, optioned after two disappointing starts, allowed seven runs for Pawtucket yesterday.

Righty Brandon Workman had a much better outing, striking out five in 2²/₃ scoreless innings. He has a 1.98 ERA in eight games with the PawSox this year.

Red Sox take one on the chin in loss to Athletics

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Taxes due, sun rises and Red Sox pitching depth fails to impress.

This one was a waste of everybody's time.

If the season comes down to one game, think back to their 8-3 loss to the Oakland A's on May 18 as the one the Red Sox punted.

Hector Velazquez wasn't fooling anybody with his high-80s fastball. He had no put-away pitch. And his command, while acceptable, wasn't nearly as sharp as it needed to be, though it's not certain that mattered.

A curveball below the zone to Jed Lowrie was hit about as far as a changeup he left up to Khris Davis. Both of them cleared the fence.

While it was crystal clear in a three-run first inning when he allowed back-to-back homers to Lowrie and Davis that Velazquez wasn't going to cut it against major league hitters, the Red Sox evidently had little choice but to keep him in the game and hope for the best. After a 13-inning marathon in which every reliever was used against the St. Louis Cardinals the night before, Velazquez had to take this one on the chin.

"It was a case of a number of pitches found the middle of the plate and they squared them up," manager John Farrell said. "On a late night coming in here, you know you have a couple of pushes from an offensive standpoint where you need some leadership from the mound, and that really wasn't the case here tonight."

A seven-year veteran of professional baseball in Mexico, the right-handed Velazquez was signed in spring training after a career year (2.37 ERA, 8.8 K/9). He got off to a strong start in Triple-A Pawtucket (1.55 ERA, 6.2 K/9) and the Red Sox made him the choice over Brian Johnson (2.92 ERA, 7.8 K/9) to replace Kyle Kendrick in the rotation, at least until David Price is ready to return.

The A's rank 26th in MLB with 3.85 runs per game this season. Here's how they welcomed Velazquez to the majors to start the first inning: Single, walk, home run, home run.

"Out of the gate I felt a little bit emotional, just with it being my first big league game," he said through translator Daveson Perez. "So my adrenaline was a little up there and getting under control was hard. So unfortunately I had a bad inning but I felt good."

The A's tagged him for three more in the fourth inning on a pair of belt-high pitches to Trevor Plouffe (RBI double) and a Chad Pinder (two-run homer).

The Red Sox squeezed their five innings and 101 pitches out of Velazquez, but at the cost of nine hits, two walks and six runs. He struck out four.

“I thought there might be a little better command within the strike zone,” Farrell said. “He’s a guy we felt like was very efficient with a pretty basic delivery, the ability to repeat a release point. There were some pitches that stayed up in the middle of the plate. They made them pay for it.”

Robbie Ross Jr. replaced him and gave up two more.

Hanley Ramirez and Chris Young drove in a pair on a single and sacrifice fly to give the Red Sox a very brief 2-0 lead in the first inning against A’s starter Sonny Gray.

Mitch Moreland destroyed a solo shot to left-center in the third inning that Farrell called a “beautiful shot the other way.” Gray lasted six and gave up three.

Less than 24 hours earlier, the Red Sox were celebrating in the visiting locker room at Busch Stadium after erasing a four-run deficit and beating the Cardinals, 5-4, in a 13-inning game that lasted about 4-½ hours.

“This is big for us,” Farrell said afterward. “This is a big win. It’s a huge shift.”

The Red Sox needed a legitimate starting pitcher to help build on that momentum. They have an impressive top-three in Chris Sale, Eduardo Rodriguez and Rick Porcello, but they’ve gotten little from the back-end of the rotation.

And the minor league depth that was touted all offseason has provided more grief than relief.

“Yeah the depth is something we talk about all year long,” Farrell said. “No matter what time of the year it is you try to build it as best possible. But we’ve got to keep searching in the event that we need guys to go as those sixth, seventh, eighth starters...Those guys are important. And right now we’re still searching.”

Now is not the time for Red Sox to make blockbuster trade

Michael Silverman

OAKLAND, Calif. — Hate to douse a good trade rumor — especially in the middle of May — but folks, Jose Quintana isn’t walking into the Red Sox clubhouse this season or any season in the near future.

And that’s a good thing.

While it’s #realnews that the Red Sox have had scouts watching White Sox games lately, that’s about as significant as noting that the Rangers and Mariners are coming to Fenway Park during the next homestand.

“It’s May,” said one American League executive familiar with the current trade landscape. “Just because scouts are covering clubs doesn’t mean anything is brewing.”

What’s far more important to keep in mind than the timing of the tidbit from CBS Radio in Chicago about Red Sox scouts doing their job is that there’s absolutely no reason for this organization to fork over the high number of blue-chip prospects the White Sox are asking for, rightfully, in return for Quintana.

Anybody recall the trade with the White Sox last December, when the Red Sox acquired tonight’s starter Chris Sale?

Sure you do, and surely you remember the Red Sox dealt away their two best prospects in second baseman Yoan Moncada and right-hander Michael Kopech.

And then there was the other deal they pulled last July, when they sent their other top pitching prospect, Anderson Espinoza, to the Padres for tomorrow’s starter Drew Pomeranz.

That second deal has yet to pay off much for either club, but for the purposes of speaking about this July's trading deadline, it's the Sale deal that is pertinent to any talk of the Red Sox trading for Quintana.

Understand that the White Sox were asking for a "rich package" last offseason and that "can't have changed," that AL source said.

The Red Sox don't have any more "rich packages" to deal.

And while that doesn't mean the Red Sox are lacking more good prospects, it does mean they'd be crazy to consider dealing from the top of their deck in order to acquire another front-line starter, which Quintana most definitely is.

The three best prospect the Red Sox have at the moment are third baseman Rafael Devers, first baseman Sam Travis and left-hander Jay Groome.

I could give a hundred reasons why trading one, never mind two, of those names would be a bad idea right now, but here are only a few.

Given the Red Sox' glaring need for a third baseman after the trade of Travis Shaw, the injuries to Pablo Sandoval and Marco Hernandez and the inability of anyone else to step up and claim the spot, it's highly relevant to point out that in Portland (Double A), Devers is currently staking his own claim that he could be the team's answer as early as this season.

As the invaluable resource soxprospects.com reported yesterday, Devers has been on a serious roll this month. In his first 15 games in May he posted a ridiculous slash line of .408/.517/.796. That .517 on-base percentage could be the most impressive feat. Devers walked 11 times in those 15 games, and that could be the truest indicator that the 20-year-old is prime for a promotion to Triple A sometime in the next month or two. He needs more seasoning, but to see him thrive right now is a key development.

Travis also is starting to hit after a slow start. In his first 13 games this month, he hit .314/.364/.569 with three home runs and nine RBI at Triple-A Pawtucket. Travis is a hitter, first and foremost, and while he has plenty left to prove (like Devers), it's not unreasonable to think the Red Sox would be curious enough to give him a look before the end of this season as well.

Groome is hurt now, but he's 18 and was the club's top pick last season. His high ceiling has not disappeared. He is not somebody the Red Sox want to bring up in trade talks anytime soon.

The White Sox have other potentially available talent, such as closer David Robertson and third baseman Todd Frazier. Perhaps the Red Sox are interested in, say, Frazier. Let's see how that possibility develops. Maybe it morphs into a rumor in the near future. Or not.

Linking the Red Sox to a talent like Quintana, however, is a stretch nobody needs to make.

Quintana is not eligible for free agency for three more seasons and is going to command names of the caliber of Devers, Travis and Groome.

The Red Sox pulled off a deal like that in December.

Those types of deals are called blockbusters, and blockbusters are rare.

The Red Sox can't, and shouldn't, pull off another one this July — never mind in the middle of May.

Matt Barnes is 'done thinking' and it's paying off

Michael Silverman

OAKLAND – Matt Barnes doesn't want a penny for his thoughts -- not when his decision to stop thinking altogether paid off big for him Thursday night.

The thought that his strong outing could represent a turnaround to his recent struggles could reap both him and the Red Sox bullpen huge rewards down the line.

“A few days ago, I was like 'I'm done thinking – give me a sign, let's play catch, I'm going to throw the ball to my location, execute my pitch and not think about anything else,' ” said the reliever after last night's 8-3 loss. “It's one of those things, sometimes when you start thinking and try to do too much and you're over-analyzing everything, and you're thinking about a million different things and sometimes you need to get the ball and just say, 'you know what, here we go – here's my sign, grab it, throw it.' We've been doing it long enough where your body's just going to do it. So sometimes less is more.”

Barnes looked as sharp last night as he did for his first seven outings of this season, when he did not allow a run.

He struck out five of the eight A's he faced, allowed just two hits and didn't walk a batter.

Prior to that, Barnes has been in search for answers that have not been there on a consistent basis. Over his last 10 appearances, dating back to April 18 and including that time missed from the suspension he served for that too-high pitch at Manny Machado's head, he has posted an 8.64 ERA, with five walks and just four strikeouts over his 8-1/3 innings. Batters were slugging .528 against him (vs. .182 in those first seven games), and they had three home runs.

Last night was night and day from that.

And it all came from hard work, capped off with a conscious decision to let that work pay off by cutting off ties with the portion of his brain responsible for decisions, doubts and worries and instead pass the baton to the portion responsible for muscle memory.

“We've been working on trying to find a rhythm, the timing and the mechanics and putting it altogether and today I felt like it was one of those days where it clicked – it felt back to normal,” said Barnes.

Manager John Farrell, who spent much of the postgame media session recounting the ways in which starter Hector Velazquez could not make the grade, welcomed the chance to switch it up and rave about Barnes' night.

“I thought that was the best two innings he's pitched in probably 10 days, a chance for him to go out and pitch, use his stuff, both breaking balls, the curve and slider, an opportunity to go out and get in a little bit of a rhythm,” said Farrell. “He needed to go out and get some work to gain some consistency. I know he comes out of tonight and even comments after he's done, feeling more consistent and better about his outing. In his own right, a guy we need later in games, as he gets back on track, hopefully this is a chance to build on it.”

*** *The Providence Journal***

Plate approach a reason for Red Sox not to worry about slumping Andrew Benintendi

Brian MacPherson

John Farrell probably would prefer Andrew Benintendi not go hitless in 26 at-bats, as Andrew Benintendi had as he got on the Red Sox charter in St. Louis in the wee hours of Thursday morning. But a hitless week hasn't been enough to prompt Farrell to move Benintendi out of the cleanup spot, let alone keep him out of the lineup entirely.

“Any player is going to go through some ebbs and flows along the way,” Farrell told reporters at Busch Stadium before Thursday’s win in extra innings. “He’s been pitched to. He’s getting a steady does of change of speeds. A lot of good hitters are going to see that. But there’s no wavering confidence in his abilities.”

Benintendi hit the ground running in what officially remains his rookie season, hitting a home run on Opening Day and reaching base at a .392 clip while slugging .478 in April. He looked every bit like a Rookie of the Year shoo-in and a franchise cornerstone in the mold of doppelganger Fred Lynn.

But Benintendi has scuffled since the calendar flipped to May -- with the notable exception of a spectacular weekend at Minnesota two weeks ago, the weekend that saw Farrell install him as his cleanup hitter for the first time. He hit two doubles and two home runs in that three-game series; he has hit one double and no home runs in all other games in May, including his ongoing 0-for-26 skid. A slugging percentage that was at .516 on May 9 fell to .427 with another hitless night Thursday.

But Benintendi has continued to demonstrate the advanced command of the strike zone that prompted Boston to promote him so aggressively a year ago. He has drawn as many walks (eight) as he has compiled strikeouts, an even better ratio than he put together in April. He saw more pitches (31) than any other Red Sox hitter in Thursday night’s marathon.

And in the top of the eighth inning Thursday, with Xander Bogaerts on third and the Red Sox down a run, got his bat on a triple-digit fastball from Trevor Rosenthal and drove it down the left-field line, deep enough to score Bogaerts with the tying run and force extra innings.

It’s his strike-zone command and ability to be productive even when not hitting that gives the Red Sox confidence Benintendi will come around -- and Farrell not to juggle his lineup.

“That’s been a productive lineup for us,” Farrell said. “There are other ways he can contribute.”

Benintendi certainly is far from the first young hitter to hit a dry patch in his first full season. It would have been surprising had he not done so. Recent seasons have seen young hitter after young hitter stumble -- often in dramatic fashion -- before righting the ship.

Bogaerts remains the classic example from this generation of Red Sox hitters, a former top prospect who displayed such poise and maturity during the 2013 World Series that he appeared almost slump-proof. He instead spent most of May, June and July mired in a slump that saw him hit .143 with a .188 on-base percentage and strike out five times for every walk. By September, however, he had righted the ship -- and he hit .320 the following year, earning his first Silver Slugger nod.

Los Angeles outfielder Joc Pederson slugged .487 in the first half in his first full season with the Dodgers in 2015, looking every bit a sure-fire superstar. He fell apart in the second half, hitting .178 with a .300 slugging percentage in more than 200 plate appearances. But his peripheral statistics didn’t change -- his strikeout-to-walk ratios were almost identical before and after the All-Star break -- and the following season saw him slug .495 in nearly 500 plate appearances.

New York outfielder Michael Conforto, the hitter whose path Benintendi has mirrored at almost every step, maintained a slugging percentage over .500 through the end of May a year ago. He then slugged just .241 in June and July, a slump so ugly the Mets optioned him back to Triple-A in mid-August. But Conforto held his own upon his return to the major leagues in September and has hit 10 home runs with a .638 slugging percentage so far this season.

When Benintendi rights the ship remains to be seen. A Bogaerts-esque slump that lasts for much of the summer is far from an ideal outcome as the Red Sox cling to contention by their fingertips. But recent history suggest that even a hitless week is no reason to adjust the long-term forecast for a hitter the caliber of Benintendi.

*** *The Springfield Republican***

Hector Velazquez rocked in debut, Red Sox fall 8-3 to Oakland A's

Jen McCaffrey

Hector Velazquez's major-league debut didn't go quite the way he or the Red Sox planned.

The right-hander was rocked for six runs on nine hits and two walks over five innings of work.

Boston fell into an early hole from which they couldn't recover and lost 8-3 in the first of four games in Oakland.

The Athletics jumped on the 28-year-old Velazquez for three runs in the first inning after the Red Sox took an early 2-0 lead in the top of the first.

Velazquez struggled through the first, in which he gave up a two-run homer to Jed Lowrie and a solo shot to Khris Davis to give up the Red Sox lead.

In five starts at Triple-A Pawtucket, Velazquez, who signed with the Red Sox as a free agent out of the Mexican League this offseason, posted a 1.55 ERA. But he had no such command on Thursday night.

Velazquez held the A's off the board for the next two innings, thanks in part to strong defense from Deven Marrero, who turned a big double play, and Jackie Bradley Jr., who threw out Rajai Davis trying to stretch a double into a triple.

Mitch Moreland briefly tied up the game 3-3 in the fourth with a solo homer, but Velazquez gave up three more runs in the bottom of the inning on an RBI double and two-run homer.

Robbie Ross Jr. entered and gave up two more runs in the sixth inning, but Matt Barnes followed with two strong innings, allowing just two hits.

The Red Sox got their first two runs in the first inning when Hanley Ramirez hit an RBI single and Chris Young hit a sacrifice fly to score Dustin Pedroia.

After the first inning, the Red Sox had little to show against A's starter Sonny Gray, who finished the night with three runs allowed on four hits over six innings.

Velazquez added to Red Sox roster for start vs. Oakland; D'Arnaud designated for assignment

Jen McCaffrey

The Red Sox added right-hander Hector Velazquez to the 40-man roster on Thursday ahead of his start against the Oakland Athletics.

To make room for him, the Red Sox moved Steven Wright to the 60-day disabled list, following his season-ending knee surgery, and designated infielder/outfielder Chase D'Arnaud for assignment.

Velazquez, who signed with the Red Sox as a free agent out of the Mexican League this winter, posted a 1.55 ERA in five starts for Triple-A Pawtucket this spring with five walks and 20 strikeouts over 29 innings.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox cool off after fast start in Oakland

Jane Lee and Alex Espinoza

OAKLAND -- Jed Lowrie, Khris Davis and Chad Pinder homered as the A's spoiled the Major League debut of Red Sox right-hander Hector Velazquez and claimed an 8-3 series-opening victory at the Coliseum on Thursday evening.

Sonny Gray was awarded his first win of 2017 with six strong innings, rebounding from a two-run, 31-pitch opening frame to allow one run the rest of the way. The A's right-hander yielded four hits, including a home run to Mitch Moreland, and struck out eight in his fourth start of the season.

"Sonny was absolutely outstanding," A's catcher Stephen Vogt said. "The first inning, they jumped on him a little bit, took advantage of the few mistakes he did make tonight. But he looked as good as I've seen him in a very long time. He felt good, had all four pitches working, really put the ball where he wanted to when he wanted to. Had that swing-and-miss slider tonight that we all know he has. It was very refreshing to see that."

The 28-year-old Velazquez was responsible for six runs and nine hits in five innings, walking two and fanning four in the 101-pitch outing. His contract was purchased by the Red Sox out of the Mexican League in February and he joined the team Thursday afternoon.

"First time out for [Velazquez]," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "Not making any excuses -- this isn't a 21-year-old coming up and making his debut. Just more the command within the strike zone that's been his billing from the time we signed to what we saw in Spring Training. Pitches up in the middle of the plate cost him."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Taking control: Staring down an early 2-0 deficit, the A's responded with three runs in the bottom of the first, after totaling just two hits the night before in a shutout loss in Seattle. The inning featured the first back-to-back home runs by the A's this season, with former Red Sox infielder Lowrie sending one to dead center for a two-run shot and Davis lifting one over the right-center-field wall. Davis has 12, tying Yonder Alonso for the team lead.

"We've been having a little trouble in the first inning," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "When you're constantly behind coming into your first at-bat, it makes it a little bit more difficult. So to be able to respond and end up taking the lead, it was big. Obviously, we had a tough [1-5] trip. Home's been a little bit better to us than the road, so it's a good start for us against a good team."

on: After Moreland notched his fourth career home run off Gray in the fourth inning, the A's again answered back, getting three runs in the bottom of the inning -- two coming on Pinder's third homer. Trevor Plouffe also hit an RBI double to extend his hitting streak to nine games, helping the A's distance themselves from a potent Red Sox club. Plouffe finished with three hits and is batting .424 during the streak.

"Trevor's got a history of hitting," Melvin said. "He's swinging the bat now as well as he has all year."

UPON FURTHER REVIEW

Rajai Davis led off the third inning with what was initially ruled a triple, but the Red Sox challenged and replay officials determined that he came off the bag while third baseman Deven Marrero was applying the tag, and the call was overturned.

WHAT'S NEXT

Red Sox: Chris Sale seeks to tie a Major League record he already co-owns with his eighth straight start of 10 strikeouts or more on Friday at 9:35 p.m. ET against the A's. Sale, who leads the Majors with 85 strikeouts and a 0.77 WHIP, went 2-0 with a 1.80 ERA in two starts against Oakland last year.

A's: Right-hander Kendall Graveman is on tap to start the second game of this four-game series, scheduled for 6:35 p.m. PT Friday at the Coliseum. Graveman has a 5.48 ERA in four starts since his return from the disabled list, after posting a 2.00 ERA in his first three starts.

Velazquez roughed up by A's in MLB debut

Alex Espinoza

OAKLAND -- Just three months after being signed from the Mexican League, Hector Velazquez made his MLB debut on Thursday night for the Red Sox.

Once Velazquez got on the mound at the Coliseum, the A's were rude hosts. The right-hander gave up a trio of homers, including back-to-back blasts in the first inning, as Boston suffered a 8-3 loss to open the four-game set.

"I felt good," Velazquez said through team translator Daveson Perez. "Out of the gate, I felt a little bit emotional, just with it being my first big league game. My adrenaline was a little up there, and getting it under control was hard. Unfortunately, I had a bad inning, but I felt good."

Oakland jumped all over Velazquez in the first frame. Jed Lowrie followed up a Matt Joyce walk by hitting a two-run homer to dead center. Then A's slugger Khris Davis delivered a solo shot four pitches later.

The A's tacked on three more in the fourth, highlighted by a two-run blast by Chad Pinder. A day after Red Sox manager John Farrell used his entire bullpen in a 13-inning contest, Velazquez did well to complete five innings. But the silver lining stopped there. In all, he allowed six earned runs on nine hits and two walks with four strikeouts.

"I thought there might be a little better command in the strike zone," Farrell said. "He's a guy that we felt like, with a very efficient and pretty basic delivery, would be able to repeat a release point. There were some pitches that stayed up middle of the plate that they made him pay for."

The 28-year-old went 2-1 with a 1.55 ERA and 0.79 WHIP in five starts with Triple-A Pawtucket, but that success didn't translate to his first big league outing. Farrell said it was too early to say whether Velazquez will make another start, saying the club wants to wait to see how lefty David Price gets through Friday's rehab assignment for Pawtucket.

"With Monday's off-day, we've got some flexibility in the rotation," Farrell said.

Sale eyes record-tying 8th straight 10-K start

Alex Espinoza

Chris Sale will try to tie a Major League record he already co-owns, eight straight starts of 10 strikeouts or more, when he leads the Red Sox against Kendall Graveman and the A's on Friday night at the Coliseum.

Sale and Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez share the record. The lefty accomplished the feat in 2015 with the White Sox. Sale also enters the contest with a Major League-leading 85 strikeouts, tied with Randy Johnson (1998, Houston Astros) for the most by a pitcher through his first eight starts with a new club.

Safe to say, Boston manager John Farrell is happy to have Sale in the rotation.

"We're looking at one of the premier guys in baseball," Farrell said. "We're fortunate to watch it every time he walks to the mound. You love that competitiveness. The physical stuff speaks for itself. But I think his attack of hitters has rubbed off on other pitchers that we have on our staff. He's a leader in his own right."

The dominant southpaw totes a 4-2 record, 2.15 ERA and Major League-best 0.77 WHIP. While with the White Sox, Sale won both of his starts against the A's in 2016, allowing three earned runs while striking out 16 in 15 innings.

Oakland will counter with Graveman, who hasn't posted back-to-back quality starts since his first two outings of the season. Graveman went 6 2/3 innings in a losing effort against Texas on Sunday, allowing four runs on nine hits and a walk while striking out two.

Things to know about this game

- It's hard enough for hitters to deal with Sale's high-90s fastball and sweeping slider, which come in from a release point that's extremely hard to pick up. So when Sale starts mixing in his 86-mph changeup, it's just one more thing for those batters to worry about. Boston's ace is the undisputed king of pitching backward with the changeup, throwing it for a called strike on the first pitch of the at-bat 178 times in the Statcast Era, nearly twice as many as any other pitcher.

- A's infielders Adam Rosales and Jed Lowrie each own a .412 career batting average against Sale, which is tied for the fifth-highest mark for any hitter with at least 15 plate appearances against the lefty.

- Boston rookie outfielder Andrew Benintendi is expected to be back in the starting lineup on Friday after being held out on Thursday against A's ace Sonny Gray. Benintendi is mired in an 0-for-26 slump in his past seven contests that has dropped his batting average from .339 to .280.

Red Sox DFA d'Arnaud, call up Velazquez

Alex Espinoza

OAKLAND -- Hector Velazquez received a warm welcome to the visitors' clubhouse at the Coliseum on Thursday afternoon before making his Major League debut in the Red Sox's series opener against the A's.

Boston selected Velazquez from Triple-A Pawtucket on Thursday while utility man Chase d'Arnaud was designated for assignment and right-hander Steven Wright was moved to the 60-day disabled list.

Despite having an eight-man bullpen, the Red Sox elected to pare d'Arnaud from the roster.

"Felt like carrying the extra pitcher, at this point, was the way to go," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "After 13 innings last night, we're probably going to stay away from a guy or two. Unfortunately, it creates the move that we had for Chase, in this case. But it gives us a little more depth in the bullpen."

Velazquez's debut comes three months after the Red Sox inked him to a contract and plucked him from the Mexican League, where he pitched from 2010-16. The 28-year-old righty fared well with Pawtucket, going 2-1 with a 1.55 ERA, 0.79 WHIP and 20 strikeouts in 29 innings across five starts.

Farrell was non-committal on Velazquez's immediate future with the club, saying it depends on his outing Thursday and the results from David Price's scheduled Triple-A rehab start in Buffalo on Friday.

"Next week is an off-day Monday," Farrell said. "We've got a chance to adjust the rotation if need be."

The Red Sox claimed d'Arnaud off waivers April 27 after he was DFA'd by Atlanta two days earlier. The 30-year-old went 4-for-9 (.444) in 13 games this season between the Braves and Red Sox, having appeared at second base, third base and left field. Wright, who was an All-Star in 2016, underwent season-ending surgery on his left knee on May 8.

Worth noting

- Price (left elbow strain), third baseman Pablo Sandoval (right knee sprain) and outfielder Brock Holt (vertigo) are all slated to start for Pawtucket on Friday evening in Buffalo. Sandoval is expected to be limited to a designated-hitter role.

* **WEEI.com**

A's 8, Red Sox 3: Here's Another Reminder the Red Sox Really Need David Price

Rob Bradford

It's almost like we forgot that the Red Sox are playing without their highest paid player.

Thanks Hector Velazquez for reminding us.

David Price will pitch what might be his final minor-league rehab assignment game Friday with Triple-A Pawtucket in Buffalo. He is expected to throw between 85-90 pitches in an outing that the Red Sox are banking on showing enough to result in a return to the big league club next week.

With this potentially being Price's only foray into actually pitching against another organization since dealing with his elbow issue in early March, there might be some uneasiness. If Price goes out there against the Rangers at Fenway Park and offers something other than a top of the rotation kind of start, there is going to be some second-guessing going on.

But if Price goes out there Friday and offers the kind of optimism he elicited in tossing what were classified as some super intense simulated games, it will be hard not to reintroduce him to the major leagues. IT's getting to be about that time where the Red Sox could really use something along the lines of what this guy can offer.

While technically the spot Velazquez filled in Thursday night during the Red Sox' 8-3 loss to the A's belonged to Steven Wright, it really is opening Price needs to fill. (For a complete recap, [click here.](#))

While there has been some uneasiness in what Drew Pomeranz and Rick Porcello has delivered at times this season, there is enough there to believe that those two, along with Chris Sale and Eduardo Rodriguez, is pennant race worthy. There is just that one missing piece. And after Velazquez's uninspiring five-inning, six run loss, Price would seem to be scratching right where the Red Sox are itching.

In games pitched by pitchers manning that rotation hole Wright and/or Price left behind, the Red Sox are 2-7, with the collection of Wright, Brian Johnson, Kyle Kendrick and Velazquez combining for a 9.35 ERA (40 earned runs, 37 1/3 innings).

Of course, even with some rust, Price would be expected to be better.

While we get derailed by his "Manager John" quips and sting from the last time we saw Price pitch, it should be remembered what the lefty can deliver. Even during his worst season as a professional, some of the runs he put together throughout 2016 would be a welcome change for these Red Sox.

After heading into his May 12 start with a 6.75 ERA, Price rattled off eight outings in which he combined for a 2.47 ERA over 58 1/3 innings. It was a dominant stretch.

Price also managed a two-month run from July 28-Sept. 22 in which he went 8-1 with a 2.93 ERA, limiting opposing batters to a .219 batting average.

Sure, there were the kind of stinkers that would have lined up with what this fifth starter concoction has been offering the Red Sox. Most notably, the 3 1/3 innings of postseason awfulness in Cleveland.

But in this time of the Red Sox really needing to uncover their identity, with the Yankees sitting 10 games over .500 with a run differential of plus-59 (the Sox are plus-5), Price is needed now. After watching the

Velazquez experiment result in three Oakland homers a series-opening loss, that is more evident now than ever.

Shattering Perceptions Game Note Image

Matt Barnes turned in his best relief outing in weeks, throwing two perfect innings while striking out five.

“I thought that was the best two innings he’s pitched in probably 10 days,” Red Sox manager John Farrell told reporters of Barnes. “A chance for him to go out and pitch, use his stuff, both breaking balls, the curve and slider. An opportunity to go out and get in a little bit of a rhythm. He needed to go out and get some work to gain some consistency. I know he comes out of tonight and even comments after he’s done feeling more consistent and better about his outing. In his own right, a guy we need later in games, as he gets back on track, hopefully this is a chance to build on it.”

*** CSNNE.com**

Drew Pomeranz Doesn't Care Who Rips Him

Evan Drellich

OAKLAND — One of the qualities that talent evaluators could knock Drew Pomeranz for may play right into his hands in Boston.

A Tennessee native who lives in the Bay Area now, Pomeranz’s disposition really fits the latter. He looks laid back. He sounds laid back, and he agreed on the CSNNE Baseball Show that he is.

Baseball’s a sport that doesn’t always reward that look, however. Guys without doses of visible fire can sometimes be branded, fairly or unfairly. But Pomeranz’s don’t-give-two-hoots attitude might actually be the perfect balance for Boston, a reason he can ultimately succeed here if healthy.

He’s taken up photography recently, buying a Digital SLR and getting lessons from Red Sox photographer Billie Weiss. He’s a big traveler in the offseason, and his Instagram account reflects that. Pomeranz’s wife, Carolyn, started a website that chronicles their lives. In St. Louis, Pomeranz and his parents took some photos at the arch.

In the great fishbowl of Boston, Pomeranz is essentially inviting people into his living room. And this is after a 10-month shotgun wedding with the Sox that’s been mostly tumultuous.

Some Sox fans wanted the trade that brought him here last June rescinded because of his arm health. He’s not exactly universally beloved.

So why expose himself to those social media avenues where people can rip him?

“People are going to rip you for whatever. I’ve been ripped since college I guess, when you go to a rival city,” said Pomeranz, a former first-round pick who’s been traded four times. “Or even high school. You go to a travel high school and someone’s yelling at you, you kind of learn like, lock in and focus on your job.

“We get to do a lot of cool stuff. Very appreciative of the lifestyle we get to live. And I think it’s awesome, try to maximize it [by sharing].”

A social media presence without sensitivity is rather remarkable.

Pomeranz is not lacking competitiveness. One scout recently raved about how locked in Pomeranz was when pitching even as far back as college at Ole Miss.

Pomeranz said coming out of a game early, as he did his last time out because of a bothersome left triceps, is “the worst feeling in the world.”

“I’ve always tried to translate on the mound, just kind of stay in right here,” Pomeranz said. “I wouldn’t say I was always so calm in the beginning. Coming up, I came up real quick. It was, it’s kind of a lot to do ... you got to kind of learn. But thankfully I’ve been so many places and been around so many great players and coaches and everything it just kind of helps me relax.”

The lefty is working hard to figure out what’s wrong with his mechanics, to go deeper into games. He felt his bullpen session Wednesday was his best of the year.

“I had a slightly different arm path this year than last year. I was much shorter last year,” Pomeranz said. “I’ve had a long, kind of more wrapped around my body arm path. ... I feel like I’m on track to getting back to that shorter path now.”

Talking about the rest of the season, Pomeranz wasn’t exactly falling asleep as he spoke.

“I hate losing,” he said. “I hate putting our team in a bad position and you know every day I’m in here, go home, I’m watching video — you watch things, making notes to try and stay on track.”

A little California-esque attitude might be just what someone in Boston needs in a tough time.

Price, Sandoval Expected To Make Rehab Starts for Pawtucket Friday Night

CSN Staff

Any of the career minor leaguers and prospects at Pawtucket better not be paying for their meals the next few days.

Red Sox left-hander David Price and third baseman Pablo Sandoval are both scheduled to play for the PawSox on Friday night in Buffalo. It’ll be the first rehab starts for both in their current stints on the disabled list.

At Pawtucket, high-salaried, big-name players Price (who’ll make \$30 million this year) and Sandoval (\$17.6 million) will join Red Sox busts Rusney Castillo and Allen Craig (each making \$11 million this year), who have spent all season at Triple-A after being dropped from the 40-man roster.

Price, coming back from his spring training elbow injury, had his first rehab start with Pawtucket rained out Sunday but pitched a simulated game. He’s scheduled to throw 90 pitches Friday. Sandoval, out with a knee sprain, is expected to DH. Sandoval was hitting .213 with three home runs and 10 RBI in 61 at-bats before his injury last month.

*** *Associated Press***

A's spoil Velazquez's debut with 3 HRs in 8-3 win vs Red Sox

OAKLAND, Calif. — Taking the mound with the lead in the second inning after a rough start to the game was just what Sonny Gray needed to get back on track.

Jed Lowrie and Khris Davis hit first-inning homers to spoil Hector Velazquez's major league debut and Gray took it from there to get his first win of the season for the Oakland Athletics, 8-3 over the Boston Red Sox on Thursday night.

"That really kind of got me going and gave me the kick I needed to really try to focus down and put up some zeroes," Gray said. "The offense really bailed me out early tonight. That was huge."

Gray (1-1) allowed two runs in a 31-pitch first inning in his 100th career start before settling down. Relying heavily on sharp breaking pitches, Gray gave up just one more run the rest of the way, while striking out eight in six innings to give him wins against all 14 other AL teams in his career.

"When he's punching guys out, that's the sign that Sonny is Sonny," catcher Stephen Vogt said. "He's an ace and aces go out there and punch people out. That's what he did tonight."

Chad Pinder added a homer in the fourth inning against Velazquez (0-1), who had a rough first start after spending his first seven years as a pro in the Mexican League.

Staked to a 2-0 lead before taking the mound in his major league debut, the 28-year-old Velazquez fell behind just four batters into the game when he allowed a two-run homer to Lowrie and a solo shot to Davis for Oakland's first back-to-back homers of the season.

"I thought there might be a little bit better command in the strike zone," Red Sox manager John Farrell said. "There were some pitches that stayed up in the middle of the plate that they made him pay for. First time out for him, not making any excuses. This is not a 21-year-old coming up making his debut. It was just more the command within the strike zone."

After Boston tied the game in the fourth on a solo shot by Mitch Moreland, the A's went back ahead in the bottom half when Trevor Plouffe hit an RBI double and Pinder followed with a two-run homer on the next pitch to make it 6-3.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LHP David Price (elbow) and 3B Pablo Sandoval (knee) will begin rehab assignments at Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday. Price is expected to throw 85 to 90 pitches and could be activated from the DL next week.

"Tomorrow is a big day for him in seeing how he comes out, the number of pitches thrown," Farrell said.

Athletics: 1B Yonder Alonso sat out after being removed from the game Wednesday in Seattle with a sore left knee. He had an MRI on Thursday that showed no structural damage and will likely miss at least a couple of days. ... RHP Daniel Mengden (foot) allowed two runs in six innings and RHP John Axford (shoulder) pitched one scoreless innings in a rehab assignment for Triple-A Nashville.

CAUGHT ON BASES

A's leadoff hitter Rajai Davis had a rough night on the bases. He was caught stealing second after leading off the game with a single and then was thrown out at third trying for a triple in the third. Davis beat the throw from center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. and was initially called safe. But his foot came off the base momentarily on the slide and he was tagged by Deven Marrero. The play was overturned on replay.

TOUGH UMP

Home plate umpire Marty Foster took a hard foul ball off the mask in the third inning that left him stumbling before Boston catcher Christian Vazquez steadied him. After being checked by the trainer, Foster stayed in the game.

EMPTY HOUSE

The attendance of 12,016 was the smallest for a Red Sox game in Oakland since the A's drew 8,221 for a game on May 3, 1999.

UP NEXT

Boston's Chris Sale (4-2) goes for his eighth straight double-digit strikeout game in the second game of the series. Sale already has one streak of eight straight double-digit strikeout games in 2015 for the White Sox. The only other player with at least 10 strikeouts in eight straight starts was Pedro Martinez for Boston in 1999. Kendall Graveman (2-2) starts for the A's.

*** *The East Bay Times***

Sonny Gray shines after shaky start and A's power past Red Sox

Jimmy Durkin

OAKLAND — Sonny Gray is just now settling into the groove of his season, which started with him on the disabled list.

The A's ace showcased devastating stuff at times Thursday while shaking off a tough first inning to beat the Boston Red Sox 8-3 in the first game back at the Coliseum following a 1-5 road trip.

"Sonny was absolutely outstanding," A's catcher Stephen Vogt said. "He looked as good as I've seen him in a very, very long time."

Gray worked six innings, allowed a season-low four hits and struck out a season-high eight batters. Despite a two-run first inning, he displayed plenty of life on his fastball throughout and had explosive downward movement on his breaking pitches to earn his first win of the season.

"I kind of used a changeup a little more tonight than I have," Gray said. "I threw a lot of sinkers and curveballs. That's a really good lineup that they have, so just trying to keep them off balance as much as possible. After the first, it worked pretty well."

This was only Gray's fourth start of the year after a strained lat muscle caused him to be shut down early in spring training and miss the first month of the season. He left his last start in Texas with a lead in tact after allowing two runs over six innings, but the bullpen couldn't hold on to it.

This one had potential to get away from him during a 31-pitch first inning. He wasn't hit particularly hard, but allowed singles to three of the first four batters. One was a slow bouncer that Trevor Plouffe couldn't field at third and allowed Mookie Betts to advance from first to third. The Red Sox scored on a Hanley Ramirez single and a Chris Young sacrifice fly.

But Gray wasn't alone in having a rough first inning, as Boston starter Hector Velázquez looked very much like a pitcher making his major league debut. The 28-year-old Velázquez, who spent the past seven seasons pitching in the Mexican League, allowed the first four batters to reach base.

Rajai Davis was eliminated on a close caught stealing that the A's surprisingly didn't challenge, but Matt Joyce walked and Jed Lowrie tied the game with a long home run to dead center field. Oakland then went back-to-back for the first time this season when Khris Davis hit an opposite field shot to give the A's the 3-2 lead.

"We've been having a little trouble in the first inning," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "When you're constantly behind coming into your first at-bat, it makes it a little more difficult. So to be able to respond, ended up taking the lead and then to keep adding on, it was big."

Oakland Athletics' Jed Lowrie (8) is congratulated by Ryon Healy (25) after Lowrie hit a home run scoring two runs in the first inning of their baseball game against the Boston Red Sox at the Oakland Alameda Coliseum in Oakland, Calif., on Thursday, May 18, 2017. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)
Jed Lowrie's two-run homer put the A's on the board in the first.

The home runs kept coming in the fourth inning. Mitch Moreland connected on a deep opposite field shot for the Red Sox to tie the game and the A's Chad Pinder followed up Trevor Plouffe's RBI double with his own long home run to left-center field as the A's were on top 6-3.

Gray was dominant after the Moreland homer. He retired nine of the final 10 men he faced, striking out six of those before departing after 103 pitches.

"When he's punching guys out, that's the sign that Sonny is Sonny," Vogt said. "He's an ace and aces go out there and they punch people out."

The A's added two more runs of cushion for him in the bottom of the sixth. Adam Rosales singled home a run and Rajai Davis easily beat out the back end of a double play to produce another and give the bullpen room for error that it didn't need.

— First baseman Yonder Alonso expects to be back within a couple of days after left knee soreness forced him out of Wednesday's game in Seattle. An MRI showed no structural damage and the A's will have him hit in the batting cage on Friday. He still won't start, but could be back in the lineup sometime over the weekend.

— Reliever Sean Doolittle threw out to 90 feet again on Thursday and is scheduled for a flat ground pitching session on Sunday. If that goes well, the A's are looking at having him throw a bullpen session sometime in the middle of next week.