

## ***The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, October 11, 2017***

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

#### **Red Sox' Drew Pomeranz ready to take next step**

Peter Abraham

Drew Pomeranz spent some time on Tuesday packing up the contents of his locker at Fenway Park. Among his possessions was an engraved bottle of wine Rick Porcello presented to teammates in thanks for their support when he won the Cy Young Award in 2016.

It served as a reminder of how quickly fortunes can change for a pitcher in the major leagues.

Porcello went from the best season of his career to an 11-17 record and 4.65 earned run average. He also allowed 38 home runs, the most in the majors.

It was Pomeranz, not Porcello, who became a reliable No. 2 starter for the Sox. He was 17-6 with a 3.32 ERA over a career-high 173⅓ innings.

At this time last year, Pomeranz had a sore left elbow and elected to have stem cells injected into the joint to promote healing and avoid surgery. He started the season on the disabled list but did not miss a start once he joined the rotation.

"I figured out what I needed to do to be successful here," Pomeranz said. "That was a pretty good feeling. I feel like there is still more. I feel like I was still getting better when the season finished."

Pomeranz, 28, has spent only two full seasons as a starter and in many ways is still learning the job. He is 20-11 with a 3.68 ERA with the Sox since being obtained from the San Diego Padres midway through the 2016 season.

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski was criticized for trading Anderson Espinoza, a well-regarded prospect, for Pomeranz.

But Espinoza did not pitch this season and is expected to miss much of the 2018 season while recovering from elbow surgery.

Pomeranz did not throw off a mound until several weeks into spring training as he recovered from the injection. He is eager to have a more conventional offseason.

"A much different feeling coming into this offseason than I had last year," he said. "Hopefully this year I'll have a chance to work in the offseason a little bit on some of the things I had to work on in spring training this year."

Just being able to throw off a mound before reporting to spring training will be an advantage. Pomeranz said his goal would be to get to 200 innings for the first time.

"I need to work deeper into games. That's the next step," he said.

Pack it up

Pomeranz took questions for five minutes, which were five minutes more than any other players during the one-hour period media personnel were allowed in the clubhouse.

Mookie Betts and Chris Sale made brief stops at their lockers, then fled in the direction of the trainer's room to avoid being corralled by television cameras.

Andrew Benintendi made his way into the room, then turned around and fled when he saw reporters.

"What are they doing here?" he said to a member of the media relations staff.

#### Young power

Rafael Devers hit home runs in Games 3 and 4 of the Division Series. The 20-year-old joined Hall of Famers Mickey Mantle (1952) and Jimmie Foxx (1929) as the only players to hit home runs in consecutive postseason games before the age of 21 . . . Hanley Ramirez was 8 of 14 in the Houston series. He has hit .380 with a 1.027 OPS in 20 career postseason games. But Ramirez has only one home run in 71 postseason at-bats . . . Outside of 2013, the Red Sox have not won a postseason series since the 2008 Division Series against the Angels . . . David Price's 6 $\frac{2}{3}$  scoreless innings against Houston dropped his postseason ERA from 5.54 to 5.03.

#### **Turns out Red Sox need major upgrade**

Christopher L. Gasper

The sounds of a season ending are belongings landing in boxes, the peal of packing tape, and the high-pitched squeal of a permanent marker scrawling identification on cardboard containers. That was the soundtrack of the Red Sox clubhouse Tuesday, the sounds of premature playoff elimination.

It's patently unfair to declare a 93-win season with a division title a failure. It's not. It just feels like one for the Red Sox right now because of how high the bar is set here in the Hub of Hardware, where teams are measured by "What championship have you won for me lately?"

The postseason has become the only season that matters in Boston sports for a contending team. It's a harsh and unforgiving way of evaluating a team, but the Red Sox, back-to-back American League East champions, are held to the same standard as the Patriots. Even after advancing to the Eastern Conference finals last season, the Celtics blew up their team in an attempt to get closer to legitimate title contention and attention.

After losing a best-of-five series with the Houston Astros in four games to get sent home in the first round of the playoffs for the second consecutive season, the Red Sox are at a crossroads with a club constructed to win now that just wasted one year of its three-year championship window. They've established that they're good enough to make the postseason, but not good enough to win in it.

The question that will define the offseason is whether president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski thinks his team needs minor modifications or a major upgrade?

The vote here is major upgrade. Sitting around and waiting for the kids to get better isn't an appealing strategy. There is not time or the pitching arms of Chris Sale, Craig Kimbrel, and David Price — all eligible to test free agency after 2018 or 2019 — to waste. It's time for the Sox to put that money they saved resetting the luxury tax this season to use. Boston needs someone to lead the way in the lineup and in their restive, unapologetic clubhouse to keep up with the Indians, Astros, and Yankees.

Royals free agent first baseman Eric Hosmer would bring pop and the clubhouse cachet that comes with owning a World Series ring. Diamondbacks free agent J.D. Martinez would inject the requisite righthanded power for a club that calls Fenway Park home and finished 27th in Major League Baseball in home runs this season.

If Dombrowski is ready to plunder what's left of the farm system and/or part with part of his young core he could do business with the White Sox for the second straight winter. Dombrowski already acquired Chicago's best pitcher in Sale. This offseason, he could make them an offer they can't refuse for their best

hitter, first baseman Jose Abreu, who has hit 30 or more home runs in three of his four seasons. Abreu and wunderkind Rafael Devers at the corners would change the complexion of the lineup.

Marlins slugger Giancarlo Stanton is the object of Red Sox' fans desire. But Stanton carries a caveat emptor label. His combustible combination of temperamental demeanor, inconsistent availability, and massive salary don't seem suited to the Boston Baseball Experience. Iceberg ahead, Mr. Dombrowski.

Dealer Dave has to do something because some of the players this team counts upon aren't doing anything in the playoffs. The Sox have lost six of the seven postseason games they've played over the last two seasons, getting swept at the hands of Terry Francona's Indians in 2016. It's not a fluke.

Over two postseasons, center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. has hit .160 with one extra-base hit and 13 strikeouts in 25 at-bats. Xander Bogaerts hit .059 against the Astros. In the last two postseasons, he has batted a combined .138 with one extra-base hit (a homer in the season-ending 5-4 loss on Monday) and one run batted in. The 25-year-old Bogaerts may yet blossom into the franchise-altering force he was billed as, but his time here is running out; he is eligible for free agency after 2019. If Bogaerts is the price to upgrade via trade, the Red Sox shouldn't let that stand in the way.

The Sox are stuck with their starters. They've spent heavily financially and in terms of prospects in building a rotation with Sale, Price, Drew Pomeranz, and Rick Porcello. This rotation has to stand and deliver in the postseason instead of ducking out of postseason games early. Sale is the only Red Sox starter to complete five innings in the last two postseasons, and his Game 1 start was a seven-earned-run shocker that set the tone for the series.

The easiest move the Red Sox could make to ostensibly augment their team would be to move on from manager John Farrell. There is not a more scrutinized or second-guessed job in New England than Red Sox manager. Farrell didn't help himself this postseason with some curious decisions, like leaving Sale in to wilt, er, pitch in the eighth inning in Game 4 after four sparkling innings of relief on three days rest. Or using Eduardo Rodriguez out of the bullpen in the sixth inning of Game 2, which opened the floodgates for a loss that put one cleat in the grave for the Sox.

When a team falls short usually the manager is the fall guy. Farrell is far from an infallible La Russian mastermind, but it's not fair to pin the Sox' (relative) failure on him. He had a team that never hit its stride this season and a lineup that never hit consistently.

Whether Farrell deserves to be fired after becoming the only Sox manager to win back-to-back division titles and whether he has gotten the most out of this roster are separate questions, though. It's possible that Farrell doesn't deserve to be fired, but the Sox' braintrust believes someone else can wring more out of the roster.

Under Farrell, the Red Sox have only finished first (three times) or last (twice) in the AL East. When he has a good team, he doesn't ruin it. When he has a bad team, he doesn't reorient it.

He won a World Series in 2013 with the bearded band of brothers. He has won just one playoff game since.

Right now, the Sox are like a baserunner caught in a rundown between third base and home plate. They're so close to where they want to be, but without an obvious clear path to their desired destination.

### **How much blame does John Farrell deserve?**

Nick Cafardo

It has always been amazing to me how easy it is for people to say someone should be fired, their livelihood taken away.

Ho-hum, just fire John Farrell. Why? We don't like him. That's reason enough, right?

Get that guy who has won three AL East titles and a World Series and who beat cancer and developed a new core of players (and, yes, also finished last two years) out of there.

He got swept in the playoffs last year. Overall he's 12-11 in the postseason in his five years with the Red Sox. So what if he won a championship? He had no input in that. Just when he loses.

In Boston, getting beat in four games in the first round of the playoffs means it has to be the manager's fault. In each of the last two years, he should have won the World Series, right? Torey Lovullo would have led them all the way, right? Oops. His Diamondbacks just got swept by the superior Dodgers.

Know how many managers in baseball have done what Farrell has done the past five years? How about nobody. Zero.

Pick a guy. Any guy.

What has Terry Francona done the last five years? One AL title, two divisional titles. Reached Game 7 of the World Series in 2016 and lost. Currently tied, 2-2, with the Yankees in the ALDS. He's 12-8 over the last five years in the postseason. Prior to that, we know he won two World Series. And there's lament that Francona was let go here.

How about Joe Maddon?

Two divisional titles, one World Series. Really close. He's 19-15 in the playoffs the last five years.

Miami manager Don Mattingly won three division titles with the Dodgers and went 8-11 in the postseason.

How about St. Louis manager Mike Matheny? The Cardinals are always really good. Again, really close. Matheny ties Farrell with three division titles and has one National League pennant. He's 14-16 in the postseason the last five years.

The Yankees' Joe Girardi? No division championships. He's 3-3 in the playoffs so far in the last five years.

Here's a good one. Bruce Bochy with the Giants? He has three rings overall, but in the last five years, no division championships and one World Series title. He's 14-8 in the playoffs in that time.

How about Buck Showalter, generally regarded as one of the best managers in baseball? What has he done the last five years? One division championship, 3-5 in the postseason.

We suppose that if Grady Little can get fired by this ownership after going to Game 7 of the ALCS in 2003, anyone can get fired.

If Red Sox management wants a new face, a new voice, it's their prerogative to make a change. The fact that John Henry, Dave Dombrowski, and Farrell did not return calls is indicative that something is being discussed. Last season, it was pretty much a slam-dunk that Farrell was coming back, and two months after the sweep at the hands of the Indians, the Red Sox picked up his contract option for 2018.

Maybe Farrell won't be so lucky this time.

There's an interesting decision to be made here, because how many of you in Red Sox Nation really thought the Red Sox were a better team than the Astros? If you're honest about it, you'd know that the Houston lineup was far superior.

The hope the Red Sox had was in their pitching — mainly two 17-game winners going back-to-back against a lineup that was 21-23 against lefty starters. That didn't pan out because the lefties didn't do their job. I fell for the lefty starter thing and had the Red Sox winning, three games to two. I was wrong.

So if you believe the Astros had the upper hand in this one, why was this the manager's fault? The nitpicking of this move and that move happens all the time. I do it constantly because we react to every move that's made, good or bad.

Actually, we seldom give credit for good moves. Most of Farrell's moves are based on analytics, an extensive packet of information that is deciphered before the game. In the past, that was Lovullo's job, to take the data and parcel it out to Farrell.

So there are a few things that can happen here.

1. Farrell comes back and finishes out his contract.
2. Farrell is fired and replaced by a new voice. Brad Ausmus, Jason Varitek, Gary DiSarcina, Brian Butterfield, and Alex Cora all would likely be considered.
3. Farrell is moved to the front office. He is a former farm director for the Indians, and it has been almost a given that at some point he would go to the front office again as a vice president of something.
4. Farrell could say he is moving on. Certainly, the rigors of the job can wear out a manager in Boston.

It has been five years, and sometimes five years is a lifetime. The manager has to take all the garbage that fans and talk-show callers dish out. He's a human dartboard. He can tune out most of it, but it's hard to do that. People are always telling him who said what.

It can be maddening. Farrell has pretty much avoided the noise and managed based on his analytics and knowledge of his players. He has managed a good bullpen and had to mix and match a relatively subpar lineup with no power.

So if that's Farrell's fault, then he'll be fired any day now.

It was on his watch that the Red Sox were caught stealing signs illegally with an Apple Watch. Should he be fired for that?

It was on his watch that David Price ambushed Dennis Eckersley. The consensus was that Farrell didn't handle it well. If he had come down on Price, he would have a Bobby Valentine revolt in the clubhouse.

His teams also played hard for him. They had comeback wins, extra-inning wins that require a heartbeat.

It would be unfair if he got fired. He doesn't hit for power, and he can't pitch in Games 1 and 2. But that's life.

It's just someone else's job and livelihood, not yours.

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

### **When will the Red Sox players get some blame?**

Ron Borges

So when do we get around to the players?

For the past 48 hours I've heard and read much about the real and imagined failings of Red Sox manager John Farrell and club president and personnel guru Dave Dombrowski. According to their legion of critics they didn't do this and they didn't do that and if they had the Sox would be heading into the ALCS with

bells on. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes I would never have thought they built and managed a team that won 93 games and the AL East title this year.

Dombrowski, it has been said, didn't adequately replace valuable missing parts like David Ortiz (good luck with that) or get Farrell enough new ammunition in August when other teams like the Houston Astros were reloading by acquiring the likes of lights-out starter Justin Verlander. All true, but when do we get around to the players?

Farrell in particular has been a public piñata for several years in this town, his managerial skills mocked and ridiculed and his clubhouse command compared not with General Patton but rather with Sgt. Schultz ("I know nothing!"). People insist he's blown more games than Esteban Yan.

Certainly Farrell's apparent willingness to let David Price off the hook after acting like an immature imbecile during his outrageous public and profane dressing down of Hall of Fame pitcher and NESN broadcaster Dennis Eckersley on a team flight didn't speak very well of him. And Price's earlier whining about how the media didn't put enough effort into getting to know him as a person are the kind of musings that do not go over well in Boston. Many observers of the club will tell you the atmosphere was poisonous in a clubhouse now led by the toxic Price and often grouching and grumbling Dustin Pedroia rather than the affable and emotional Ortiz.

Perhaps so. Certainly, at least, some of the blame for that follows on management. But, again, when do we get around to the players who created it? Why do they get a pass?

Even with those issues, Farrell maneuvered a flawed Red Sox team to the AL East title and 93 wins for the second straight season after losing by far his most potent bat with Ortiz' retirement and his alleged ace in the long months in which the well-paid Price was out with a sore elbow. If most managers held things together well enough to make the playoffs without his best bat from the previous season and without the guy who was supposed to be his No. 1 starter, he wouldn't be facing a firing squad. He'd probably get an extension.

Before you lose your minds over this, this is not someone making a case that Dombrowski and Farrell are blameless in the Sox second straight quick hook from the postseason. It's just to raise this point — when do we get around to the people who actually decided wins and losses? When do we get around to the players?

In the end, you can manage your butt off and baseball ops can make one move after another but if you bring in arguably your two best pitchers — starter Chris Sale and closer Craig Kimbrel — and they can't hold a lead in a do-or-die playoff game, don't blame the manager.

If your lineup of young talent that few of the public critics were willing to trade during the offseason because of their "upside" and "contract flexibility" — like Andrew Benintendi, Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers or in some cases even Jackie Bradley Jr. — then isn't it about time to ask those players why they were outscored 24-18, out-hit 49-39, out-walked 14-1, out-doubled 9-7, out-homered 8-5 and outslugged .571-.445 by the Astros, as my colleague Michael Silverman pointed out in Tuesday's Herald? Was that the manager's fault? Was it Dombrowski's fault? Were they swinging the bats or were their players?

When the season began many of the same people now criticizing the manager and the president of baseball operations for the team they built were arguing that their pitching and defense would be so improved it would negate the obvious lack of run production likely to follow the retirement of Ortiz. I didn't buy into it then and still don't. I'm not a believer in run prevention. I'm a believer in run production.

In a year when league-wide home runs were booming, the sickly Sox were last with 168 and next to last in slugging percentage. Who had the most to do with that? A manager sitting on his duff in the dugout or players flailing away with their bats at home plate?

Whether John Farrell stays or goes, no manager can hit for his players. None can pitch for them either. When they get into the postseason the players decide who wins and who loses. Even the devotees of Moneyball admit that.

Is John Farrell the reincarnation of Earl Weaver? Not hardly. But if in five years you win a World Series, two division titles and reach the playoffs three times it shouldn't produce your dismissal or Dombrowski's, for that matter. What it should produce is a re-evaluation of your talent because, in the end, managers and coaches don't win games and neither do heads of baseball ops. Players do.

So when do we get around to them?

### **Red Sox must fix their David Price problem**

Steve Buckley

The Red Sox drew 2.9 million fans to Fenway Park this season for an average gate of 36,020 per game.

This means the old Kenmore Square ball yard was nearly always filled to capacity. So there's that.

As for television ratings, a forbes.com report shows that the Red Sox were fourth in Major League Baseball for local primetime ratings, earning a 5.98 Nielsen cable rating. In the baseball industry, then, the Sox are doing more than holding their own.

Yet NESN's ratings for Sox games dropped 15 percent from last year. The NESN people with whom I spoke yesterday did point out that Sox ratings were about the same in the 25-54 demo, though they agreed that the 15 percent overall drop — the number they used was actually 13.6 percent — is something that'll need to be addressed.

How to explain the dip? Perhaps it's a Jerry Remy thing: With the longtime color analyst out for a good chunk of the season battling cancer, NESN did a reboot of the old "Community Auditions" television show, running a conga line of former Sox players in and out of the booth.

Or maybe fans tuned out the Sox because of the so-called "likability" issue. And allow me to stop right here and make it clear this is not just a press box thing, because the No. 1 comment I keep getting from Sox fans is, "I just don't like this bunch."

Highlighted by Sox pitcher David Price's verbal beatdown of NESN analyst Dennis Eckersley during a team charter to Toronto, which was seemingly supported by the lefthander's teammates, this year's Sox emerged as insecure and thin-skinned. Yet in an odd twist, it may well be Eckersley himself who rebuilds the Red Sox' image.

On this almost all of us can agree: NESN struck gold late in the season when Eck was taken out of the studio and placed in the booth with play-by-play man Dave O'Brien and a returning Remy. It was instant chemistry, and pure magic. Eck and Remy are former teammates from the 1970s and early '80s, and they had an instant on-air rapport as they swayed back and forth from old-time baseball stories to crisp, spot-on analysis.

Each knew when to give up the mic to the other, and O'Brien showed a talent for knowing when to stay out of the way and let the two ballplayers do their thing. If you've watched Mets games in recent years, you know that play-by-play man Gary Cohen and ex-players Ron Darling and Keith Hernandez do a nightly tutorial in the fine art of making the three-man booth work.

But O'Brien, Remy and Eckersley are right there with them, and NESN should work to team them up as often as possible in 2018.

The problem with all this? It's not going to work unless the Red Sox clubhouse makes peace with Eckersley. I've heard Darling and Hernandez be critical of Mets players, yet there have been no reports of them being verbally assaulted on an airplane; they seem to say whatever's on their minds, unconcerned with how it's going to play in the clubhouse.

Not only did David Price never apologize to Eckersley, he later suggested, preposterously, that Eck started doing a better job after that little talk they had.

Red Sox fans would love nothing better than to embrace Price, as evidenced by the uproarious cheering they bestowed upon him as he was offering up a superb (and, at the time, season-saving) relief outing against the Astros in Game 3 of the Division Series.

But as if to make it clear his problems with Boston extend beyond Eckersley, the sportswriters and Sox manager John Farrell, Price was unable to even throw a postgame bouquet at the fans who had showered him with applause.

Here's a recap of a couple of questions posed to Price after Game 3:

Reporter: "David, what does it mean to you to be able to perform like that in a game of this importance and to have the fans clearly show their appreciation to you?"

Price: "It feels good to put up zeros in the playoffs. Like Hanley (Ramirez) said, that's why I signed here. I knew we had a good team, I knew we would have a good team for a long time, and this is the second year I've been here and to win back-to-back AL East titles. We're moving in the right direction and I think we all understand how good of a team we have in this clubhouse and just focus on today."

Not a word in there about the fans.

Somebody else took a stab.

Reporter: "Were you feeling the love from the fans?"

Price: "Yeah, that was a good performance."

Are Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner aware of this?

How about CEO Sam Kennedy?

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski?

This is such a young team, with the likes of Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Xander Bogaerts, Andrew Benintendi and Christian Vazquez still not even eligible for arbitration. Third baseman Rafael Devers, age 20, isn't even eligible to buy a beer at the Cask.

And they are getting their cues from David Price.

Let me say this for the 100th time:

If the Red Sox don't address these problems now, you'll be seeing crowds of 18,000 at Fenway in three or four years.

**It's getting crowded inside Red Sox' window of opportunity**

Chad Jennings

There's only one reason a team trades the limitless future of a 21-year-old phenom for three years of an elite starting pitcher. It sees a window of opportunity, and it feels ready to take advantage.

When Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski sent Yoan Moncada to the White Sox for Chris Sale, he was basically acknowledging that it was time to win. Same thing when he called up 20-year-old Rafael Devers, whose feet had barely touched the ground in Triple A. Same thing when he released Pablo Sandoval, who was in no shape to help.

The window was wide open. The time was now.

And just because the Red Sox have been eliminated from the playoffs does not mean the window has closed. Sale, David Price and Craig Kimbrel will be back next season. Devers, Andrew Benintendi and Mookie Betts are still dirt cheap by baseball standards. The Red Sox have a talented core that should contend through at least Sale's tenure.

But if you're looking through this window of opportunity, it's best to get used to the view, because the Red Sox' window happens to be remarkably similar to the windows in Houston, Cleveland and New York.

This postseason might have been a glimpse into the immediate future of the American League, with the last four teams standing poised to keep duking it out for the pennant.

“(The Astros) are a very good team,” Red Sox manager John Farrell said. “I think we showed that we are, too.”

You can bet the Indians and Yankees would say the same.

The Astros have opened their pocketbook the past two years, pushing payroll well over \$110 million, and showing a willingness to take on even more salary with their Aug. 31 trade for Justin Verlander, who is signed through 2019.

Jose Altuve's dirt-cheap contract includes team options for the next two seasons, George Springer is just now entering his arbitration years, and Carlos Correa is under team control through 2021. Alex Bregman doesn't even hit arbitration until 2020.

Dallas Keuchel and Marwin Gonzalez are eligible for free agency after next season — future financial issues to be addressed, for sure — but there's not a key player from this season who shouldn't be back with the Astros next season.

And who in the AL West is poised to stand in their way? No other team in that division finished with a winning record, so if there's a team fully motivated to capitalize on this window, it's surely Houston.

But they're not the standard bearers just yet.

The league-leading Indians will lose first baseman Carlos Santana to free agency, and midseason additions Jay Bruce and Joe Smith were three-month rentals, but the rest of that team is sticking together for a while.

MVP candidate Jose Ramirez is signed to an absurdly team-friendly contract with options through 2023, and ace Corey Kluber's deal includes a team option for 2021. Edwin Encarnacion, Jason Kipnis and Carlos Carrasco are under contract through 2020, closer Cody Allen has one more year of arbitration, and ALDS Game 1 starter Trevor Bauer still has three arbitration years.

Giovanni Urshela and Mike Clevinger are still making the league minimum.

Adding to the stability: Manager Terry Francona is under contract through 2020, which would make him the longest-tenured Indians manager since Mike Hargrove, who won division titles in each of his final five seasons in the late 1990s. Francona's under contract long enough to match that feat.

While the West and Central have clear front-runners, the AL East is poised to be a yearly heavyweight fight after the Yankees' rebuilding effort took less time than expected.

CC Sabathia's \$25 million will come off the books this winter. So will Matt Holliday's \$13 million, as well as the \$20 million the Yankees paid Alex Rodriguez to sit at home this year.

For the free-spending Yankees, that's addition by subtraction, because money off the books means money to spend, especially with an eye toward the 2018 free agent class that could include Bryce Harper, Manny Machado and Clayton Kershaw.

Even if they cut payroll in the short term, the Yankees will still have Aaron Judge, Gary Sanchez, Greg Bird and Luis Severino making the league minimum for at least one more season.

Aaron Hicks, Didi Gregorius and Dellin Betances still have two more years of arbitration eligibility, and when the Yankees traded for Sonny Gray, David Robertson and Tommy Kahnle, it was with the benefit of multiple years of team control.

Even after those trades, they still have a strong farm system, with top prospect Gleyber Torres ready to take over third base early next season.

Masahiro Tanaka's right to opt out this offseason is a significant wrinkle, but the Yankees' window opened earlier than expected, and it's looking right out onto the Red Sox land of opportunity.

### **Red Sox coaching staff awaits its fate**

Jason Mastrodonato

Soon, likely this week, the gavel will drop and the Red Sox front office will hand down its verdict.

Manager John Farrell could be ruled innocent and be cleared to continue steering the ship that's hauled in just enough success to keep him afloat, despite two straight postseason failures and never-ending public image fiascos.

Or he will be guilty for his role in the way the Sox crumbled.

But the verdict doesn't stop with Farrell.

Even if he's to come back, will he ask the rest of his coaching staff to join him?

And if he's let go, will any of his coaches stick around under a new manager?

The blame game never stops, and rightfully so when a team with this much talent and this big of a payroll crumbles to pieces in the manner it did.

Start with the hitting coach: Chili Davis.

A three-time All-Star who hit 350 homers in his playing days, Davis was hired prior to the 2015 season. He inherited an offense that failed miserably under hitting coach Greg Colbrunn in 2014, when the Sox scored just 3.91 runs per game (tied for 17th in the majors) and hit .244 (tied for 21st) with a .684 OPS (tied for 21st) and 123 homers (22nd). Since Davis took over, the Red Sox have increased those numbers dramatically, scoring 4.96 runs per game (first in the majors) while hitting .268 (second) with a .762 OPS (third) and 537 homers (21st).

But what's fresh in New England is how feeble the offense looked in 2017, most notably how the Sox hit just 168 homers (last in the American League) with a .736 OPS (11th), worst since Davis arrived. Over the past two postseasons, the Sox scored just 3.57 runs per game with a .731 OPS.

Davis has aspirations of managing.

On the pitching side, Carl Willis is developing quite the list of Cy Young winners under his tutelage.

Last year, Rick Porcello became the fourth Cy Young Award winner on a Willis-coached staff, and Chris Sale has a chance to be the fifth this year.

Willis' first day as pitching coach was May 11, 2015. Since then, the Red Sox have a 3.94 ERA (seventh), 1.28 WHIP (tied for eighth), .251 BAA (ninth), 8.62 K/9 (seventh) and 2.92 BB/9 (eighth).

Before Willis arrived in 2015, the Sox had a 4.97 ERA (29th), 1.42 WHIP (26th), .266 BAA (24th), 7.73 K/9 (15th) and 3.46 BB/9 (25th).

But under Willis, the pitching has fallen apart in October. Sox pitchers have a 5.98 ERA in the postseason, including a 10.96 ERA from the starters.

Third base coach Brian Butterfield was under some heat Monday for sending yet another runner into an out at the plate in the Game 4 loss to the Houston Astros. Mitch Moreland, who had a broken toe and knee discomfort this season, was thrown out by a country mile. It was the 30th time the Red Sox made an out at home this year, most in the majors and most in Butterfield's tenure.

The Red Sox hadn't been scoring much in the postseason, and aggressive baserunning has been a hallmark for Butterfield since he arrived with Farrell in 2013. The Sox have made at least 60 outs on the bases in each of their five years under Farrell and Butterfield, including a majors-worst 81 this season.

But that's simply a strategy issue. It shouldn't be difficult to make changes with how they approach third-to-home situations in 2018, if they want to. That would be easier than trying to replace Butterfield, a well-respected veteran who serves as both a baserunning coach and infield instructor.

Under Butterfield, the Sox rank fourth in the majors in stolen base success rate, converting 78 percent of their chances since 2013.

And under Butterfield, Hanley Ramirez went from being a disastrous left fielder to a steady first baseman while shortstop Xander Bogaerts was a Gold Glove finalist in 2015, less than a year after the Red Sox moved him to third base during the season.

The Sox need new voices in the clubhouse. If they can't get new players capable of bringing a fresh voice, it starts with the coaching staff.

But given their success, if Davis, Willis and/or Butterfield depart, it shouldn't take them long to find work.

### **How Red Sox stack up heading for 2018**

Jason Mastrodonato

While the final out of their 2017 season is still less than 48 hours old, the Red Sox are nonetheless already looking to 2018 and beyond. With that in mind, here's a glance around the diamond at what they are dealing with:

#### **STARTING PITCHING**

Analysis: Despite a 10.96 earned-run average in the postseason, the Sox' starting staff had its best rotation ERA since 2013. The starters were eighth in the majors with a 4.06 ERA and threw the third most innings in baseball. While they suffered an injury-plagued season from David Price and a downward turn from Rick Porcello, Chris Sale was dominant in many of his starts and Drew Pomeranz showed the potential the team hoped they'd see when they acquired him a year ago.

2018 outlook: On paper, most general managers would be happy with a rotation of Sale, Price, Pomeranz, Porcello and either Eduardo Rodriguez or knuckleballer Steven Wright in 2018. Of course, this season proved that what's on paper doesn't always translate to success. If Wright and Price return to spring training healthy, despite the lack of depth in the minors, the major league staff should be plenty good enough. However some changes need to be made, specifically with Price's personality, Sale's workload, Porcello's struggles and Rodriguez' frustrating inability to realize his potential.

## RELIEF PITCHING

Analysis: The Red Sox didn't squeeze the most out of their bullpen in the postseason, which is a shame considering how good it was during the regular season, when it ranked second in baseball with a 3.07 ERA. Pitchers who threw out of relief in the regular season contributed only 101/3 postseason innings while allowing four earned runs. Craig Kimbrel put together quite the regular season, striking out 124 of the 256 batters he faced. Addison Reed was a strong pick-up at the trade deadline while Carson Smith made an impact after returning from Tommy John Surgery. Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes both contributed before fading down the stretch and missing the postseason roster.

2018 outlook: Tyler Thornburg missed the entire season with shoulder surgery to treat thoracic outlet syndrome and is expected to be ready for 2018. With Reed a free agent, Thornburg could step into that role. Smith looked strong at season's end and Joe Kelly settled in nicely to his first year out of the bullpen. The Sox could use a reliable lefty.

## CATCHERS

Analysis: Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon were quite the duo in 2017. Combined they allowed just 61 stolen bases, third fewest in the bigs, while throwing out 39 base-stealers, fourth most. Their .260 average ranked ninth and their .693 OPS ranked 20th.

2018 outlook: Vazquez deserves to play more. He hit .322 from Aug. 1 through the end of the season, and his arm continues to improve, occasionally showing the 1.75-second pop time he was displaying so consistently before Tommy John surgery. Blake Swihart is out of options, so the Red Sox will likely need a third catcher unless they turn Swihart into a super-utility player and keep him on the roster.

## INFIELD/DH

Analysis: The Red Sox had a below-average infield in 2017.

They ranked 26th in OPS at first base, 28th at third base, 18th at second base, 13th at shortstop and 11th out of 15 teams at DH.

Dustin Pedroia missed time at season's end and was clearly bothered by his knee injury. Xander Bogaerts once again faded, as did Mitch Moreland. Hanley Ramirez never got hot. Rafael Devers was a lone bright spot.

2018 outlook: Dave Dombrowski has his work cut out for him. He'll need to find a big bat to play first base and must contend with the situations of both Ramirez and Pedroia. Ramirez will be 34 next spring training and is owed more than \$22 million for 2018 (with a vesting option for 2019). Battling injury, Ramirez played 133 games and his production dropped considerably from a year ago. Pedroia's knee injury hurt his season and the 34-year-old, who is signed through 2021, needs to make a decision on surgery, something

that could sideline him into the season. Keeping free agent Eduardo Nunez, assuming his knee is healthy, would be a good idea.

## OUTFIELD

Analysis: It was a group that looked much better on defense than at the plate. With Jackie Bradley Jr., Mookie Betts and Andrew Benintendi taking most of the reps, the Red Sox outfield ranked third with 45 defensive runs saved and tied for 11th with 28 outfield assists. But their combined .257 average ranked 18th among major league outfields, their .761 OPS ranked 17th and their 68 homers ranked 23rd. They went 60-for-74 stealing bases.

2018 outlook: Is this the year the Red Sox have to consider trading Bradley? He'll be in his second year of arbitration (though he's a Super 2 player and has four total years in arbitration) and, after two strong years at the plate, took a step back on offense, hitting just .245 with a .726 OPS. If the Red Sox need a power bat to play one of the corners, Benintendi and Betts are both capable center fielders. The Sox will also need to find a better fourth outfielder to replace Chris Young, a free agent.

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

### **This Red Sox team will go gentle into that good night**

Bill Reynolds

So it ended.

Without the Hollywood finish.

And to the sound of one hand clapping.

Ended with a loss in Fenway Park to the Houston Astros in the fourth game of the American League Divisional Series.

The stuff that dreams are made of?

Hardly.

There will be no American League Championship Series, no appearance in the World Series, none of the things that would have given this Red Sox team a certain immortality.

Just one more Red Sox team that soon will recede into a certain anonymity, a good team for sure, but not one that's ever going to be remembered with a lot of fondness.

In many ways it was a team that always seemed to be waiting for David Ortiz to come out of the dugout and bail them out, a team devoid of charisma.

It was a talented team, the kind we've come to expect from the Red Sox with their big dreams and big pockets, in this sport without a salary cap.

Yet there always seemed to be something missing. Maybe it was as simple as Ortiz, the iconic figure whose personality was as big as Fenway itself. Without his charisma, the Red Sox simply were a different team, no question about it.

There's no overestimating this.

It was a team, which in too many ways, never really seemed to have it's own identity. Despite being talented, you never thought it was going to go deep into October. Not tough enough? Not talented enough? You tell me. Was there a real leader there? You tell me that, too, Certainly it wasn't David Price. If he's not the definition of a baseball diva, he'll certainly do until one comes along.

It was not an endearing Red Sox team. Instead, it seemed like some baseball version of the Island of Misfit Toys, guys thrown together. In short, it was a team lacking the star power of guys who traditionally have moved the needle around here.

No Ortiz.

No Pedro.

No Yaz.

No Roger Clemens.

No Fred Lynn in the season of his life, back there in 1975.

No Jim Rice.

In short, a team good enough to get into the playoffs, but not to make any real memories there. A team that went about as far as it should have gone, regardless of who the manager was. Which leads us to John Farrell.

History tells us that being the Red Sox manager is not a lifetime job, and rest assured Farrell is not going to break precedent. Has he done enough to come back next year? In a better baseball world he has. But this is Boston where the graveyards are full of former Sox managers, and don't be surprised if someone isn't putting his name on another tombstone right now, fair or not.

Is there a tougher job anywhere?

Probably not.

Does anyone get criticized more in sports than a baseball manager, for the simple reason that everyone knows the rules, and thinks they know the strategy, especially here in New England, this place where kids all but come of age learning how to criticize the manager, and that's just the way it is.

Farrell does little to help himself by talking about a baseball game and trying to make it as complicated as nuclear fission. Enough already.

And the bigger problem is that he is doing it in the middle of a very large fishbowl, not to mention in the very large and pervasive shadow of Bill Belichick, one of the greatest coaches in the long history of professional football. Or if it's difficult to get second-guessed all over New England every time you make a coaching decision, think about doing it in Coach Bill's neighborhood.

Not an easy thing.

Not when the only way we measure success is if you win. Not if you got the most out of your team. Not if you overachieved.

But did you win?

That's all anyone wants to know.

And the bottom line?

The Sox were a good team, not a great team.

Ditto for their season.

### **How can the Red Sox improve in 2018?**

Tim Britton

BOSTON — Chris Sale looked around at his teammates departing the home clubhouse after the final Red Sox game of 2017, and he diagnosed the future.

“If you look around here and look at the names, we have a lot of guys coming back,” Sale said. “A lot of the guys that carried this team are young guys that are going to be here for a while. It’s hard not to be optimistic about this team for a long time.”

The carpet under Sale’s feet was still sticky with the champagne he and his teammates had popped last Saturday. By Tuesday, he was packing up his locker. Life comes at you fast in the postseason.

Boston’s second consecutive early dismissal from the playoffs could lead some to believe a roster overhaul is necessary. But Sale is right to point out the relative youth of Boston’s roster. The Sox boasted a half-dozen regulars 27 and younger, with Rafael Devers providing hope that the club has finally found an answer for its long-term hole at third base. Sale himself is 28, just like Rick Porcello and Drew Pomeranz. Eduardo Rodriguez is 24. There are reasons to be optimistic.

“This is one heck of a team we have right here,” Xander Bogaerts said. “I would totally do it again with all the guys we have in here.”

Yet, this American League Division Series depicted the gap that exists between these current Red Sox and a similarly young team in the Astros. The Indians and Yankees have youth on their side as well. The American League isn’t going to get any easier.

So where does Boston go from here?

The team’s most obvious need is in the middle of the lineup. A league-leading offense regressed more than the front office expected, with every core member taking a step back in 2017 from his 2016 production. Some of that should reverse next season, but it would be unwise to bank on it. A full season of Devers will help at third, but he’s also due for some growing pains — the way a full season of Andrew Benintendi in left field helped but didn’t heal the lineup completely.

This is the part where you pine for Giancarlo Stanton and we point out its lack of wisdom. The Marlins slugger is coming off a 59-homer season, has a swing that could obliterate Fenway Park and should be available in a deal. He’s also owed \$295 million over the next 10 seasons and had averaged 121 games per season before this year. There’s a reason Miami wants to trade him now.

The Red Sox would seem to be able to get a similar talent at a significantly lower price on the free-agent market. J.D. Martinez actually slugged a higher percentage than Stanton even this season, hitting home runs at a greater rate while with Detroit and Arizona. Considering the fashion in which power has been devalued — the salaries for power hitters were down last winter; Martinez and others like him moved for relatively little this summer — it’s unlikely Martinez costs even half of Stanton’s salary.

Martinez isn’t a positional fit, but he could serve as the designated hitter most days and otherwise fill in around the outfield with Hanley Ramirez asked to play more first base. Martinez would solve Boston’s two biggest offensive issues this past season: lack of power and lack of production against left-handed pitchers. Martinez’s 1.356 OP against southpaws was the highest in baseball in a decade.

There are backup plans behind Martinez as well in Cleveland's Carlos Santana and Jay Bruce. Either could split time at first and DH with Ramirez.

Beyond that, there aren't obvious places to upgrade. The outfield is one of the game's best. Boston will not find a better shortstop than Bogaerts, and Christian Vazquez appears ready to take the next step to full-time starter behind the plate. An insurance option for Dustin Pedroia at second would make sense, given the way the team had to handle his knee injury this season.

For the pitching staff, it's a matter of getting everybody healthy and trying to keep them that way. The Sox can go into next spring with six starters again, provided David Price and Steven Wright are ready to renew starting roles. A bullpen that survived this season could be even better with Carson Smith and Tyler Thornburg back.

"We were a very competitive team throughout. We won a lot of baseball games. You win the division, that's a major accomplishment," manager John Farrell said after Monday's loss. "We didn't meet all of our goals, but we have seen some really good young players continue to develop.

"There's a lot of good things that are going on here."

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

### **Red Sox biggest questions entering the offseason: Farrell's status, Moreland's free agency, adding another bat**

Jen McCaffrey

After finishing first in the American League East for the second straight year, the Red Sox have a bevy of questions to answer this offseason after falling to the Houston Astros in the American League Division Series.

John Farrell

Does John Farrell return as manager?

This is the biggest question hanging in the balance now and it should be resolved the quickest. Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski is scheduled to meet with the media later this week for his annual season recap press conference. If the Red Sox are to fire Farrell, they will do it then.

Through five seasons in Boston, Farrell has led the Red Sox to a World Series championship, two last-place finishes followed by two first-place finishes in the division.

Giancarlo Stanton

How will the Red Sox improve their offense?

This seems like the top priority for a team that finished last in the league in home runs and underestimated the power it would get from Mookie, Betts Xander Bogaerts and Hanley Ramirez.

Among the names floated around for the Red Sox to add are the Marlins' Giancarlo Stanton and soon-to-be-free-agent J.D. Martinez. Stanton is owed \$295 million over the next 10 years and would undoubtedly require the Red Sox to part with some of its young core.

Martinez seems to be the more cost-friendly approach, making \$11.75 million this season. On the free-agent market he could fetch at least \$15-\$20 million per year.

Stanton hit .281 with a 1.007 OPS, 32 doubles and 59 homers in 159 games this season in Miami.

Martinez hit .303 with a 1.066 OPS, 26 doubles and 45 homers in 119 games between Detroit and Arizona this season.

Does free agent Mitch Moreland return?

Moreland was a strong free-agent addition for the Red Sox despite being hampered in the second half with a broken toe and balky knee. Moreland hit just .246 but added 34 doubles and 22 homers while providing solid defense at first. The Red Sox will have to decide if they want to pursue Moreland or hand the job over to Sam Travis.

Who do the Red Sox add to the bullpen?

The Red Sox bullpen was a strength for much of the season and should be boosted by a healthy Carson Smith next season as well as by the return of Tyler Thornburg. Joe Kelly and Craig Kimbrel will also be back while Addison Reed, Fernando Abad and Blaine Boyer are free agents. Heath Hembree, Matt Barnes, Brandon Workman and Robby Scott are all under contract as well.

Nevertheless, the Red Sox relief corps could benefit from another proven bullpen arm.

And what about the rotation?

Of all the facets of the team, the rotation seems least likely to change.

David Price is expected to return healthy as is Steven Wright, who had early season knee surgery. Chris Sale, Drew Pomeranz, Rick Porcello and Eduardo Rodriguez make six potential pitchers for the Red Sox rotation next year.

Does the team pursue extensions for Xander Bogaerts and Mookie Betts?

Each of the last few offseasons, the question of whether Betts and Bogaerts will sign long-term deals with Boston before hitting free agency is pondered.

Neither had their best years at the plate and both have declined contract discussions in the past. We'll see if that changes this offseason.

Will Dustin Pedroia have surgery and how will that affect next season?

Pedroia dealt with left knee inflammation for much of the season, significantly slowing him down over the final few months.

He's scheduled to get the knee re-examined this week and will determine if surgery is necessary. After Boston's loss in Game 4, Pedroia told reporters that surgery would entail a long recovery, suggesting he might not be ready for next year.

"I have a lot of things to weigh in with the doctors and figure it out," he said.

Do the Red Sox trade any of their young talent for a big-name player?

If the Red Sox are to pursue a big bat through trade rather than free agency, they'd almost certainly have to part with some of their young major-league talent, especially if that bat is Stanton.

Dombrowski has made blockbuster trades each of the first two winters in Boston acquiring Kimbrel just a few months after he was hired in 2015 and Sale last offseason. Does he pull off a similar trade this winter?

Are the Red Sox satisfied with infield depth?

With uncertainties surrounding Pedroia's health, it's a legitimate question whether the Red Sox feel comfortable with Brock Holt and Deven Marrero as their primary infield depth.

Eduardo Nunez becomes a free agent this offseason and it's possible the team pursues him as well but, he too may need surgery on his injured knee.

Does parting ways with free agent Chris Young open the door for Rusney Castillo?

Young's two-year deal is up this offseason and after a down year at the plate, the Red Sox might not be eager to work a deal with him, especially with Castillo in Pawtucket.

The 29-year-old hit .314 with an .857 OPS in 87 games this year for Triple-A Pawtucket. Of course translating that to the major-league level has been an issue, but with extended time in Pawtucket, maybe it's time to give Castillo another chance.

### **Pomeranz took a giant step forward in 2017, hopes a normal offseason can mean more strides in 2018**

Jen McCaffrey

BOSTON - Drew Pomeranz was hoping to get a second chance on Wednesday against the Houston Astros in Game 5 of the American League Division Series.

But it didn't work out that way with the Red Sox falling 5-4 in Game 4, and in turn, dropping the series to Houston, 3-1.

Despite his inability to redeem a rough Game 2 start, 2017 was a massive step forward for the 28-year-old lefty on a personal and professional level.

"I was looking forward to getting another chance in the postseason," Pomeranz said Tuesday as he took a break from packing up his locker in the Red Sox clubhouse. "But as far as the rest of the year, I felt like it was a big improvement for me to come in here and after the little time I had in the AL East last year just kind of figuring out what I needed to do and to be successful."

After a tumultuous 2016 when he was traded from San Diego to Boston and caught up in the Padres scandal of withholding medical information from the Red Sox, Pomeranz had a comparatively calm 2017 and excelled.

He posted a 3.32 ERA over a career-high 32 starts and 173 2/3 innings, finishing the year as Boston's second-best starter behind Chris Sale. It was a far cry from the end of 2016 when he was headed for a stem-cell injection. The trade (in which Boston parted with top pitching prospect Anderson Espinoza) had already been concluded a bust.

This offseason, Pomeranz knows what he needs to work on and has the time to do so.

"Definitely a much different feeling coming into this offseason than I had last year," he said. "Hopefully this year I'll have a chance to work in the offseason a little bit on some of the things I had to work on in spring training and the beginning of the year last year."

"Last offseason it was big because I knew I had so many things to work on and I couldn't work on them when I wanted to so I had to carry it over into the season a little bit," he said. "I'm looking forward to having more time to do those things this offseason."

The last seven months marked just his second full year as a starter, and first without a midseason trade. The consistency of roles made a big difference.

"There's definitely a lot more room for improvement it's only the second full year someone's let me go and start and pitch a whole year," Pomeranz added.

Part of his success came with communicating with manager John Farrell. In San Diego, Pomeranz knew the Padres was planning to move him back to the bullpen so he set up a meeting with then manager Andy Green to advocate for himself. He carried that same attitude with him to Boston, making sure he and Farrell were on the same page.

Sometimes they weren't and it was public, like during a heated exchange in the Oakland visitors' dugout in May. But the starter said he learned to work with his manager as opposed to being managed.

"I think it's good for both of us to know how everyone is feeling," Pomeranz said of he and Farrell. "We talked a decent amount of times throughout the season and I had a good relationship with him and do. I wanted him to know where I was coming from and I wanted to help him put us in a good position to win."

More often than not, that was the case for Pomeranz, who finished the season tied with Sale for the team lead in wins with 17.

The offseason is bound to present a variety of changes for the Red Sox, but Pomeranz is hoping a normal offseason for him can help him take his game to the next level next season.

### **Pomeranz washes away bitter taste of loss**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- If not for the jarring late-game swings by the Astros that ended the season for the Red Sox the day before, Drew Pomeranz likely would have spent part of Tuesday in the interview room at Minute Maid Park discussing his upcoming start in a winner-take-all Game 5 of the American League Division Series presented by Doosan.

Instead, Pomeranz spoke in a far less exciting atmosphere at Fenway Park as he cleaned out his locker.

Despite the disappointing end, Pomeranz is one of the Red Sox players who most exceeded expectations in 2017.

He came into Spring Training coming off stem-cell treatment in his left elbow and was a bubble candidate to make the rotation. By the end, Pomeranz had emerged into his team's No. 2 starter behind Chris Sale, going 17-6 with a 3.32 ERA.

"Obviously, a disappointing end," Pomeranz said. "I was looking forward to getting another chance in the postseason, but as far as the rest of the year I felt like it was a big improvement for me to come in here, and after the little time I had in the AL East last year just kind of figuring out what I needed to do and to be successful here and accomplishing that was a pretty good feeling. But I feel like there's still more."

The only thing that will leave a bitter taste in Pomeranz's mouth was his performance in Game 2, when he gave up five hits and four runs and was lifted with two outs and nobody on in the third inning.

Then again, he wasn't alone. The Red Sox didn't get a single good start in the four games against the Astros, and it's one of the major reasons they couldn't go the distance in the Division Series. Sale, Pomeranz, Doug Fister and Rick Porcello combined to go 0-2 with a 12.71 ERA in the four starts.

"Yeah obviously, myself, I was excited to get out there and help the team and help us win," said Pomeranz. "Those guys were just swinging hot bats. I guess they were swinging a lot and hitting every mistake we threw up there, but at the end of the day it's on us.

"We needed to do something to step up and make better pitches, and that's part of the reason why I was looking forward to getting another chance. If we would have won, I probably would have started [Game 5], so I was very anxious to get back out there and not end the season like that."

Pomeranz no longer has any choice but to wash that Game 2 memory away and focus on the many things he can build on.

The first is improved health. Other than some regular wear and tear that diminished his velocity late in the season, Pomeranz has no injury concerns heading into the winter.

"Definitely a much different feeling coming into this offseason than I had last year, but hopefully this year I'll have a chance to work in the offseason a little bit on some of the things I had to work on in Spring Training and the beginning of the year last year," said Pomeranz.

The second is performance. Though his ERA was identical the last two years, most of Pomeranz's success in 2016 was in San Diego before the trade. Putting together a solid season while pitching home games at Fenway Park and going against the heavy-hitting AL East is something that can't help but boost Pomeranz's confidence.

With two full seasons as a starter under his belt after being a swingman the previous three seasons, Pomeranz eyes 200 innings in '18 after logging 170 2/3 in '16 and 173 2/3 in '17.

"Yeah, the goal is to keep going," said Pomeranz. "I want to keep going, and it's basically just taking away some of those short outings I had and turn them into six, seven innings, and I'm right at that 200 mark. More for me, it's just cleaning up those shorter outings and trying to stay in the game a little longer."

The 28-year-old Pomeranz has one more year of arbitration-eligibility and could be a free agent at the end of the 2018 season.

**\*CSNNE.com**

### **Drellich: Hosmer's leadership, Martinez's power fit Red Sox' needs**

Evan Drellich

BOSTON — The Red Sox can make it rain again.

From the day David Ortiz announced he was retiring, it was universally apparent the Red Sox would need to find a middle-of-the-order bat to replace him. They passed on that chance last winter, preferring to get themselves under the luxury tax threshold for 2017. It was universally apparent how well that plan worked on the field.

But, they did indeed stay under the threshold in 2017. So now the penalties this winter for acting like, well, the major-market Boston Red Sox, are lessened.

Thus, the mea culpa spending can begin.

Likely, the Red Sox will largely look the same in 2018 as they did this year. The outfield appears set, as does the left side of the infield. First base is an open position with Mitch Moreland now a free agent, and designated hitter is in play as well. Hanley Ramirez could have a guaranteed spot going into 2018 at either first or DH, but the Sox might be wise to acquire not one but two significant hitters — both insurance and competition for Ramirez.

First baseman Eric Hosmer and outfielder J.D. Martinez headline the available bats via free agency. Both get positive reviews for their character. Mutual interest is expected all-around.

Hosmer is an established leader, a quality uncommon for someone entering their age-28 season who is also freely available. Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski may be more inclined to pay for

intangibles than others, both because of his philosophical leanings and need. And the intangibles will be a part of the price.

The presence is commanding. Hosmer's father is a firefighter, and his mother a nurse who immigrated from Cuba.

A left-handed hitter, Hosmer's been to a pair of World Series and won one with the Royals, the only team he's played for. He also won the World Baseball Classic with Team USA this spring, starting over Paul Goldschmidt.

He's durable, playing 162 games in 2017 after playing 158 in each of the last two. He's hit 25 home runs each of the last two seasons, slashing .318/.385/.498 this year.

Heck, at the 2016 All-Star Game, Hosmer even said the right things about David Ortiz.

"He's constantly spreading knowledge throughout the whole entire league. As a player, as a leader of a team, you appreciate because you see how he goes about his business," Hosmer said. "You see how he makes the people around him that much better. So to hear his words and the message before the game was, you know, something you really will look back on and be extremely appreciative that you can be in a locker room and hear words like that from a guy like David."

No player comes without concern. Hosmer's defense is not looked at well by the readily available metrics, although he won three straight Gold Glove awards from 2013-15. He hits a lot of ground balls, and ground balls don't turn into home runs.

But Hosmer's loved his time at Fenway Park so far, with a .354 average and three long balls in 109 plate appearances.

Strictly from an offensive production standpoint, Martinez has more to offer, although he's older, entering his age-30 season.

Martinez's 2017 production was tremendous. A right-handed batter, he ripped 45 home runs and led the majors in slugging percentage, .690. He also hit .303 with a .376 on-base percentage, finishing up the season with the Diamondbacks. He's an outfielder by trade but could DH.

When Martinez, a very hard worker, arrived in Detroit after beginning his career with the rebuilding Astros, he had just rebuilt his swing and found a group of veterans to learn from. Martinez has leadership qualities, and could blossom into a lead figure in the clubhouse, but he's not there yet.

Martinez is appealing as well because he cannot receive a qualifying offer, after he was traded midseason. Hosmer's a guarantee to receive a qualifying offer, so the Sox would have to give up a second-round draft pick to sign him.

Considering how few home runs the Sox hit in 2017, it'd almost be a surprise if one of Hosmer or Martinez didn't land in Boston.

**\**WEEI.com***

**Bradford: What now for these Red Sox?**

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox were able to tweak the narrative over the past few days. If they came back from Houston and continued to their lopsided American League Division Series loss, believe it or not, the questions would have come faster and far more furious.

But they won a game and put up a fight in another. And along the way, the likes of Hanley Ramirez, Chris Sale, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Rafael Devers, David Price, Rick Porcello and even John Farrell were able to take advantage of their ALDS second chances.

Still, the season is over and reality has set in. The overreactions that come with wins and losses are gone, and now we can take a measured look at exactly what we're dealing with in terms of the Red Sox' 2018 roster:

#### FIRST BASE

When we look back on the Mitch Moreland era, there should be a sense of appreciation. This guy played in 149 games despite a broken toe and bad knee, finishing off with a really good postseason. He was also just one of four Red Sox hitters with 20 or more homers (22). But, with the Red Sox' lineup as currently constituted, this is a position that they need star power production from, leaving the chances of Moreland returning seemingly slim. It also puts some doubt in the feasibility of relying on Sam Travis, who has shown solid signs becoming a productive major leaguer, but is a hitter who does not offer the kind of power the Sox need.

2018 outlook: Red Sox will almost certainly make a run at free agent Eric Hosmer. Another target may be Carlos Santana, who is a notch below Hosmer. Hanley Ramirez's return to the position also isn't out of the question, which would free up a spot for free agent slugger J.D. Martinez (45 homers in 119 games).

#### SECOND BASE

This is going to be dependent on Dustin Pedroia's knee. The guess is that he finally has to undergo surgery, which may keep him out for a significant part of the 2018 season. There just simply might not be any way around it. If that's the case then the Red Sox are going to be put in the unfamiliar spot of finding another everyday second baseman. It's a problem that they wouldn't seem to have an immediate internal solution for, unless Brock Holt is deemed fit for such a role.

2018 outlook: It's a terrible free agent class for second basemen, with Neil Walker (coming off back surgery) seemingly at the top of the list. What would I do? Lock up Eduardo Nunez. He is exactly the type of player the Red Sox could use, both on the field and in the clubhouse. And while his defensive acumen isn't close to Pedroia, he can be good enough while perhaps sharing the duties with someone like Holt.

#### SHORTSTOP

It's time to find out exactly what Bogaerts is. This season was tough on the 25-year-old thanks in large part to the hand injury that derailed most of his final three months. (It's still baffling why they didn't shut him down after being hit by that pitch at Tropicana Field.) Bogaerts' final numbers weren't terrible (.273 batting average, 10 homers, 15 stolen bases, .746 OPS), but they have to get better. This is a guy who has two more years before he becomes a free agent, but is still someone we aren't quite sure is deserving of being identified as a foundation piece.

2018 outlook: Bogaerts has to be what he was in 2016 (.294, .802 OPS, 21 homers) and the last day of the season (opposite field home run). This lineup desperately needs it.

#### THIRD BASE

The Red Sox have finally found their answer. Rafael Devers is the answer, punctuating his 2 1/2-month major league career with his 11th home run in 62 games (albeit an inside-the-park job). And while he had his issues defensively, the 20-year-old made the kind of above-average plays that would suggest that range isn't going to a factor. Experience will likely take care of those too-much-time errant throws to first. Perhaps the only concern regarding Devers will be conditioning. The Red Sox need him to stay at third base and not quite transfer over to first base or designated hitter for a few more years.

2018 outlook: The Curse of Adrian Beltre has finally seemed to come to an end. After the challenges that came with leaning on the likes of Will Middlebrooks, Bogaerts, Pablo Sandoval, Travis Shaw, Josh Rutledge and Yoan Moncada, the Red Sox have found their guy in Devers.

## OUTFIELD

It's hard to imagine the Red Sox dangling any of the three outfielders as trade bait. Maybe Jackie Bradley Jr., but, considering what he does defensively -- with some occasional offensive punch (43 homers over the last two seasons) -- that wouldn't seem wise. They have a good thing going with these three. But who will be their Chris Young in 2018? The priority would seem to be getting a right-handed-hitting option. Howie Kendrick might be an interesting name to consider. You know who else would be? Rusney Castillo. He did hit .395 against left-handers with Triple-A Pawtucket, and the Red Sox' financial restraints wouldn't seem to blocking the outfielder like they did in 2017.

2018 outlook: Status quo, plus Castillo might be enough. The caveat here is the perceived need for another veteran clubhouse presence. That was some of thinking behind committing to Young for two years.

## DESIGNATED HITTER

The Red Sox have to find out what Hanley Ramirez is going to be. This is a team that had the seventh-best slugging percentage out of the DH spot in the American League, a trend that did not help matters when trying to find prolonged offensive success. If they think Ramirez's shoulders are going to be better thanks to his new workout approach, then that's where they go. But they better be sure, because if there is a commitment to Ramirez that will mean enough plate appearances for his \$22 million option for 2019 to vest and then you really have doubled-down. If there is doubt, the move would probably be to cut the 33-year-old loose, putting the Red Sox on the hook for the one year of \$22 million instead of double that with the extra year.

2018 outlook: It wouldn't be the worse thing, if Ramirez can find a way to manage his shoulder issues, to revisit his everyday status at first base to free up room for a more potent power threat (Martinez) at designated hitter.

## CATCHER

The dynamic of splitting time between Sandy Leon and Christian Vazquez was one of the few things that worked better than the Red Sox probably anticipated. Sure, people will be clamoring for more Vazquez considering he finished with a surprising .290 batting average and .735 OPS in 99 games. But it would be a mistake -- like it was with Leon after the 2016 season -- to put all the eggs in that one basket. Leon has his value, as was evident a catchers ERA that was third-best in the major leagues. The intrigue here revolves around Blake Swihart, who will be out of options.

2018 outlook: This would seem to be a "it ain't broke so don't try to fix it" scenario. Swihart, who only hit .187 in 62 minor-league games in 2017, still has upside and value. Teams are reluctant to jump ship on catching until the last possible moment, so unless there is a legitimate trade to be had, look for the Red Sox to see how things play out in spring training before moving on from the former first-round pick.

## STARTING PITCHERS

Chris Sale is your ace, and will be for the next two seasons. After that the Red Sox have to figure some things out. Rick Porcello is under contract for two more years, and has earned the right to try and figure out what went awry in 2017. Drew Pomeranz has another year before becoming a free agent, and is setting himself up for a pretty good payday after his 17-win, 3.32 ERA season. Eduardo Rodriguez remains ultra-talented, and ultra-frustrating. The guy who Dombrowski deemed untouchable two offseasons ago might actually be an avenue for finding the big bat most believe the Red Sox are missing. Don't forget about Steven Wright, who will be back after knee surgery. And then there is David Price. It's hard to envision

Price going the surgery route this offseason after watching what he did for the last month. It's also difficult envisioning the lefty not being good after witnessing his relief pitching exploits. Also, for those people suggesting the Red Sox might trade Price, don't count on it. The fact that he is still committed to being a \$30 million-a-year player for the next five years is one thing, but also consider that that elbow might be magical in some ways, but typically teams' medical staffs don't sign off on magic when it comes to acquiring players. Also of note: Depth-starter Brian Johnson is out of options.

2018 outlook: The only change here might be Rodriguez. With Wright coming back, and the potential need to include major league value in any trade, the 24-year-old might be the one the Red Sox float in the offseason. The guess here, however, is they don't make any major alterations.

## RELIEF PITCHERS

It's hard to envision any significant changes here, either. News flash: The Red Sox will be picking up Craig Kimbrel's 2018 option. As for set-up guys, Joe Kelly has another year before free agency, with Carson Smith entering his first year of arbitration eligibility. Matt Barnes. Heath Hembree. Robby Scott. All under contract for some time and have shown enough to be back in some capacity. Addison Reed will be gone, looking to close somewhere. But Tyler Thornburg will be counted on to finally land back in the eighth inning spot after his 2017 medical chaos. Austin Maddox also showed enough to suggest he is going to be a 2018 major leaguer. Fernando Abad is gone.

2018 outlook: While the Thornburg for Reed switch should offer some discomfort, the Red Sox can't keep chasing eighth inning guys every offseason. It would be understandable if they settled with Smith, Thornburg and Kelly in the eighth, at least to begin with.

## **Red Sox injuries: Updates on Mitch Moreland, Eduardo Nunez, Dustin Pedroia**

Rob Bradford

Now that the Red Sox' season is over, we will start hearing details about injuries we knew about, and some we didn't. One which was revealed after the Sox' season-ending, Game 4 loss to the Astros was Mitch Moreland's knee issue.

While it was known that Moreland battled through a broken toe for much of the season, the first baseman told WEEI.com Monday night that trying to manage the ailment most likely led to a knee problem.

"It kind of fed into my knee a little bit, so I have to get that checked on and we'll go from there," he said. "I was able to fight through it. I made it, and now we have the offseason to take care of it."

Asked if he thought the injury would lead to offseason surgery, Moreland said, "I don't know. We're going to check it out [Tuesday] ... We'll see what comes up from it. We haven't even done anything on it yet other than get treatment on it and get me between the lines every day."

Despite the broken toe and the knee injury, Moreland ended up playing in 149 regular season games, hitting .246 with a .769 OPS and 22 home runs. He went 5-for-13 in the ALDS (.385) with two doubles.

"I expect myself to do that. I don't think it's something that is out of the ordinary," said Moreland of battling through his injuries.

As for if the toe ultimately paved the way for the knee injury, the free agent-to-be said, "You kind of expect stuff like that to happen when you're battling through stuff. You're going to have some weird things come up when you try and compensate. It's not really unexpected. There are other guys who been fighting through stuff this year. That's what this team does, we fought until the last out.

"I wanted to win. That's it."

- Eduardo Nunez, who was forced from Game 1 after succumbing to his knee injury while running out a first-inning ground ball, told WEEI.com after the Monday loss that tests revealed no further damage in his knee and he would not need surgery. Nunez, who also will be eligible for free agency, also admitted that he came back too early when attempting to serve as a designated hitter in Houston.

- Dustin Pedroia is scheduled to meet with the medical staff Tuesday to determine if surgery is the best option for his ailing right knee. If he does undergo a procedure, it appears it might be something that possibly sidelines him for a stretch of 2018.

"I'm going to go talk to the doctors about that," Pedroia said. "Obviously we had to try and find a way to do what we did so I could be out there. But if you were to get it fixed, the recovery is a long time, so I have a lot of things to weigh in with the doctors and figure it out."