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*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox name Alex Cora as new manager

Peter Abraham

Alex Cora played in the College World Series three times while at the University of Miami. As a major leaguer, he won a World Series with the Red Sox.

Last spring, Cora helped build a team that landed Puerto Rico in the championship game of the World Baseball Classic.

As bench coach, Cora then helped the Houston Astros to a 101-win season and a berth in the World Series.

Now Cora will be the focal point of another championship pursuit, having returned to the Red Sox as manager.

The announcement came Sunday that Cora agreed to a three-year contract with a team option for 2021.

“Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans,” Cora said in a statement released by the Sox.

Cora also thanked Red Sox ownership for what he described as a “tremendous opportunity.”

Principal owner John Henry described Cora as a “natural leader to guide our clubhouse.”

The Sox won back-to-back American League East championships under John Farrell but fired him on Oct. 11, feeling too many of their young players had regressed and the Sox needed more guidance from the manager’s office.

With the effusive Cora, it will be a different approach.

“He is extremely smart with a dedication to what it takes to be successful in today’s game on the field,” said Henry, who also owns the Globe.

“His baseball acumen and his ability to think strategically are uncommon for someone his age. We could not have found a better match for our players, our front office, and for where we intend to go over the coming years as an organization.”

Cora, 42, will not be in Boston for a news conference until after the World Series, which starts Tuesday and could run through Nov. 1.

The Sox worked with Major League Baseball and the Astros to determine when to make the announcement and all sides agreed to withhold further comment until after the Series.

“It has been a very special season and an incredible organization to be a part of and I am looking forward to the World Series and winning with this group,” Cora said.

Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski moved quickly after firing Farrell, selecting Cora from a field of candidates that included former Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus and Arizona Diamondbacks bench coach Ron Gardenhire.

“We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex,” Dombrowski said. “He came to us as a highly regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity.”

“He is a highly respected and hard-working individual who has experience playing in Boston. Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today’s game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club.”

Cora also interviewed with the Mets and had interest from the Tigers and Phillies.

Cora, a native of Puerto Rico, is the first Hispanic manager in Red Sox history. At 42, he will be the youngest Sox manager since Kevin Kennedy, who was 40 at the start of the 1995 season.

Cora inherits a team that was 93-69 for two consecutive seasons under Farrell but did not advance beyond the Division Series. There will be pressure to take what is a talented roster back to the World Series for the first time since 2013.

Cora understands the challenge and the environment in Boston. He is the first former Red Sox player to become manager since Butch Hobson in 1992.

Cora was a middle infielder with the Sox from 2005-08, appearing in 301 games under Terry Francona. The only player still remaining from those teams is second baseman Dustin Pedroia.

“As someone who has played in Boston and knows what it takes to win here, Alex is uniquely positioned to instill a championship culture,” team chairman Tom Werner said. “Baseball is in his blood and we could not be more pleased to have found someone so accomplished to lead our team.”

The 47th manager in Red Sox history, Cora is the first without previous major league managerial experience since Hobson. But he drew praise from Astros manager A.J. Hinch and the Houston players for his work as bench coach.

“He’s all about baseball. He’s all about the competition and small advantages within the game, one of the brightest baseball intellects that I’ve been around,” Hinch said last week.

“He challenges people. He challenges me. He’s someone who’s all about winning. And I think to watch our players respond to him, he’s got a lot of respect in that clubhouse because of the work he puts in and the attention to detail that he brings.”

The Red Sox, while talented, have issues Cora will need to solve.

Several of the young players on the roster, particularly shortstop Xander Bogaerts, regressed this past season. David Price had a 3.38 earned run average but feuded with some media members to a point that it became a subplot to the season and drew criticism from fans.

Hanley Ramirez, a talented hitter, was so inconsistent with his effort that Farrell would point out those times Ramirez was “engaged” in the game.

Pedroia ended the season with an injured left knee that could require surgery.

The Red Sox are also likely to see changes over the coming months as Dombrowski adds power to the offense via free agency or trade.

Cora's immediate responsibility will be to develop a working relationship with Dombrowski and construct a coaching staff.

Cora played in the majors from 1998-2011. He was a starter with the Dodgers from 2000-04, first at shortstop and then at second base.

Cora signed with the Indians as a free agent before the 2005 season then was traded to the Red Sox on July 7 in exchange for infielder Ramon Vazquez.

Cora's only career home run at Fenway Park was a memorable one. The two-run shot to right field came off Roy Halladay in the seventh inning on Aug. 31, 2006, and gave the Sox a 6-4 victory against Toronto.

After his playing career ended, Cora sat out a season then joined ESPN and ESPN Deportes as an analyst. He interviewed for managerial openings with Texas and Arizona before joining the Astros' staff last Nov. 15.

Cora has been an active member of the Puerto Rican Winter League as a player, manager, and executive.

Cora was general manager for Criollos de Caguas the last five years and managed the team from 2014-16. Last winter, Caguas earned Puerto Rico its first Caribbean Series title since 2000.

"It's a great opportunity for Alex. As a former Red Sox player, I think it's a great fit," said Dodgers manager Dave Roberts "He's very connected to the players and the game and all the things that go with being a manager. It's going to be a new challenge for him, but I think he's as prepared as anyone."

After a stellar college career with Miami, Cora was a third-round pick of the Dodgers.

His older brother, Joey, was in the majors from 1987-98 and is now third base coach of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Cora resides in Caguas and has four children: Camila, Jeriel, Xander, and Isander.

Alex Cora has a lot of things to figure out quickly with Red Sox

Nick Cafardo

You wonder what Alex Cora was thinking as he sat in the Houston dugout watching the Red Sox lose to the Astros in four games in the American League Division Series.

Was it going through his mind that he would likely be named the manager of the Red Sox in a couple of weeks? Did he think about each player and wonder, "What more could I get out of Xander Bogaerts? Or Jackie Bradley Jr.? How will Rafael Devers develop under my guidance?"

Cora certainly had a hand in bringing Alex Bregman into stardom in Houston. He's had a hand in coaching Carlos Correa and Jose Altuve and George Springer. He's seen what a great core looks like and now he has a chance to shape the core of the Red Sox, perhaps influencing Devers, Bogaerts, Bradley, Andrew Benintendi, and Christian Vazquez like no one else has.

At least that's the Red Sox' hope.

Cora is a fresh face. He's Latino. He has chance to bond with Boston's growing list of Latino players. He has a chance to connect with younger players because at 42 he's not that old himself.

He's taking over a team that has finished on the down side of the last two Division Series. He was hired to take the Red Sox the rest of the way. He knows that. With that comes an enormous amount of pressure.

Terry Francona was hired under almost the same circumstances. Grady Little had taken the Red Sox to the ALCS in 2003, but made the monumental blunder of keeping Pedro Martinez in Game 7 way too long. Little was fired. Francona was hired with the notion that he would take them the next step.

He did. Of course, Francona had the benefit of the team signing pitcher Curt Schilling, to go along the hiring of a new manager. We'll see if the Red Sox do the same for Cora, perhaps signing a slugger such as J.D. Martinez or Eric Hosmer to enhance a lineup that's close to the one Cora is leaving in Houston.

Cora has to be thrilled for the new assignment. He's wanted to be a manager since he retired as a player in 2011. He knew what he wanted to do. He spent some time as an ESPN analyst, enough time to know that he wanted to achieve his goal of managing someday.

His name was the hot one because he was the bench coach on the hottest team. If Houston manager AJ Hinch was successful, his bench coach had to have something to do with it, right? Major League Baseball managerial searches are all about perception, and the perception was that Cora was the next great thing.

Dave Dombrowski, to his credit, pounced on that. While Dombrowski in past lives has hired older, experienced managers such as Jim Leyland, for the second straight managerial search he's gone for a novice. Dombrowski hired Brad Ausmus for his first managerial job in Detroit, and now he has tabbed Cora for his first managerial job in Boston.

Be patient, Red Sox fans. There will be growing pains. There were for Ausmus. There are for every first-time manager. Cora, who will get to name his coaching staff, might lean on some experienced, veteran coaches, but in the end he's responsible for every decision that will be made.

He will have to tune out the talk shows. He will have to stop reading the newspapers and the websites. This will be different than anything he's experienced. Oh, you can take plenty of heat as a player, but utility players, as Cora was, don't usually get a lot of heat. In fact, most of the time they are beloved fan favorites, and media favorites. Cora always has been media-friendly, especially having worked at ESPN, so he gets that part of it. He should be a breath of fresh air for the media here in Boston.

The Astros are the only baseball franchise that doesn't allow its coaches to speak with the media without permission. They've decided they only want Hinch speaking about the issues of the day. Who knows if Cora will demand that in Boston?

Frankly, we have no idea how Cora will handle the media, the players, and game situations. We think — and the Red Sox certainly thought this in hiring him — that he'll be just fine. But it's Boston. It's an unforgiving fan base, a city that looks at everything through a magnifying lens when it comes to the Red Sox' manager.

It's not like Cora doesn't know that.

The upside to this move is that Cora's youthfulness might engage the players more than John Farrell did. Maybe Cora will step into the clubhouse more and chat it up with the players. Maybe the players will come to really like and respect him as someone who understands what they're going through more because he's closer to their age.

As he looked at the Red Sox team his Astros beat, Cora had to wonder how a team with two 17-game winners could have lost the first two games of that series. Why weren't they prepared? Why did a player such as Bogaerts, so talented, so athletic, bomb so much when it counted most. And why isn't this guy a better player than he's shown?

How does the best closer in the AL come into a key game and implode like Craig Kimbrel did? Is there something not being done to prepare these guys or to get them ready for high-stakes situations?

And does Cora have a plan for David Price? How will Cora win his respect? How will Cora get Price to be a big-time performer again, and act like a \$31 million-a-year pitcher? Whom should Cora hire as his pitching coach to get the best out of what should be a great staff? How will he turn Rick Porcello around?

These are all questions Cora must have answers to. He will not get a lot of time to figure out these issues. He has to hit the ground running from spring training on and solve problems quickly. He has to hire the right coaches with the right messages and ones who will take his leadership and perform their duties superbly.

There was really no reason for Farrell to be fired, but that doesn't matter now. Cora is in charge and there can't be any excuses about being a rookie manager getting his feet wet. You don't get to do that in Boston. You have to act like you've done this before or it could be a long three years.

How do first-time managers fare in Major League Baseball?

Alex Speier

Alex Cora's baseball acumen and ability to connect with those around him is unquestioned by anyone who has crossed paths with him during his playing, television, or coaching careers. He represents a wealth of attributes that positioned him as a compelling managerial candidate.

"We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex," Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said Sunday in a statement.

"He came to us as a highly regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly respected and hard-working individual who has experience playing in Boston.

"Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today's game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club."

Yet while Cora — the bench coach for an Astros team that has advanced to the World Series — represents all of those elements, there is at least one box that is unchecked: The 42-year-old never has managed in the big leagues. His managerial experience is limited to two years as the head of the Caguas Criollos in the Puerto Rican Winter League.

For a team coming off a playoff campaign with World Series aspirations, a first-time manager in his first year on the job represents an atypical profile.

Of the 47 World Series winners since the introduction of the League Championship Series round in 1969, just three have been helmed by a player in his first full season as a manager: the 2001 Diamondbacks (Bob Brenly), the 1987 Twins (Tom Kelly), and the 1980 Phillies (Dallas Green).

Both Kelly and Green had served as the interim managers of their teams late in the season before their championship runs as "rookie" managers, and so they generally are viewed as being at least somewhat distinct from Brenly, who became the first manager to claim a title without prior big league managerial experience since Ralph Houk won titles with a loaded Yankees team in 1961 and 1962.

It's far more common for an experienced manager to inherit a ready-to-win club and to achieve baseball's ultimate prize in his first season with a new club. Of the nine managers to do so since 1969, the most recent two were Red Sox. Terry Francona (four years removed from his firing in Philadelphia) won in his first year on the job in Boston in 2004, while John Farrell won a championship with the Sox after coming to Boston in 2013 following two years managing the Blue Jays.

Of course, the idea of managerial turnover for a team that reached the playoffs is itself unusual. Since 1969, there are just 25 instances in which a team that got to the postseason one year turned to a new manager the following offseason. Of those 25 teams:

- 14 (56 percent) missed the playoffs in the first year under their new manager;
- 5 (20 percent) had a better regular-season record;
- 11 (44 percent) reached the playoffs again;
- 4 (16 percent) advanced deeper into the postseason under the new manager; and
- 3 (12 percent) won the World Series.

Notably, all three of those championships — the 2004 Red Sox (Francona), the 1996 Yankees (Joe Torre replacing Buck Showalter), and the 1974 Athletics (Alvin Dark replacing Dick Williams, whose A's had won back-to-back titles in 1972 and 1973) — were won under veteran managers.

In short, it's unusual for a team in the Red Sox' position to entrust its clubhouse to someone who has never performed in that role. That said, it's not unprecedented.

After the 2013 season, Jim Leyland retired from the Tigers. Then-Tigers president/CEO/GM Dombrowski replaced him with first-time manager Brad Ausmus.

More recently, after Don Mattingly led the Dodgers to a Division Series loss in 2015, a built-to-win Los Angeles team replaced Mattingly with first-timer Dave Roberts. Despite Roberts's lack of managerial experience, the Dodgers felt comfortable about the impact he could make based on what they learned through the interview process.

"I don't know if you ever know if a guy is ready. Experience is great, but the energy [Roberts] brought into a room was second to none," explained Dodgers vice president of amateur and international scouting David Finley (formerly the Red Sox' director of player personnel), who took part in the process that led his team to Roberts. "He's a player's manager. He can be tough on the players, as well. The culture he builds in the clubhouse, the chemistry was noticeable from the beginning. You could tell that would be the case in the interview process.

"There was no doubt he was going to be able to manage people, just because of his personality. Not having manager experience, I think he'd managed a part of the clubhouse for so long it didn't matter."

Finley's description of Roberts's attributes — energy, authenticity, a natural ability to forge strong relationships, someone who'd become a team leader during a long big league career as a supporting cast member rather than a roster centerpiece, experience as a bench coach — encompasses a number of traits (and résumé lines) possessed by Cora.

As for in-game management, the Dodgers were convinced that Roberts's intelligence would translate — particularly given the favorable impression that he made during managerial situations that were part of LA's interview process. (The Red Sox likewise used managerial simulations in the process that led them to Cora.)

"Analytically, he's brilliant. That was probably the biggest question for some of us who didn't know him," Finley said of Roberts. "In-game, running through the simulations of the game, he was strong — very strong . . . You could tell he'd be well-prepared and there would be thought behind every action. I've got to believe the interview process, you have to perform there in a big moment as you're fighting for a job. He was great at it."

Roberts led the Dodgers deeper in the playoffs in 2016 — the NLCS — than they'd been the previous year under Mattingly. And this year, Roberts oversaw a Dodgers team that won 104 games and cruised to the World Series, where they will oppose Cora's Astros.

"It's important to have a manager who can get the best out of every player. To me, that's why we're having this success. Every player has a role," said Finley, suggesting that Roberts has helped players such as Justin Turner, Chris Taylor, and Yasiel Puig deliver star-caliber performances.

"I can't think of a player who had an underachieving season. He gets the most out of every player. That's what's important for a manager."

Cora's Astros likewise saw their roster deliver across-the-board performances at the upper range of projections. Cora has received credit for being a part of the culture that allowed such a development to occur — a noteworthy part of his and his team's profiles given that the Red Sox' lineup this season was plagued by players who fell short of expectations.

In an effort to alter that mix, the Red Sox elected to look beyond managerial inexperience for someone whom they believe, like Roberts, embodies nearly everything else that they seek. In so doing, they are making an atypical gamble with a team that will enter 2018 with championship ambitions — believing that the best candidate need not be the most experienced one.

Five things to know about new Red Sox manager Alex Cora

Andrew Mahoney

Here is a closer look at Alex Cora, who was named manager of the Boston Red Sox on Sunday.

■ Cora was inducted into the University of Miami Sports Hall of Fame in 2006 — Cora was drafted by the Minnesota Twins in the 12th round of the 1993 MLB draft while he was in high school. Rather than sign with the Twins, he attended Miami, where he played shortstop and helped lead the Hurricanes to three College World Series appearances. He made the All-College World Series teams in 1995 and 1996, and in the 1996 title game against LSU, he went three-for-five with a triple and three RBIs.

He made his Major League debut against his brother — Cora was drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the third round of the 1996 MLB draft and made his debut in the big leagues in 1998 at Seattle. His older brother, Joey, was the second baseman for the Mariners that day.

He is persistent — On May 12, 2004, Cora had an 18-pitch at-bat against Matt Clement of the Chicago Cubs. After working the count to 2-1, Cora proceeded to foul off the next 14 pitches before he eventually prevailed with a two-run homer.

Legendary Dodgers broadcaster Vin Scully had the call that night

"It is the rare time that you can be in the ball park, and everyone is counting the pitches," Scully said as the at bat reached 17 pitches.

When Cora finally ended the battle with a home run, Scully marvelled at the accomplishment.

"What a moment! 9:23 on the scoreboard, if you want to write it down for history. What an at-bat!" Scully exclaimed. "That's one of the finest at-bats I've ever seen, and to top it off with a home run, that is really shocking."

He played for the Red Sox — After playing seven seasons with the Dodgers, he signed as a free agent with the Cleveland Indians in 2005. In July of that season, Cleveland shipped him to the Red Sox for Ramon Vazquez. In three-plus seasons in Boston, Cora appeared in 301 games, batting .252 with six home runs and 61 RBIs. He played 83 games for the 2007 World Series Champions, batting .246.

He and his family reside in Puerto Rico in the offseason — Cora has four children. As bench coach with the Astros, he missed a three-game series in Baltimore this summer because of the birth of his twin sons, Xander Gabriel and Isander Manuel. During his playing career, Cora represented Puerto Rico in the 2006 and 2009 World Baseball Classic. He now serves as Puerto Rico's general manager. The 2017 team finished runner-up to the United States in the WBC.

A conversation with Carolina Martinez on Pedro, charity work, and more

Nicole Yang

He's been retired from the game since 2009, but Pedro Martinez is far from removed from the sport of baseball. Martinez, who pitched seven seasons in Boston, works as an on-air personality for the MLB Network and is a Red Sox special assistant. But for those who don't have time to catch him on camera, the retired Red Sox legend's Twitter feed is chock full of takes as well.

After Sunday night's NLCS contest between the Dodgers and the Cubs, Martinez shared a number of his postgame thoughts, including praise for a former teammate. Los Angeles' manager Dave Roberts was also a member of Boston's 2004 World Series squad.

According to his wife, Carolina, baseball talk infiltrates their home as well. Given Pedro's love for the game, and the fact that both their children are pursuing baseball careers, it should come as no surprise. On Nov. 3, fans will get the opportunity to join the conversation, too.

The Pedro Martinez Charity is hosting its second annual gala in Boston, giving attendees the chance to mingle with players like David Ortiz, Jason Varitek, and Rafael Devers. The proceeds from the event will go toward hurricane relief efforts — a cause that is near and dear to the Martinez's hearts since the Dominican Republic was one of the Caribbean islands that was hit by Hurricane Maria.

The couple's charity work has been central to their post-baseball life and has been an instrumental factor in helping them stay as closely connected to the city of Boston as they are. Carolina spoke with Boston.com about their other retirement endeavors, how they manage expectations for their sons, and more:

What else have you guys been up to since retirement?

“We have been really busy because Pedro has been doing his broadcasting but is also working on launching the Spanish translation of his book, his autobiography, that will be done by the end of the year, and also his documentary. That is keeping us very busy besides doing lots of work with the Pedro Martinez Charity.

“We are really enjoying retirement. He is enjoying retirement. I think he's doing an interesting crossover from being on the mound to being on the cameras. He's having fun, and most importantly, his analysis is getting the same respect that he got when he was playing baseball in the sense that it's really thoughtful. Fans really like to see him on TV, like to listen to his analysis, and that's really important feedback for us.”

How would you describe the differences between being with him during the season and watching him on TV?

“It's kind of the same person but in different perspectives. Just because on the field, he was really competitive. He's naturally really energetic, so I think TV gives him the opportunity to show that side of his personality — funny, charismatic — that he sometimes couldn't show on the field. From my perspective, I love watching him on TV because he can be more of himself.

“Just like fans used to love him when he was not pitching. He was funny, he was always coming up with stuff in the dugout for his teammates, he was like the cheerleader of the team. That's kind of what he portrays on TV, like that funny character that everybody I think people gravitated towards when he was here in Boston.”

What is your favorite memory of Pedro on the diamond?

“That’s a tough one. As a Red Sox, I think it was when they won the World Series. He called me from the clubhouse. For him, I know that was an amazing accomplishment because that’s what he intended to do when he got here. He was hired by Dan Duquette to come to the city and bring a trophy. For me, that represents the highlight of the memories with the Red Sox.

Personally, the 2009 World Series, when he was with the Phillies, are really fond to my heart. We were all in Yankee Stadium and that was his last game of his career. I don’t think he wanted to retire yet. I don’t think it was in mind, and neither was it in ours as a family, but just a memory of having him walk off the mound in that last game versus the Yankees. For me, I think that’s the most beloved memory because that’s the last time we saw him in a uniform.

How often would you travel with him during season and go to games?

“When he was here, I was going to Boston College, so I was busy with school, so I would go on-and-off. When we went to the Mets, we got married, and I traveled a little bit more with him.

“It was a really demanding schedule and that was probably one of the reasons why he rushed his retirement, I think, because they get tired of hotels, of traveling, of eating hotel food. I think by the time, they’re 38, 39, they’re ready to just be home. Some of them. Some of them just keep playing, but some of them are ready to say goodbye to that lifestyle. I know he misses the competition, but I know he doesn’t miss the traveling or the hotels.”

How is your relationship with David Ortiz?

“We’re really close, especially now that they’ve moved to Miami. We’ve gone fishing, I think they’re in a good transition now of getting used to the Florida lifestyle that’s different than New England. We’ve become really close.

“I think he and Pedro have that big brother-little brother-type relationship, where David often goes to him for advice and counseling, and Pedro’s happy to give it to him.”

Did you follow his story lines in the media? What did you think about their portrayal of Pedro?

“I think because Boston is such a small town, it’s normal for the athletes that perform for Boston teams to be in the limelight a lot. With Pedro, I think the take he had on the media was really interesting because he was not afraid to necessarily to speak his mind.

“At that point, he became the highest paid player on the team, so I think he expected that pressure to be on him because of his contract, because he was a Latino presence in the city, and because he was opinionated. Even though it caused some strife with the media, I think the media kind of enjoyed getting quotes from him. He didn’t mind speaking his mind and being carefree with what he wanted to do and say.

“Today, we see it, we laugh, and we think it’s funny. But back in those days, it was a little bit more of a back and forth. Nothing got out of control, which is good because up until this day, we can still see the respect he has and receives from the media, as well as the respect that he gives the media. Thank God it was just an in-the-moment thing and never carried on to any bad resentment.

The Detroit Tigers recently signed Pedro Martinez Jr. to a minor league deal. How do you manage the baseball expectations for him?

“One of the good things is that he’s not going to be a pitcher, so that definitely will diminish the comparisons a little bit. He’s a third baseman. I think Pedro has made it really clear to his sons that they

don't have to be him, they don't have to become him. Because there's also Pedro Pablo Martinez Jr. that's playing. He plays in Florida.

"I know that as a dad, Pedro wants his sons to have their own identity. And I think he has communicated that to them really well. Even though the expectations are going to be there regardless, emotionally for them, they are clear that they don't need to be up to daddy's expectations.

"They're both infielders, they're not pitchers. They're both really different than Pedro, even body types and everything. I think they're in a good spot for them to keep on doing what Daddy did but in their own way, shape, and form. For them, it's probably going to be easier, or it could be harder, to not start from scratch but to start where Pedro left off. Sometimes that could be a double-edged sword. But we are hoping and praying that they'll both do good."

Does Pedro ever give them little pointers or try to coach them?

"Oh yeah, all the time. There's always some bumping heads because the kids, you know, really think they know best. But he coaches them. When he's not home, they send videos, and he can tell just looking at the videos: 'You're off here, you're off there.' It's great having a coach like him."

Is there a lot of baseball talk at home?

"Yes, yes. I personally enjoy when we're watching a game because it's like watching him fight the TV, no matter who's playing. That's one of my highlights of the day, when there's a baseball game and we're watching it together. Sometimes I feel tempted to do like a Facebook Live or an Instagram story just because it's so... You know, as a former player, they become really critical.

"One of the tweets that he recently tweeted was about how he hadn't seen a hit-by-a-pitch during the playoffs yet and he used the hashtag #differentimes."

"So you know, when they're old school, they have their own little book of baseball and how things should go. I enjoy when we're watching it, that this generation is a different generation with a different mindset. He enjoys them too, but at the same time, he's like, 'This is not what I expected,' or 'This pitcher, you know, pisses me off. They don't pitch inside enough. They don't have the guys. They don't have the heart,' or 'I wish that would be me, 20 years ago.'

"It's just really funny to hear his commentary. I've felt tempted many times just to start a Facebook Live because I'm a baseball fan myself, so I always put myself in the shoes of fans and think about what they would enjoy. But no, I don't do it. I just think about it. But it's great. We always talk baseball, all the time."

What's something that fans would be surprised to know about Pedro?

"I think people are surprised that he is in love with flowers. He loves flowers, he loves gardening. He talks to flowers. That's what he used to do before pitching, actually. That was his therapy. He would go and he would clip them and just talk to them. It's something that he inherited from his mom because she used to do that with him when he was younger. Whenever he had some kind of, you know, he's always had a character since he was a little boy, snappy, you know? What she used to do is she used to bring him over with her to the garden, and she would tell him, 'This will calm you down.' So then that's what he started to do.

"He carried that with him, and on his pitching days, he used to go out to the garden in our home, and he used to clip flowers and talk to them. And get rid of the dry ones. I think that's something that baseball fans might find interesting because he's such a beast on the field, but he has a really tender heart."

Is there a particular flower that he likes the most?

“He loves them all. He’s been trying to get the Boston landscaping over to the Dominican, but I keep telling him that’s not going to be possible. Weather-wise, they are so different. Over there it is humid and dry. Here, even in the summer, it is still nice. It’s not the Caribbean. But he has tried. We’ve brought some seeds over to our home, but they don’t last. He loves all the flowers, though. He doesn’t have one favorite in particular. Whatever blossoms, he’s like, ‘Aw that’s so pretty.’”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Alex Cora’s World Series run completes package for Red Sox

Chad Jennings

The waiting was the hardest part. Except for Alex Cora, who surely had all the time in the world.

Even before yesterday’s announcement, Cora becoming a Major League manager felt inevitable. He was the top managerial prospect in the game, a Red Sox favorite from the very beginning, and he interviewed for three jobs in the past two weeks.

The Red Sox were the ones in a rush to get him off the market. Cora was busy making his resume even more impressive.

A guy who wanted to sit behind the manager’s desk at Fenway Park spent the weekend coming from behind to beat the Yankees for the American League pennant.

When it comes to sealing the deal, that’s hard to beat, and now Cora gets to chase a ring with Jose Altuve on his side and a dream job in his pocket.

Forgive the man if he’d like to take his time.

Frankly, the Red Sox couldn’t ask for a better final step in the journey from player to analyst to coach to manager. Cora’s never managed outside of the Puerto Rican Winter League, and he’s now getting a crash course on the view of October baseball from the bench.

That’s where the Red Sox want to be, and Cora’s doing it with, essentially, the team they want to become.

The Astros are driven by two aces at the top of the rotation. They have a young core coming into its own. They’re sprinkled with hardened veterans beginning to yield to the next generation.

Andrew Benintendi and Carlos Correa are the same age; Mookie Betts is, ideally, a younger version of Altuve; Rafael Devers would do well to follow the lead of Alex Bregman; Dustin Pedroia can be a clubhouse fixture like Brian McCann; and Chris Sale and David Price surely have noticed what Justin Verlander and Dallas Keuchel have done this month.

This season was the climax of a long-term success story in Houston. When all the pieces fell into place — from emerging stars to veteran acquisitions — the Astros went from on-the-rise darlings to the new standard in the American League. They’re not as young as they seem — all but two everyday players are 27 or older — they were one win shy of the Indians’ best record in the American League, and now they stand alone with a full embrace of advanced metrics coupled with their willingness to cultivate clubhouse intangibles.

They were literally the team the Red Sox couldn’t beat at the end. Who better to get the Sox over that hump than a guy who’s seeing it from the other side?

The fact Cora is with the Astros for this final chapter is one last feather in his cap, and the fact his current team — at such an all-or-nothing point in the season — would trust him to interview for multiple jobs

speaks to its confidence in his ability to juggle multiple responsibilities, which is surely a must for any Red Sox manager.

Even before the regular season ended, Astros manager A.J. Hinch knew his bench coach was heading for this sort of October, torn between personal opportunities and team obligations.

He had no problem with it.

“I trust him to be prepared,” Hinch said at the end of September, as the Astros finished the season at Fenway Park. “I trust him to be able to handle it. He can compartmentalize very, very well. If anybody ever asked for permission, we’ll have to handle it depending on what we’re doing, where we’re at, where his comfortable timeline is. But regardless of whether he would have conversations about possibly being the manager somewhere or not, he shows up at the ballpark, he’s ready to go and prepared.”

At a key moment in Saturday night’s ALCS Game 7, FOX television cameras caught Hinch wrapping an arm around Cora’s shoulders to discuss mid-game strategy.

“I have the utmost trust that he’s going to have his attention here,” Hinch said. “It’s always weird for teams that have openings and your staff’s being talked about, but again, it’s all about the person, and I think he can handle compartmentalizing those issues.”

“All about the person.” I suppose that’s true of any job opening, but it rings especially true for this job, in which know-how and personality collide in an unusually high-profile way.

The right fit was always going to be worth the wait, and now that the Red Sox have the right fit, they can let Cora enjoy these next 10 days. He has a big opportunity in front of him, and an even bigger challenge waiting ahead.

Can’t fault him if he’d like to take his time and enjoy the ride just a little while longer.

Red Sox reel in Alex Cora

Chad Jennings

The Red Sox have a new manager, but for now, he has another job to do.

Alex Cora, the Astros bench coach and former Red Sox infielder, will be the 47th manager in Red Sox history. The team announced yesterday that Cora has accepted a three-year deal to replace John Farrell. The contract includes a team option for 2021.

Introducing the new manager, though, will have to wait. Cora’s still trying to win a World Series. The Astros meet the Dodgers in Game 1 tomorrow. An official press conference with Cora will happen when the series is over.

“In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse,” Red Sox principal owner John W. Henry said in a released statement. “He is extremely smart with a dedication to what it takes to be successful in today’s game on the field. His baseball acumen and his ability to think strategically are uncommon for someone his age. We could not have found a better match for our players, our front office and for where we intend to go over the coming years as an organization.”

At 42 years old, despite no managerial experience and his team still playing in the postseason, Cora reportedly also interviewed for managerial openings with the Mets and Tigers. He’d been a finalist for managerial openings the past two offseasons, as well.

All of baseball, it seemed, had become intrigued by Cora’s combination of analytic understanding and clubhouse relatability.

“He’s all about baseball,” Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. “He’s all about the competition and small advantages within the game, one of the brightest baseball intellectuals that I’ve been around. . . . And I think to watch our players respond to him, he’s got a lot of respect in that clubhouse because of the work he puts in and the attention to detail that he brings.”

Cora played 14 seasons in the majors, including a three-year stint in Boston where he won a World Series in 2007. He retired after the 2011 season and spent four years as an analyst for ESPN and ESPN Deportes.

This was his Cora’s first year as a major league bench coach, but he served as both general manager and manager for Criollos de Caguas in the Puerto Rican Winter League, and he was general manager of Puerto Rico in the World Baseball Classic.

Cora grew up in Puerto Rico, he’s bilingual, and he will be the first non-white manager in Red Sox history.

“We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex,” Sox president of baseball operations, Dave Dombrowski, said. “He came to us as a highly-regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly-respected and hardworking individual who has experience playing in Boston. Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today’s game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club.”

Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers speaks limited English, catchers Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon are native Spanish speakers, as is starting pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez and designated hitter Hanley Ramirez.

“Alex brings a lot to the table, my friend,” Astros veteran outfielder Carlos Beltran said. “He’s a guy that always is looking for information that he could use against the opposite team. And . . . he provides that information to the player, which is great. He has good communication with the guys, respect (of) the guys. He’s always in the clubhouse getting to know the players, getting to know which buttons he could push on each player to make them go out there and play the game hard, which is great.”

Cora’s comfort with newer advanced metrics, and his reputation for clubhouse communication were surely key factors in the Sox decision to hire him over more experienced candidates Ron Gardenhire and Brad Ausmus, who also interviewed for the job.

In replacing Farrell, the Sox were looking for something beyond wins and losses. Farrell had a successful five-year tenure that included a World Series championship in 2013 and back-to-back division titles the past two years. He’s the only manager in franchise history to win the American League East two years in a row.

But after those back-to-back first-place finishes, Farrell failed to advance beyond the division series. The Sox lost to Cora’s Astros this year, and Farrell was fired two days later. He had a hands-off approach to the clubhouse, where discontent seemed to boil over this season, headlined by David Price’s battle with the media and Dustin Pedroia’s awkward finger-pointing with the Orioles.

“As someone who has played in Boston and knows what it takes to win here, Alex is uniquely positioned to instill a championship culture,” Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said. “Baseball is in his blood and we could not be more pleased to have found someone so accomplished to lead our team. Welcome home, Alex.”

While Cora brings relatively limited experience, he brings universal acclaim for his communication skills and understanding of a modern-day clubhouse.

He’s a young, new-age manager for a young, evolving team.

“I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave, John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy for giving me such a tremendous opportunity,” Cora said in the released statement. “Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans.

“At the same time, I want to express my appreciation for Jim Crane, Jeff Luhnow, A.J. Hinch, and the entire Houston Astros organization for giving me the chance to start my coaching career. It has been a very special season and an incredible organization to be a part of and I am looking forward to the World Series and winning with this group.”

Clubhouse, accountability give Alex Cora his first challenges

Steve Buckley

No need to mince any words: The Red Sox clubhouse is a sinkhole.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the team’s official announcement of Alex Cora as manager of this splintered, disaffected bunch was accompanied by a statement from principal owner John Henry that spoke to clubhouse issues.

“In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse,” said Henry in the statement, which was released just as tailgaters in the Gillette Stadium parking lots were firing up the grills and getting ready for Pats-Falcons on Sunday Night Football.

Wow. In just 12 words Henry was able to say what president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski couldn’t/wouldn’t say when he Ambiened all New England during the press conference to address the dismissal of manager John Farrell.

“In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse.”

What Henry is really saying is that the Red Sox had been lacking a leader, natural or otherwise, to guide their clubhouse. Even casual observers of the 2017 season could see that the Sox were a sad, grumpy bunch from wire to wire — despite the first-place finish in the American League East, despite the many extra-inning triumphs, despite each post-victory episode of “Dancing With the Outfield Stars,” despite the ritualistic dousing of whichever player was being interviewed by Guerin Austin on the NESN postgame show.

Farrell should have been fired the day he rolled over for David Price by making that comment about how accountability is a two-way street. The reality is that there was next to no accountability emanating from the Red Sox clubhouse this season, and that’s because the former occupant of the corner office didn’t demand any, at least publicly.

Can Alex Cora, a 42-year-old former Sox reserve infielder and current bench coach of the World Series-bound Houston Astros, be the man who brings order to chaos? Can he make the Red Sox clubhouse a place where there’s some genuine, dare we say it, accountability?

You’ll be inundated with a ton of Marshmallow Fluff out of 4 Yawkey Way in the coming weeks, attesting that Cora can and will deliver on everyone’s promises and expectations. The reality is the Red Sox don’t know. The writers don’t know. The talk-show hosts don’t know. You don’t know.

This is uncharted territory. Not only is Cora a first-year manager, but he’s a first-year manager whose clubhouse is run by a \$217 million pitcher who awakens each new day to the grim reality that somebody, somewhere, is laughing and singing.

Price is a stupendous talent, make no mistake about that. He could be a Hall of Famer, and if he pitches like a Hall of Famer next season, Sox fans will quickly forget he yelled at Dennis Eckersley on an airplane. But Price couldn't even bring himself to say something about all those wildly cheering Sox fans after his stellar relief outing against the Astros in Game 3 of the Division Series, and that's precisely what Manager Alex will have to deal with.

It's been said Cora's age is an advantage. Sure. The likelihood is that he'll better communicate with players. But as a cautionary flag, Butch Hobson was only 40 when he was named manager of the Red Sox, and his tenure was three seasons of sub-.500 finishes.

That Cora is bilingual? Yes, that's a huge plus. Picture young, impressionable Rafael Devers being able to sit down for an occasional heart-to-heart with his manager without media relations assistant Daveson Perez acting as interpreter.

And, yes, it is absolutely true that Cora, as a player, seemed to have a handle on the cadence, rhythm and pulse of a big-league clubhouse. I can give you just one real example from my own observations to support this point, but I believe it's a good one: When rookie second baseman Dustin Pedroia was struggling early in the 2007 season and there was growing sentiment that the kid should be sent to Triple-A Pawtucket and that the veteran Cora should take over at second, the veteran would have none of it.

No veteran in his shoes would even have hinted he deserves the job. It was the way he handled it.

In a 7-4 Boston victory over the Yankees on April 29 of that season, Cora started at second base and contributed a triple and double (and three ribbies) to up his average to .360. Pedroia, who sat that day, was also sitting on a .182 average.

"I know everyone wants two RBI and three hits a day," Cora told reporters after the game, "but you still have to realize what your role is and what you have to do to help the team."

Julian Tavarez, that day's winning pitcher, said, "I think he's the best utility player I've ever seen in the last three or four years."

Cora knew what his job was, and he was great at it.

And now?

The biggest challenge of his career awaits him.

Everything we know about Alex Cora suggests he can handle a big-league clubhouse.

But this is no ordinary clubhouse.

Recent history proves Red Sox skippers get swamped by choppy seas

Michael Silverman

The Red Sox will soon officially name a new manager, the 47th of their 116-year history. Ranging from a high of 2,007 games (Joe Cronin, 1935-1947) to a one-game stint from Rudy York in 1959, the average tenure of a Red Sox skipper is 324 games — a little less than 2½ seasons per stint.

Opening a rotary telephone repair shop might offer more job security and, as John Farrell could tell you from his Barcalounger and Terry Francona told you in his book, world championship glows fade fast in this town.

How have Red Sox managers dealt with the pressure of late?

We'll skip over the first 36 managers and focus only on the last 10, recent enough to be relevant to how the modern game is played and especially how the modern player is paid. I've covered the last seven names on this list, and required an assist from longtime Red Sox reporter Bill Ballou of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette on the first three.

To the next manager of the Red Sox, good luck. Maybe the only advice worth offering is don't let the hashtags get you down — the tougher your skin, the less it will hurt when the door hits you on the way out.

- John McNamara — 1985-1988

Games: 571; Record: 297-273-1; Winning percentage: .521

McNamara deserves credit for steering the 1986 Red Sox to a World Series appearance . . . but that's where most of the praise comes to a crashing halt. McNamara loved his veterans and had trouble relating to youngsters. There was considerable talent on that 1986 team and McNamara got the most out of the players — up until the haunted, disastrous World Series Game 6, in which he made multiple bad decisions. The traumatized team sputtered to a fifth-place finish the following year, and one half-season later, the same summer when news of the Wade Boggs-Margo Adams affair began to leak, the manager was out. McNamara, said Ballou, was “the worst at media relations of any Red Sox manager I've covered: paranoid, suspicious.”

- Joe Morgan — 1988-1991

Games: 563; Record: 301-262; Winning percentage: .535

Morgan took over for McNamara and if ever there was a homegrown solution to whatever ailed the Sox at the time, Morgan was that guy. A Walpole native who attended BC, played four seasons in the big leagues and managed Triple-A Pawtucket, Morgan liked to play his hunches, uttered quirky slogans such as “Six, two and even” and brought vegetables from his garden to hand out to the reporters. He rubbed some veterans the wrong way with unconventional moves. “Morgan Magic,” so dubbed when the team won 19 of his first 20 games in 1988, was his high point. He brought the Sox to the ALCS twice, his teams never finished worse than third, but he lost the trust of then-owner Jean Yawkey and the front office.

Morgan, said Ballou, “was incapable of lying, which got him in trouble with his players.”

- Butch Hobson — 1992-1994

Games: 439; Record: 207-232; Winning percentage: .472

The Red Sox believed that the former University of Alabama football player, their former third baseman and Pawtucket manager would be able to earn respect from the veterans ensconced in their bunkers. They were wrong. The players still ran the asylum during his reign and the team never finished above .500 under Hobson.

Hobson, said Ballou, “had the thickest skin of any manager I've covered, and he was frequently and sometimes cruelly criticized. Players respected his legendary toughness, but he may emotionally have been better suited to be a football coach than a major league manager.”

- Kevin Kennedy — 1995-1996

Games: 306; Record: 171-135; Winning percentage: .559

Kennedy was one of the more capable in-game managers. In Year 1, he brought the team to its first playoff appearance since Morgan in 1990. A strong finish in 1996 was not enough for him to overcome a slow start that season, Roger Clemens' last here, and ultimately Kennedy was unable to gain any traction or enough trust from the front office. A big fan of both the veterans on his team and actress Natalie Wood (he kept a

mini-shrine to her in his office), Kennedy was a well-spoken and well-coiffed skipper who left a neutral impression.

- Jimy Williams — 1997-2001

Games: 766; Record: 414-352; Winning percentage: .540

Williams was a pure baseball lifer, with a keen eye for talent who enjoyed teaching the game and was a solid in-game manager. His country affect was a tough sell in these parts. His memorable line, “If a frog had wings he wouldn’t bump his booty” in his first press conference left some befuddled forever. Williams got the best out of Shea Hillenbrand and Trot Nixon, he was there at the start for Nomar Garciaparra and he enjoyed the best of Pedro Martinez but Carl Everett got the best of him in the end.

- Joe Kerrigan — 2001

Games: 43; Record: 17-26; Winning percentage: .395

Those who believe Bobby Valentine was the worst manager in this group have blocked the memory of Kerrigan’s reign of horror. His team was already in revolt when he took over for Williams but Kerrigan managed to inject more poison into a toxic dump of a season. The pitchers turned on their former pitching coach who also managed to alienate his players as well, most notably when he tried to teach Manny Ramirez a thing or two about hitting.

- Grady Little — 2002-2003

Games: 324; Record: 188-136; Winning percentage: .580.

A roar erupted from the City of Palms ballpark in Fort Myers when Little was introduced as the new manager, one of the first savvy moves from new owners John Henry, Tom Werner and Larry Lucchino. Little was adroit at getting the most out of mercurial talents such as Ramirez. He calmly led good teams and remained mostly popular with the players. In 2003, Theo Epstein was his boss and a disconnect grew over Little’s avoidance of many of the front office’s sabermetric suggestions. His handling of Martinez in Game 7 of the 2003 ALCS led to a downfall that was coming anyway.

- Terry Francona — 2004-2011

Games: 1,296; Record: 744-552; Winning percentage: .574

Epstein’s first managerial hire turned out OK considering Francona had a .440 winning percentage in four years with Philly. That experience in that market helped prepare Francona for Boston, a city that played to his strengths. He was a players’ manager in that he always had his players’ backs and fell on their swords when needed. With intense preparation that he masked with self-deprecating wit, Francona led deep teams to two titles. When it fizzled, it fizzled fast in 2011. Hard to envision any other manager outlasting his eight-year stint.

- Bobby Valentine — 2012

Games: 162; Record: 69-93; Winning percentage: .426

The Sox overcompensated by turning to the way-back time machine in the Valentine hire, thinking that the smart, witty and telegenic new guy was the same guy who managed in New York for seven seasons in the late 1990s, early 2000s. He wasn’t that guy. The players did not respond well to Valentine’s style and vision, and to be frank, Valentine had left his baseball fastball behind in New York. The hire was made above the head of new GM Ben Cherington.

- John Farrell — 2013-2017

Games: 810; Record: 432-378; Winning percentage: .533

One day it will be illuminating to discover exactly why Dave Dombrowski fired Farrell, but his record — one championship, three division titles and two last-place finishes — offers a standard of success and a cautionary tale for how to measure the job of a Red Sox manager.

New seats eyed at Fenway, but park 'still evaluating' added safety nets

Dan Atkinson

The Red Sox are looking to extend seats even farther onto the playing field at Fenway Park and are “still evaluating” whether they’ll add more protective netting to the section, a decision that could determine whether fans find themselves in the line of fire, a ballpark safety expert warns.

“It sounds like they didn’t learn their lesson from a few years ago, when that woman was almost killed,” said “Death at the Ballpark” author Robert M. Gorman, referring to Tonya Carpenter, who suffered life-threatening injuries in 2015 when she was hit by a splintered bat that flew into the stands.

The Sox are looking to add another row of seats in left field — possibly as many as 25 — pushing in toward the third baseline, according to documents filed at City Hall. The designs, filed a week after a 2-year-old girl was drilled in the face by a foul ball at Yankee Stadium last month, don’t include any mention of safety netting.

Along the first base line, the Sox are proposing to move a row of seats forward but also drop them down below ground level into a larger “dugout suite” that would keep fans behind a fence. But on the third base line, an entirely new row would be added with only a slightly higher barrier than what currently exists.

The drawings filed at City Hall show about 25 new seats in the new left field row, though Sox spokeswoman Zineb Curran wouldn’t say exactly how many. Curran also deferred comment when asked if the organization was concerned about whether bringing fans closer to the field could result in injuries.

“It would be premature to discuss the proposed changes at this stage as we are awaiting review and analysis from various city organizations,” Curran said. “We continue to evaluate options related to netting to ensure the game experience is both safe and enjoyable.”

The hospitalization of the toddler hit by a foul ball at Yankee Stadium renewed calls for protective netting from Major League Baseball officials and the player’s union. Some franchises, including the Yankees, have vowed to extend safety netting next season.

The Red Sox have said they will consider expanding their netting, which extends to the near end of each dugout.

Gorman warned that the team’s proposed seating expansion appears to be a step in the wrong direction.

“They’ve taken a step backward. They’ve not only not extended netting across the dugouts but they’ve put people closer to the action,” he said. “It’s like they’re asking for it.”

*** *The Springfield Republican***

Dave Dombrowski made shrewd hire, now Alex Cora must do same with his staff

Christopher Smith

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski made a shrewd hire naming Alex Cora the 47th manager of the Boston Red Sox.

The 42-year-old former Red Sox utility infielder has the ability to immediately connect with both the young players and veterans on this roster.

He has experienced winning (2007 World Series champion). He can help this core of players (1-6 in the postseason the past two years) understand what it takes to relax and play well in October.

He's always been known as a strong communicator. He added to that positive reputation this season as bench coach of the Houston Astros.

He's also familiar with the Boston experience from ownership to media. He can keep these players focused on what's happening on the field instead of what is being written and said about them.

"The fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club," Dombrowski noted in a press release. (The introductory press conference won't happen until after the World Series).

This is very significant. Rafael Devers, the 20-year-old phenom third baseman, still is learning English. He uses a translator with the media. Cora also will be able to connect with several prospects at spring training who are learning English.

Now it's important Cora makes his own shrewd hires.

Dombrowski will give him the ability to pick his own coaching staff. He obviously can retain any members of John Farrell's coaching staff or hire all new coaches.

Perhaps he hires his brother Joey Cora -- the Pirates third base -- for his staff. Maybe his brother will be his bench coach?

Or maybe Cora should hire a bench coach with previous major league managerial experience. The new Red Sox skipper has spent only one year on a major league coaching staff. It's inevitable he'll make some wrong in-game decisions, but it could help to have someone beside him who has gone through it before.

First-year manager Torey Lovullo hired Ron Gardenhire -- who managed the Twins for 13 seasons -- as his bench coach in Arizona for 2017.

There are plenty of ex-managers who would accept the position.

Assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister continues to be extremely important to the organization. Bannister also serves as vice president of pitching development. He'll remain in that role even if he's not assistant pitching coach next year.

Bannister said "90 percent of his job involves the minor leaguers" despite him traveling with the major league club.

Cora should consider naming Bannister the pitching coach if Bannister wants the job. Bannister enjoys what he's doing right now so he might want to continue in his current role.

Hitting coach Chili Davis is highly respected and might make a strong major league manager someday. But several Red Sox hitters underachieved in 2017 and a new voice might be best here.

Mookie Betts' OPS dropped 94 points from 2016. Xander Bogaerts has experienced an offensive regression the past two years when he should be competing for batting titles each year like he did in 2015.

Cora should consider retaining infield instructor Brian Butterfield simply because Devers has a ton of work to do next spring training to become a better defensive third baseman. He made 14 errors in 56 major league games.

Butterfield is known as one of the major's best infield instructors.

Butterfield didn't have a particularly strong year as third base coach. Cora could make him first base coach if he does retain him. The Red Sox not only made the most outs on the base paths (81) during 2017 but they also made the most outs at home (29).

Boston reportedly wants to keep bullpen coach and catching instructor Dana LeVangie who is a 1987 graduate of Whitman-Hanson (Mass.) High School, and a 1991 graduate of American International College.

Assistant hitting coach Victor Rodriguez seems like a logical candidate to remain in the organization even if he does not return to the coaching staff. After all, he has worked for the Red Sox for the past 23 years.

Rusney Castillo's most loyal supporter is Alex Cora, but will payroll keep him at Pawtucket again?

Christopher Smith

Rusney Castillo hasn't lived up to the seven-year, \$72.5-million contract he signed with the Red Sox in August 2014.

But could the 30-year-old Cuban outfielder receive a chance to make Boston's 2018 Opening Day roster as the fourth outfielder with Alex Cora as the Red Sox's new manager?

Cora has been Castillo's most loyal supporter since he managed him in Puerto Rico with Criollos de Caguas during the 2014-15 offseason. Cora again managed Castillo in Winter Ball the next two offseasons as well.

The high-priced outfielder enjoyed his best professional season to date in 2017 with Triple-A Pawtucket. He batted .314 with a .350 on-base percentage, .507 slugging percentage, .857 OPS, 15 homers, 22 doubles and 43 RBIs in 87 games. Much improved after he hit just two homers and posted a .664 OPS in 103 games in 2016 for the PawSox.

Chris Young, Boston's fourth outfielder in 2016-17, is entering free agency this offseason.

And so Boston has an open spot.

Will Castillo at least receive a chance to win the fourth outfielder role or will his lucrative contract work against him in 2018 just like it did last year?

Contract situation

Castillo's contract worked against him in 2017.

Boston refused to exceed the \$195 million tax threshold to avoid the highest tax penalties which would have resulted from exceeding the threshold for a third straight season.

Boston decided to stay under and reset its penalties for 2018.

Castillo's \$10.36 million average annual salary would have put the Red Sox over the threshold. So they kept him off the 40-man roster. Only 40-man salaries count toward the major league payroll.

The Red Sox already are nearing the \$197 million threshold set for 2018 before even making any offseason signings or trades. So it seems inevitable they will exceed it. At this point, it just depends on how much money the Red Sox want to spend beyond the \$197 million cap.

The Red Sox would receive a 20 percent tax on an overage that exceeds the threshold by \$20 million or less. So Boston would owe \$3.8 million if its 2018 payroll is \$216 million (a \$19 million overage).

It would receive a 32-percent surcharge if its payroll exceeds the threshold by \$20-40 million. So the Red Sox would owe \$10.08 million if their payroll reached \$236 million.

Boston would receive a 62.5 percent surcharge if the payroll exceeds \$40 million while also having its top draft pick in 2019 moved back 10 spots. So the Red Sox likely would prefer to stay under a \$40-million overage for baseball reasons.

First and foremost, the Red Sox need to add power to their lineup. Eric Hosmer and J.D. Martinez are free agents they could pursue.

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski could try to trade someone with a large guaranteed salary on the current roster. That's an option. Or he could look to deal one or two arbitration eligible players.

Castillo's chances of playing for the 2018 Red Sox probably will depend on whether his average annual salary puts the club over the \$40 million overage.

If the Red Sox prefer an overage of only \$20 million, then he could remain in Pawtucket if his salary would put them over that number.

All that said, he has an ally in Cora. That works to his advantage. But he also must continue to hit like he did in 2017 for Cora to make a strong case to Dombrowski that Castillo belongs on the roster.

No longer a one-dimensional hitter

Pawtucket manager Kevin Boles discussed Castillo's 2017 season with MassLive.com last month.

"Do I think that eventually he can definitely get himself back at the major league level. Sure. He has that type of ability," Boles said. "Whether or not there's an opportunity that presents itself, we'll see. But he's controlling what he can control as far as his performance on the field."

Castillo has a .262 batting average, .301 on-base percentage, .379 slugging percentage and .679 OPS in 99 major league games (337 plate appearances).

"His groundball rate the year before was very high. We're starting to see better extension through the ball and he started to use right-center a lot more," Boles said. "I think he was one dimensional the year before as far as looking mostly to his pull side. And it looked like he was staying through the ball a lot better this year."

Cora is a big Rusney supporter

Cora immediately was impressed with Castillo after the outfielder stroked four hits in his first eight at-bats for Criollos de Caguas in December 2014. He has been a big believer in the Cuban outfielder since Day 1:

Cora tweeted about Castillo frequently over the next year. Here are some of those tweets:

May 20, 2015: "Rusney not needed" #JustKidding," he tweeted before Castillo was promoted to the big leagues.

May 21, 2015: "Rusney won't save the Red Sox offense but he should help."

June 4, 2015: Cora tweeted about how Castillo needed to adjust his leg kick to catch up to fastballs in and offspeed pitches off the plate.

June 7, 2015: "Rusney's instincts getting better."

Aug. 7, 2015: "Another good night for Rusney," he tweeted after Castillo went 3-for-5 with three runs and an RBI.

Aug. 20, 2015: He questioned why Castillo wasn't in the Red Sox lineup vs. a left-handed starting pitcher.

Aug. 24, 2015: He tweeted "Have a night Rusney Castillo" after the outfielder went 3-for-4 with a homer, double and five RBIs.

Sept. 9, 2015: "3 assists in 6 games (@alexspeier) not bad for a bad instinctive player. He can play! Rusney."

Alex Cora named new Red Sox manager; Cora receives three-year deal with a club option for 2021

Jen McCaffrey

It's finally official.

The Red Sox named Alex Cora the 47th manager in franchise history on Sunday afternoon.

Cora, 42, who is still under contract as bench coach of the Houston Astros, agreed to a three-year deal with the Red Sox that runs through the 2020 season, with a club option for 2021.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave (Dombrowski), John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy for giving me such a tremendous opportunity," Cora said in a statement. "Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans.

Cora played 14 years in the majors, including four with the Red Sox under Terry Francona from 2005-2008 and was a part of the 2007 World Series team.

After retiring in 2012, he became general manager of the Criollos de Caguas in the Puerto Rican League and led the team to the 2013 Caribbean Series in his first year on the job. Cora also served as the general manager for the Puerto Rico team that finished second in the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

This past season was his first as bench coach for the Astros, who begin the World Series on Tuesday against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex," Dombrowski said in a statement. "He came to us as a highly-regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly respected and hardworking individual who has experience playing in Boston. Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today's game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club."

"In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse," club owner John W. Henry in a statement. "He is extremely smart with a dedication to what it takes to be successful in today's game on the field. His baseball acumen and his ability to think strategically are uncommon for someone his age. We could not

have found a better match for our players, our front office and for where we intend to go over the coming years as an organization."

The last former Red Sox player to go on to manage the team was Butch Hobson, an infielder in Boston from 1975-80 and manager from 1992-94.

Prior to being hired by the Astros as bench coach, Cora spent four years (2013-16) as a baseball analyst for ESPN and ESPN Deportes.

Per Major League Baseball rules, the Red Sox will not hold a formal press conference for Cora's hiring until after the World Series is over.

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

Alex Cora named Red Sox manager

Bill Ballou

Astros bench coach Alex Cora is the latest Red Sox manager and his job description is simple, at least in concept.

The 2018 Sox have to go 173-0. Anything less than perfection won't be tolerated, as many before him have found out — John Farrell, Terry Francona, Kevin Kennedy, Joe Morgan and the list goes on. The past is past, however, and Cora is the new boss as the team announced Sunday.

The timing of the announcement and the rapid pace of the progress of Cora's hiring makes it seem like the Red Sox may have fired Farrell just so they could hire Cora before anybody else did, and there were other suitors out there, most notably the Nationals.

Because Major League Baseball does not like anything detracting from post-season play, the Sox and Cora won't have any public availability until his Astros are done with the World Series. As such, the new skipper released a statement that said in part:

"I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave (Dombrowski), John Henry, Tom Werner and Sam Kennedy for giving me a tremendous opportunity. Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me."

Cora's contract is for three seasons. He is 42, a native of Puerto Rico, and will be the the 43th different full-time manager of the Red Sox since the franchise opened for business in 1901. He will be Boston's first minority manager.

Cora was a utility infielder for Boston from 2005-08 and as such played on two of the franchise's best teams in recent years, the 2007 World Champions and the 2008 club that took the Rays to the seventh game of the ALCS before losing.

The last Boston manager to have also played for the team was Butch Hobson, whose tenure ran from 1992-94. While the Red Sox regularly hired former players as managers for many decades, Cora and Hobson are the only ones in the past 44 years.

This will be Cora's first major league managerial job. Since the end of World War II, Sox skippers whose first big-league jobs were on the Boston bench include Grady Little, Joe Kerrigan, Hobson, Joe Morgan, Eddie Kasko, Dick Williams, Johnny Pesky, Billy Jurges, and Mike Higgins.

That group's results are mixed. Morgan and Williams were unqualified successes. Little and Kasko had winning records.

While Cora's resume does not include any big-league managerial experience, he has had a varied career in the game.

He played in 1,273 major league games for six different teams — the Dodgers, Indians, Red Sox, Mets, Rangers and Nationals. He has been general manager and manager of the Criollos de Caguas in the Puerto Rican Winter League; GM of Puerto Rican team in the 2017 World Baseball Classic; and an analyst for both ESPN and ESPN Deportes.

“We were extremely impressed when we interviewed Alex,” Dombrowski said in a statement released by the Red Sox. He added, “Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today's game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans in a plus.

“Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant to our club.”

Cora will be the second member of the 2008 Red Sox to become a major league manager, joining Kevin Cash of the Rays. Six players from that team were still active in the big leagues as of 2017 — Dustin Pedroia, Jed Lowrie, Jacoby Ellsbury, Jon Lester, Clay Buchholz and Chris Smith.

It can be assumed that Pedroia will be with Boston in 2018, making Cora the first Sox skipper since Kasko in 1973 to manage a former teammate. Kasko managed Carl Yastrzemski, Rico Petrocelli and Reggie Smith, all of whom he played with on the 1966 Sox.

Cora played mostly second base and shortstop in Boston. He joined the team on July 7, 2007 when the Sox got him from the Indians for Ramon Vazquez, a reserve infielder whom Terry Francona was not fond of. Francona became extremely fond of Cora.

In 301 games with Boston, Cora hit .252 with six home runs, one of them the strangest in recent Fenway Park history. A left-handed hitter with limited power, Cora hit a fly ball into the right field corner in the seventh inning of game against Roy Halladay and Blue Jays on Aug. 31, 2006.

Toronto right fielder Alex Rios should have caught the ball easily, but it inexplicably bounced off his glove and into the box seats for a two-run homer that gave Boston a 6-4 lead, which is how the game ended.

The Sox are hoping that Cora can transfer that right-field corner karma into the Fenway dugout and get them closer to the World Series than Farrell was able to the last two years.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Red Sox announce Alex Cora as new manager

Kevin Thomas

The Boston Red Sox have hired Houston Astros bench coach Alex Cora as their new manager, the team announced Sunday.

Cora was signed to a three-year contract with a team option for 2021. He replaces John Farrell, who was fired on Oct. 11 after Boston was eliminated in the first round of the American League playoffs for the second year in a row.

Cora, 42, will not be introduced to the media as Boston's manager until after the World Series. The Astros will play the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series starting Tuesday.

“I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave (Dombrowski), John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy for giving me such a tremendous opportunity,” Cora said in a Red Sox news release.

“Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans.”

Dombrowski, in the news release, said, “We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex. He came to us as a highly regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly respected and hardworking individual who has experience playing in Boston.

“Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today’s game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club.”

Cora, a native of Puerto Rico, played parts of four seasons with the Red Sox from 2005-08. He will become the franchise’s 47th manager, and its first Hispanic manager.

He takes over a team that won the AL East each of the past two seasons, finishing with a 93-69 record both years.

Cora played 14 years in the major leagues before retiring in 2011, and was a member of Boston’s 2007 World Series champions. An infielder, Cora was a lifetime .243 hitter with 35 homers and 286 RBI.

While the Astros job is his first coaching position in the major or minor leagues, Cora has managed in the Puerto Rican winter league. He also managed Puerto Rico in the World Baseball Classic last spring.

Before joining the Astros this season, Cora was an analyst for ESPN.

“Alex is a guy that communicates well with the players; he’s a guy that studies the game,” Astros designated hitter Carlos Beltran told the Associated Press earlier this month. “His preparation is above what I have seen in baseball, and he has a great personality.

“He’s intense – players like to see it. But at the same time, he is a guy that can sit down in the clubhouse with the players and have a baseball conversation,” Beltran said. “So he’s got the skills and I love it. He’s been a big help for this organization. He takes a lot of pride into relationships with the players.”

Dombrowski earlier said that the new Red Sox manager would get to choose his own coaching staff. It is unclear whether any of Boston’s 2017 coaches will be retained, including third base coach Brian Butterfield, a Maine native and Standish resident.

*** *RedSox.com***

Sox finalize 3-year deal with Cora to manage

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- It has been quite the October for Alex Cora, who was officially named the 47th manager in Boston Red Sox history on Sunday. Cora and the Red Sox agreed to a three-year contract that will run through the 2020 season and includes a club option for the 2021 season.

However, Cora has some work to do at his existing job first. He is the bench coach for the Houston Astros, who are gearing up to play the Dodgers in the World Series, which starts on Tuesday night in Los Angeles.

Once the series is over, Cora will settle into a dream job of not only managing in the Major Leagues for the first time, but doing so for a franchise he won a World Series championship with as a player in 2007.

The job went to Cora exactly a week after he interviewed in New York with Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski during an off-day in the American League Championship Series. Cora was one of three candidates Dombrowski interviewed in his search for John Farrell's successor.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave, John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy for giving me such a tremendous opportunity," said Cora in a press release issued by the Red Sox. "Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans.

"At the same time, I want to express my appreciation for Jim Crane, Jeff Luhnow, A.J. Hinch, and the entire Houston Astros organization for giving me the chance to start my coaching career. It has been a very special season and an incredible organization to be a part of and I am looking forward to the World Series and winning with this group."

In accordance with Major League Baseball rules regarding announcements during the postseason, the Red Sox and Astros will refrain from further comment until after the completion of the World Series.

A formal press conference with Cora and Dombrowski will be held at Fenway Park at a time to be determined. Dombrowski, Red Sox owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner also expressed their thoughts on the hiring of Cora in a Sunday afternoon press release.

"We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex," said Dombrowski. "He came to us as a highly regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly respected and hardworking individual who has experience playing in Boston.

"Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today's game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club."

Dombrowski also interviewed Brad Ausmus, who managed for him in Detroit, and Ron Gardenhire, who wound up replacing Ausmus as manager of the Tigers at the end of last week.

After the interview in New York, Cora quickly became Dombrowski's top target, and the Red Sox were successful in landing him.

"In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse," said Henry. "He is extremely smart with a dedication to what it takes to be successful in today's game on the field. His baseball acumen and his ability to think strategically are uncommon for someone his age. We could not have found a better match for our players, our front office and for where we intend to go over the coming year as an organization."

"As someone who has played in Boston and knows what it takes to win here, Alex is uniquely positioned to instill a championship culture," said Werner. "Baseball is in his blood and we could not be more pleased to have found someone so accomplished to lead our team. Welcome home, Alex."

Cora brings a well-rounded skill set to the table. He is known for having strong communication skills with players and was always known for his intelligence as a player, something that can only help him as a manager. Cora's experience in his first season as bench coach under Hinch this season has been invaluable. In particular, the Red Sox were looking for a manager who works well with young players, and that is viewed as one of Cora's best strengths.

The former utility infielder was with the Red Sox from 2005-08 and he played in the Major Leagues from 1998-2011. He is the 22nd former Red Sox player to manage the club, and the first since Butch Hobson (manager from '92-94).

Cora should be in good position to succeed in his first managerial job. The Red Sox won 93 games and the American League East division titles in each of the last two seasons and have a core of talented young players (Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, Jackie Bradley Jr.) to go along with an ace (Chris Sale) and elite closer (Craig Kimbrel), both in their primes.

Though Cora has just one year of experience as a Major League coach, he spent the past five winters as general manager for the Criollos de Caguas in the Puerto Rican Winter League, doubling as the club's manager for two of those (2014-15, '15-16). Last winter, his Caguas club earned Puerto Rico its first Caribbean Series title since 2000. Cora also was the general manager for the Puerto Rico team that finished second in the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

Before going to the Astros, Cora spent four years as a baseball analyst for ESPN and ESPN Deportes. Soon enough, he will start another exciting new chapter. First, he gets to experience the thrill of coaching in the World Series.

*** *ESPNBoston.com***

Alex Cora just got the best-worst job in baseball

Scott Lauber

BOSTON -- Alex Cora's stress level is about to skyrocket. And it isn't because he will coach the Houston Astros in the World Series.

To no one's surprise, Cora was hired Sunday to be the next manager of the Boston Red Sox. Good luck. As high-pressure gigs go, this ranks somewhere between air-traffic controller and White House chief of staff. There's a reason why late Boston mayor Tom Menino used to tell people that he wouldn't trade places with Terry Francona.

Look, there are only 30 of these jobs available, and the Red Sox are one of the highest profile franchises in the sport. They also have a turnkey roster that has won 93 games and a division title in each of the past two seasons and an owner who is willing to spend money to keep the team competitive year after year.

But the Red Sox also might represent the worst-best opportunity for a big-league manager. In sports-crazed Boston, where fans' expectations can best be described as World Series-or-bust and media scrutiny is relentless, six-month seasons drag on like dog years and skipping the Sox is akin to being a human piñata. Just ask Francona, who won two World Series and got run out of town in 2011, and especially John Farrell, whose reward for three American League East crowns and a World Series title in five years was a pink slip two weeks ago.

It's little wonder, then, that Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski has friends in the managerial ranks who have told him in the past that this job wouldn't be for them.

"I've had really quality managers that I know and I respect," Dombrowski said, "that have said they wouldn't want to manage in Boston."

Francona recently put it another way: "I do think, for whatever reason, that place is a little crazy."

Cora knows all of this, of course. He played here for four seasons and experienced firsthand the extreme low of missing the playoffs in 2006, the ultimate high of winning the World Series in 2007 and the daily soap opera that can swallow up players and managers alike.

So, Cora need not be warned about what he's getting himself into. He also has the relative security of a three-year contract, plus a club option for 2021, and therefore won't meet with the same fate as Farrell if the Sox don't advance beyond the division series next season.

(Here's a tip, though, Alex: Take the advice of Astros manager A.J. Hinch and shut down your Twitter account. "When [a move] doesn't work out, it's a public slaying on Twitter," Hinch said the other day.)

Cora also has interviewed for other jobs -- the Arizona Diamondbacks last year and the New York Mets and Detroit Tigers last week, to name a few -- and there's no denying the Red Sox give him the best chance to win immediately as a first-time big-league manager. For Cora, that makes the job appealing.

It's easy to see what Dombrowski likes about Cora. What he lacks in experience (he has managed only in winter ball and was a first-year bench coach with the Astros this season) he makes up for in his ability to communicate in multiple languages with players of all ages. He also will bring a youthful energy to the job. At 42, he's only one month older than David Ortiz.

Cora's influence on the Astros is easy to see. Hinch, who called Dombrowski and offered a strong endorsement for his right-hand man, says Cora has "one of the brightest baseball intellects that I've ever been around." Players laud his ability to connect with them.

To wit: Alex Bregman was hitless in 10 at-bats when he was due to come to the plate against Red Sox ace Chris Sale in the eighth inning of Game 4 of the Division Series. Cora approached Bregman before he left the dugout.

"He came up to me and said, 'Hey, one at-bat, that's all that matters,'" Bregman said. "I was 0-for-10 going into that at-bat. And he said, 'One at-bat, that's it. Have some fun, play the game how you did the beginning of the series.'"

Sure enough, Bregman hit a game-tying solo home run.

"He has good communication with the guys, respects the guys," Astros designated hitter Carlos Beltran says of Cora. "He's always in the clubhouse getting to know the players, getting to know which buttons he could push on each player to make them go out there and play the game hard, which is great."

The Red Sox are hoping Cora has an uplifting effect on a team that joylessly slogged through a first-place season. He remains close with second baseman Dustin Pedroia, his former teammate, whose lack of comfort with being a team leader was exposed this season. And Cora might be able to draw out whatever leadership qualities exist within Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts and other members of the Red Sox's young core.

In short, the Red Sox are betting that Cora will be the next Dave Roberts, who didn't have managerial experience in the big leagues when he took the reins of the Los Angeles Dodgers from three-time division title-winning skipper Don Mattingly. In three seasons at the helm, Roberts has led the Dodgers to 92-win, 91-win and 104-win seasons and the World Series this year.

Dombrowski factored all of that into his decision. Cora is only the third manager he has hired in the last 12 years. Other than Jim Leyland, whom he hired in both Florida and Detroit, few of the managers with whom Dombrowski worked have had tremendous success.

Cora is clearly Dombrowski's guy, and if the Red Sox don't get over the division series hump, the heat will be on both of them. But there's nothing quite like the scrutiny on the manager of the Boston Red Sox, a burden that is about to become Cora's daily reality.

Alex Cora named Red Sox manager

Scott Lauber

BOSTON -- For the majority of his four seasons as a utility infielder with the Red Sox, Alex Cora wore No. 23. Nearly a decade later, the most relevant number associated with him will be 47.

Cora was hired Sunday as the 47th manager in Red Sox history, the team announced Sunday. After one season as the Houston Astros' bench coach, he will take the reins of a young Red Sox team that won 93 games and the division title in back-to-back seasons under deposed manager John Farrell.

"Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans."

Because Cora and the Astros are still playing, having advanced to the World Series with a 4-0 victory over the New York Yankees in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series on Saturday night in Houston, the Red Sox were unable to introduce Cora at Fenway Park. A news conference will have to wait until after the World Series, which begins Tuesday.

"I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox," Cora said in a statement announcing his hiring. "Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans."

Cora thanked the Astros "for giving me the chance to start my coaching career."

"It has been a very special season and an incredible organization to be a part of and I am looking forward to the World Series and winning with this group," he said.

Cora is the 22nd former Red Sox player to manage the team and the first since Butch Hobson (1992-94). Cora is also the second Puerto Rico native to be a full-time manager in the majors, joining former Marlins skipper Edwin Rodriguez. Sandy Alomar Jr. served as an interim manager for the Cleveland Indians for six games in 2012.

Boston's decision to hire Cora comes after an expedited 11-day search. Within the past week, Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski met with three candidates -- Cora, former Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus and longtime Minnesota Twins skipper Ron Gardenhire, who has since been hired by the Tigers -- before settling on Cora, who also interviewed for openings with the New York Mets and the Tigers.

Cora quickly emerged as the Red Sox's top candidate. Dombrowski traveled to New York on Oct. 15 to interview Cora on an off day in the ALCS. A few days later, Cora spoke by phone with Red Sox owner John Henry.

"Alex brings a lot to the table, my friend," Astros designated hitter Carlos Beltran said. "He's a guy that always is looking for information that he could use against the opposite team. He has good communication with the guys, respects the guys. He's always in the clubhouse getting to know the players, getting to know which buttons he could push on each player to make them go out there and play the game hard, which is great."

Beltran also told ESPN's Marly Rivera that he doesn't see Cora's departure as a loss for the Astros.

"I see it as a gain [for baseball]," he said. "There are only 30 jobs in the major leagues, and a Puerto Rican having one of those jobs, not only a job in the majors because the majors can refer to any team, but such a big market, it makes me very proud. I know that Alex is going to do an excellent job."

Both Beltran and shortstop Carlos Correa told Rivera they believe the Red Sox's hiring of Cora will open doors for more Latinos to become managers in Major League Baseball. Maybe even for Beltran himself.

"We'll see. But yes, I have talked to my wife and I have told her that's something I'd like to do in the future, [to manage] a major league team and have that opportunity," Beltran told ESPN. "I have played this game for many years and I am proud to have been able to contribute to players' careers. So if I am given that opportunity at some point, I know I'm going to do well."

Indeed, Cora is viewed within the industry as a strong communicator. A bilingual speaker, he has been praised for his ability to relate to players of all backgrounds. He's also only six seasons removed from a 14-year playing career, and at age 42, he will be the third-youngest manager in the majors after Tampa Bay's Kevin Cash and San Diego's Andy Green. Cora is only one month older than Red Sox great David Ortiz, who retired following the 2016 season.

According to sources familiar with Cora's thinking, he views the Red Sox as a ready-to-win opportunity -- a rare situation for a first-time major league manager -- whereas the Tigers and Philadelphia Phillies are in various stages of rebuilding.

The Red Sox, in turn, are hoping Cora will bring more positivity to a clubhouse that was unusually dour despite the team's success during Farrell's final season. Cora is close with veteran second baseman Dustin Pedroia, with whom he played for three seasons from 2006 to 2008. He also might be able to draw out the leadership qualities in Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts and other members of the Red Sox's young core.

To Dombrowski, those qualities -- and an enthusiastic endorsement from Astros manager A.J. Hinch -- outweighed the fact that Cora hasn't managed in the big leagues and has only one year of experience as a major league coach. He has managed a winter-ball team in Puerto Rico and served as general manager for Puerto Rico's team in the World Baseball Classic.

"He's all about the competition and small advantages within the game," Hinch said. "One of the brightest baseball intellects that I've ever been around. He challenges people. He challenges me. He's someone who's all about winning. And to watch our players respond to him, he's got a lot of respect in that clubhouse because of the work he puts in and the attention to detail that he brings. That's why he's the hottest managerial candidate on the planet, and deservedly so."

*** *WEEI.com***

Red Sox officially name Alex Cora new manager

Ty Anderson

The Red Sox have made it official: Alex Cora is their new manager.

Named the 47th manager in team history, the 42-year-old Cora joins the Red Sox after an interview process that saw him clearly emerge as the top candidate for Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

"We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex," said Dombrowski. "He came to us as a highly-regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly respected and hardworking individual who has experience playing in Boston."

Cora played in Boston from 2005 to 2008, and is in his first year in an MLB coaching role, serving as the bench coach for the American League-winning Astros, who advanced to the World Series with Saturday's Game 7 win over the Yankees.

“I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave, John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy for giving me such a tremendous opportunity,” Cora said. “Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans.”

“In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse,” said Henry. “He is extremely smart with a dedication to what it takes to be successful in today’s game on the field. His baseball acumen and his ability to think strategically are uncommon for someone his age. We could not have found a better match for our players, our front office and for where we intend to go over the coming years as an organization.”

“Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today's game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus,” added Dombrowski. “Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club.”

For the past five winters, Cora has served as general manager for the Criollos de Caguas in the Puerto Rican Winter League, doubling as the club’s manager for two of those (2014-15, 2015-16). Last winter, his Caguas club earned Puerto Rico its first Caribbean Series title since 2000. Cora also was the general manager for the Puerto Rico team that finished second in the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

It appears Alex Cora will be next Red Sox manager

Rob Bradford

It sure looks like Alex Cora will be the next Red Sox manager.

According to The Athletic and FanRag.com, Cora has been offered the job as manager of the Red Sox. If contract terms are agreed upon (Scott Boras is Cora's agent), an announcement will be made after the Astros' postseason run. The 41-year-old serves as bench coach for Houston, which beat the Yankees Saturday night in Game 7 of the American League Championship Series to advance to the World Series against the Dodgers.

Ken Rosenthal reports that the deal would be for three years.

It appears as though Dave Dombrowski's assertion Friday that the Red Sox' were undecided on if any candidates outside Cora and Brad Ausmus would be interviewed was predicated on Cora's acceptance of the Sox' terms.

Could Nationals derail Alex Cora going to Red Sox?

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox' managerial search might have hit a bump in the road Friday.

For one, Dave Dombrowski still wasn't able to make an official move on Alex Cora due to the Astros extending their American League Championship Series to a seventh game. While Cora has interviewed with the Red Sox, it has been understood that if a hiring is to be made, it wouldn't take place until after the Houston's bench coach's showdown with the Yankees.

But perhaps the more impactful event came in the form of the Nationals firing Dusty Baker.

According to the Boston Globe, Washington has already asked the Astros permission to talk to Cora about their managerial opening. And while many thought the 41-year-old was destined to join the Red Sox, the Nationals aren't representing just a random opportunity.

During his playing days, Cora's last team was Washington, where he played in 2011. This is what Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo told MLB.com when asked about Cora back in April, 2011:

"I think it comes natural to him to be a teacher," Rizzo said. "Alex still has a lot left in his tank as a player. But he has my number, and when he's done playing, he can make a call. It will be well-received."

Dave Dombrowski told WEEL.com Friday that he was still "undecided" when it came to interviewing additional candidates outside of Cora and Brad Ausmus.

*** *CSNNE.com***

Red Sox hire Alex Cora as their new manager

Evan Drellich

BOSTON -- Alex Cora is the 47th manager in Red Sox history, charged with reinvigorating a young clubhouse and improving on consecutive 93-win seasons that fizzled in the first round of the playoffs.

The team made the hiring of the 42-year-old Astros bench coach official on Sunday, a day after Houston advanced to the World Series and two days before the start of the Fall Classic. Cora will remain with the Astros until the Series is finished and has a three-year deal, with a club option for 2021.

A 14-year big leaguer from Puerto Rico, Cora is the first Latin manager in club history. He hit .252 in 301 games for the Sox from 2005-08. He was the most sought-after managerial candidate this offseason and arrives with a great reputation based on his personality, his prior experience in Boston and his season with the Astros.

He knows Sox second baseman and leader Dustin Pedroia well. The last time Cora was in the World Series prior to this year was 2007. On Saturday, exactly 10 years after the Red Sox came back from a 3-1 series deficit against the Indians in the American League Championship Series, the Astros finished off a rally after falling behind 3-2 in the series.

"You know, we've never been through this," Dustin Pedroia said after the Sox won Game 7 in 2007. "This is on the biggest stage. Everyone is watching these games. I remember the Angels series, I was nervous. Alex Cora told me, 'Hey, settle down, be yourself, have fun. This game is meant to be played, have fun. Play as hard as you can and leave it out there on the field. If we lose, we lose. Don't have any regrets.'

"Ever since then I kind of went out there, and I don't worry about anything but playing hard. I think everybody is doing that. Nobody cares about anything, just picking each other up and playing the game to win."

Early on, Cora will have to prove that his inexperience is not a stumbling block for a club in a win-now mindset. This season was Cora's only as a major-league coach. He's the first Sox manager to take the big job without prior major-league managing experience since Grady Little in 2002.

Cora's ability to bond with players is his hallmark.

"Alex brings a lot to the table," Astros outfielder Carlos Beltran said. "He's a guy that always is looking for information that he could use against the opposite team. And he's also, he provides that information to the player, which is great. He has good communication with the guys, respects the guys. He's always in the clubhouse getting to know the players, getting to know which buttons he could push on each player to make them go out there and play the game hard, which is great.

"I think I always feel that sometimes managers, they draw a very defined line between players and manager. And sometimes they get caught up not going to the clubhouse because they don't want to feel like

they're invading their space. But as a player, I love when managers come to the clubhouse, sit down, talk to us, get to know us, ask about our family, about everything. And that really, for me, means a lot. So Alex does that real well."

Cora's hiring comes five years and a day after the Red Sox hired John Farrell. The choice could have been announced prior to Sunday, but the Red Sox were being respectful of the Astros' playoff run.

In a statement released by the Red Sox, Cora said: "I am extremely honored and humbled to be named manager of the Boston Red Sox and I want to thank Dave, John Henry, Tom Werner, and Sam Kennedy for giving me such a tremendous opportunity. Returning to the Red Sox and the city of Boston is a dream come true for me and my family and I look forward to working towards the ultimate goal of winning another championship for this city and its great fans. At the same time, I want to express my appreciation for Jim Crane, Jeff Luhnow, A.J. Hinch, and the entire Houston Astros organization for giving me the chance to start my coaching career. It has been a very special season and an incredible organization to be a part of and I am looking forward to the World Series and winning with this group."

"We were very impressed when we interviewed Alex," Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said in the statement. "He came to us as a highly-regarded candidate, and from speaking with him throughout this process, we found him to be very knowledgeable, driven, and deserving of this opportunity. He is a highly respected and hardworking individual who has experience playing in Boston. Alex also has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today's game and his ability to communicate and relate to both young players and veterans is a plus. Finally, the fact that he is bilingual is very significant for our club."

"As someone who has played in Boston and knows what it takes to win here, Alex is uniquely positioned to instill a championship culture," team chairman Werner added in the statement. "Baseball is in his blood and we could not be more pleased to have found someone so accomplished to lead our team. Welcome home, Alex."

*** *The Boston Sports Journal***

Red Sox preferred experienced manager, but Alex Cora offers what they needed

Sean McAdam

When Dave Dombrowski announced that John Farrell was being fired as manager of the Red Sox on Oct. 11, he noted that it was the organization's strong preference to hire someone with managerial experience as Farrell's replacement.

Now, less than two weeks later, the Red Sox have hired Alex Cora, who has managed only in winter ball and wasn't part of a major league coaching staff until this past season, when he was made the bench coach of the American League champion Houston Astros.

What happened?

It's not as though Cora is completely inexperienced. He did manage two seasons in winter ball for his hometown of Caguas, Puerto Rico and spent this past season as bench coach for the Houston Astros, who will face the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series beginning Tuesday.

But Cora is more than a resume. He also spent nearly four seasons in Boston and understands the culture of the city and demands of the market.

"As someone who has played in Boston and knows what it takes to win here," Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said in a press release by the team announcing Cora's hiring, "Alex is uniquely positioned to instill a championship culture."

In working for perhaps the most data-driven organization in the game with the Astros, Cora has also been exposed to every facet of analytics, which will aid him in preparing to manage the Red Sox.

“Alex has a full appreciation for the use of analytical information in today’s game,” said Dombrowski.

It helps, too, that Cora is bilingual, which Dombrowski noted was “very significant” in the release. Nearly 32 percent of MLB players were Latino in 2017, a number that is expected to rise. And several key members of the major league roster – from Eduardo Rodriguez to Rafael Devers to Christian Vazquez – are Spanish-speaking, to say nothing of the many Latino players in the minor league system, many of whom will be in Boston during Cora’s tenure.

But while Cora’s fluency in is considered a big attribute, the Sox are likely most impressed by his ability to communicate with players in either Spanish or English.

In 2017, there was the sense that Farrell wasn’t getting through to the team’s young core. Indeed, a number of the team’s core seemed to take a step backward – Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts and Jackie Bradley Jr. – and Bogaerts, in particular, seemed directionless at times.

“In Alex, we have a found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse,” said principal owner John Henry. “We could not have found a better match for our players, our front office and for where we intend to go over the coming years as an organization.”

At 42, Cora becomes one of the game’s youngest managers. Only Tampa Bay’s Kevin Cash (39) and San Diego’s Andy Green (40) are younger and the energy he brings is vital at a time when teams are increasingly looking for someone with the drive and commitment to guide a team through the grind of a season which begins in early February, and with any luck, can last until November.

Red Sox may be on verge of acknowledging Cora as their managerial choice

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox are going to have a wait a while longer to introduce their next manager. But they might be able to confirm his hiring as soon as Sunday.

The Houston Astros defeated the New York Yankees 4-0 in Game 7 of the ALCS Saturday night, which appeared to push off — for 10 days to two weeks — any chance the Red Sox would have to make official what people around baseball have suspected for some time: current Astros bench coach Alex Cora will be named the next manager of the Red Sox.

With Cora still under the employ of the Astros and the franchise headed to just its second Series in history, the Red Sox will have to wait to hold an introductory press conference. Major League Baseball does not like its signature event disturbed by off-field news.

But an MLB source hinted Sunday that it’s now conceivable — perhaps even likely — that the Red Sox could issue a statement confirming Cora’s hiring, while still waiting until the Astros are through with the World Series before bringing Cora to Boston for a full-scale introductory press conference.

Had the Astros lost Saturday night, the Red Sox would have had time to work out a contract with Cora and then introduce him to the media on Monday, the day before the start of the World Series.

Ken Rosenthal of The Athletic reported Saturday that Cora would be the next Sox manager, with a contract three years in length. Jon Heyman of FanRagSports.com had a similarly worded report.

A Red Sox source, with direct knowledge of the team's search, would not comment on those reports Saturday night. However, a baseball source indicated Saturday that there was no official agreement in place, though it was expected that would be a mere formality in time.

A report by NJ.com last week said that Red Sox ownership spoke by phone with Cora mid-week, seemingly the final step in green-lighting his hire by the team.

The sudden opening by the Washington Nationals, who announced Friday that Dusty Baker would not return in 2018, offered a potential 11th-hour obstacle for the Red Sox, since the Nats, according to the Boston Globe's Nick Cafardo, would seek permission from the Astros to also interview Cora.

Cora ended his playing career with the Nationals in 2011 and enjoys a good relationship with Nationals GM Mike Rizzo. Also, the Nationals roster is dotted with clients – including Bryce Harper, Stephen Strasburg and Max Scherzer — of the same agent who represents Cora: Scott Boras.

But another source suggested Cora prefers the Red Sox job. He spent nearly four seasons with the Sox and was part of the '07 championship team. Additionally, he's maintained a relationship with the Sox through his involvement with a winter league team in his native Caguas, Puerto Rico.

At 42, Cora is seen as a highly attractive managerial candidate throughout baseball. He has demonstrated an ability to connect with players, especially younger ones, and a willingness to utilize the analytics that have become such an integral part of the game. He's also bilingual, which is seen as a big advantage for an organization like the Red Sox who have a number of key Spanish-speaking players on the roster (Rafael Devers, Eduardo Rodriguez, Christian Vazquez) and many others in the minor league system.

One high-ranking member of the Red Sox front office has been telling associates for the past week that Cora is the Red Sox choice. The team also interviewed former Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus, as well as former Minnesota Twins manager Ron Gardenhire. Gardenhire was introduced as the new manager of the Tigers on Friday, taking him out of consideration in Boston.

That leaves just Ausmus and Cora, though president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said as recently as Friday that the Red Sox were still reviewing their process and trying to determine whether to interview additional candidates.

But that was likely little more than a stalling tactic, as the Red Sox waited to see how the ALCS unfolds.

MLB Notebook: On the Red Sox' offseason payroll challenge; expansion/realignment talk

Sean McAdam

Late this past week, the Red Sox Baseball Operations staff was still waiting on word from ownership regarding the club's payroll budget for the 2018 season.

For now, with free agents frozen until after the World Series and trade talk on hold until the GM Meetings in the middle of next month, the number of purely theoretical. But eventually, there needs to be a plan – and a number – in place.

The CBT (competitive bargain tax, more commonly known as the luxury tax) number for 2018 will be \$197 million, and from here, it seems self-evident that the Red Sox will be forced into going over that benchmark – if they want to make any improvement to a team which suffered its second-straight quick playoff exit.

The Red Sox already have \$115.5 million committed to six players: David Price, Hanley Ramirez, Rick Porcello, Dustin Pedroia, Craig Kimbrel and Chris Sale. (The latter two have club options, but it's obvious the Red Sox will pick up both).

They also owe Pablo Sandoval \$18.455 million and are staring at approximately \$53 million in salaries for 15 salary-arbitration cases.

That brings the running total to more than \$186 million. Add in another \$3 million or so for a handful of players with fewer than three years of service time and insurance and benefits costs, and the Sox are already right up against the \$197 million threshold – without adding a single new player to the roster.

If the Sox want to add a significant power bat to their lineup, plus some starting pitching depth (with questions marks attached to Eduardo Rodriguez, Price and Steven Wright) and an alternative to Dustin Pedroia to protect them against a surgical procedure that could force him to miss a significant part of 2018, they'll need authorization to spend another \$30 million or more in 2018.

It helps that the Red Sox stayed under the CBT threshold in 2017, allowing them to reset their tax rate should they go over in future years.

For 2018, the Red Sox can spend up to \$217 million and have the amount of money spent between \$197 million and \$217 million taxed at a rate of 20 percent. Should they go over \$217 million, they would be further assessed a surtax of an additional 12 percent.

But not even the \$217 million threshold gives the Red Sox much wiggle room. That would allow for one big contract of \$20 million or so, for, say, J.D. Martinez, but wouldn't provide enough in the budget to also retain Eduardo Nunez, or address starting pitching depth.

(Of course, the Red Sox could further save some money by non-tendering some of their arbitration-eligibles. Reliever Robbie Ross Jr., who is scheduled to earn \$2 million, would be one such candidate. They could also trade someone off the major league roster and save additional salary).

Beyond the financial penalties faced, the club would also risk other assessments after the 2018 season, such as having to give up a better draft pick after signing a qualified free agent, or getting a lower draft pick for themselves should they lose a qualified free agent.

Still, the history of this current ownership group is that it commits to more resources after a series of disappointing seasons, and while the Sox are coming off back-to-back division titles, their last two October stall-outs would seem to suggest a bigger payroll is in the offing.

For a team with a committed and loyal fan base, accustomed to paying for some of the highest ticket prices in the game, that's as it should be.

Baseball hasn't expanded in almost 20 years – it welcomed the Arizona Diamondbacks and Tampa Bay (Devil) Rays for the 1998 season – but suddenly, there are whispers that MLB could add two more teams in the not-so-distant future.

Montreal and Portland are the two cities most often mentioned as potential expansion cities. Such a move would give baseball 32 teams, and also allow for realignment and an expanded playoff.

With 32 teams, baseball could go to eight four-team divisions, or four eight-team groupings.

Highly respected writer Tracy Ringolsby, writing in Baseball America, suggested the latter, in a format which would eliminate any notion of the American League and National League.

Under Ringolsby's play, the Red Sox would take part in a North Division, grouped with the two Canadian franchises (Montreal and Toronto), two New York teams (Yankees and Mets) along with Cleveland, Detroit and Minnesota.

Under a 156-game schedule, with one set day off every week (either Monday or Thursday), teams would play division opponents 12 times per season, for a total of 84 games. They would then face every other one of the 24 teams outside the division three times, for a total of 72, accounting for 156 games.

This means the other teams outside the division would come to Fenway only once every other year; by the same token, the Sox would visit the other non-division cities every-other season.

As for the postseason, a four-division setup would have the division champs advance to the LDS, with eight wild-card teams in one-game elimination games, competing to be the division champions' first-round opponents.

That would give baseball six additional one-and-done games to auction off to TV without further expanding the post-season footprint.

Of course, there are obstacles, not the least of which is the loss of three home dates per franchise in the shortened schedule. But Ringolsby, who proposes all road trips be limited to two cities, contends that could be made up for by the reduction in travel outside a team's division.

Another potential pitfall: teams like Baltimore and Tampa Bay, accustomed to nine (or 10) lucrative home dates per season with big draws like the Red Sox and Yankees, will now get only three home dates every other year with those teams.

Sure, there are issues to overcome, not the least of which is adding 50 more players who are currently not good enough to compete at the big league level.

As for effectively eliminating the leagues, such a tradition-busting move would have been antithetical under commissioner Bud Selig, but Rob Manfred has shown an admirable willingness to consider anything and everything – if it's good for the game.

And for those who would decry a watering-down of the playoff field, the plan would result in 12-of-32 teams getting into the post-season, the same current number as the NFL, and still less than 16-out-of-30 formats in the NBA and NHL.

Two Red Sox coaches – Carl Willis (Minnesota) and Chili Davis (San Diego) – interviewed for other positions this week and more interviews and offers may come for the likes of Gary DiSarcina, Ruben Amaro Jr., and Dana LeVangie – but the coach everyone is keeping their eye on is third base coach Brian Butterfield.

Butterfield is a New England (Maine) native and would strongly prefer to remain with the Sox. (Indications are the Sox will also strongly suggest that the new manager retain LeVangie, who has been part of the organization – as a minor league player, scout or coach – for better than 25 years).

If Butterfield is not retained, an offer from the Miami Marlins would surprise no one, given that Butterfield has ties to part-owner Derek Jeter, manager Don Mattingly and newly-installed director of player development Gary Denbo dating back to Butterfield's time spent in the New York organization.

Interestingly, should the Red Sox job go to Brad Ausmus, Butterfield would have a connection there, too, having served as Ausmus's first manager in pro ball.

While the Red Sox have some work to do, things could be worse – they could be the Washington Nationals.

The Nats shocked nearly everybody Friday with the announcement that Dusty Baker would not return as manager for 2018, despite two seasons in which the Nats won two division titles in two seasons and averaged 96 wins per season.

The move reportedly went against the wishes of GM Mike Rizzo and was at the behest of the Lerner family, which owns the team.

Next year, the Nats will be on their seventh manager in 14 seasons and that kind of instability isn't good for a franchise.

The inning that did in the Nats – the fifth inning of Game 5 of their NLDS matchup with the Cubs – included a passed ball, throwing error, catcher's interference, and a hit batsman forcing in a run.

Just how unusual was that series of events taking place together? This unusual: research determined that those four things had never once taken place in the same half-inning in the more than 2.7 million innings that had preceded it.

When you're experiencing something that is essentially a 1-in-2.7 million shot, you're dealing with larger forces at work.

That sort of karma, to say nothing of three other NLDS exits in the previous five seasons, can weigh heavily on a team's psychological well-being.

Red Sox players in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s had to answer for Bill Buckner, Bucky Dent and Aaron Boone. Nationals' players will face the same line of questioning unless/until the franchise wins it all.

That's not a comfortable existence, especially in an era when there are more media outlets than ever searching for an angle.

Alex Rodriguez can be delightful as a TV analyst, which should surprise no one who came across him in his career. Far more than most modern players, Rodriguez loved the game, closely paid attention to it and loved talking about it. When paired with the right partner, Rodriguez can offer informed analysis and provide keen insight.

But his fawning persona in which he pretends to be every bit the Mr. Yankee that Joe DiMaggio or Whitey Ford were, is a little much. First, he spent just a little over half his career (12 of 22 seasons) in pinstripes. And it was only a few short years ago that Rodriguez sued the Yankees in a legal dispute over an injury.

But now, on the FS1 pre- and post-game shows, Rodriguez unabashedly roots for the Yankees and tries to make funny by slipping a Yankee jacket on an unsuspecting David Ortiz.

There's made-for-TV schtick.... and then there's the unctuousness that turned off so many teammates and opponents alike over the years.

People around the Indians are still trying to digest their ALDS loss to the Yankees. One of the mysteries was the ineffectiveness of ace Corey Kluber, who failed to get out of the fifth inning in either of his two starts. Kluber, who missed time earlier in the season with some lower back issues, insisted after Cleveland was eliminated that he was healthy, but the Indians noticed that the presumptive Cy Young Award-winner was frequently dropping his arm slot in his two starts, a sure sign of fatigue – or worse.

Dusty Baker's firing, youth of Red Sox managerial candidates part of game-wide trend

Sean McAdam

Never mind “old school” vs. “new school” when it comes to being a major league manager. Now is not the time to be old – or older – when you want one of the 30 big league jobs.

Friday’s announcement that the Washington Nationals would not be bringing back Dusty Baker is one more piece of evidence.

Of the five managers fired/not retained since September, four – Baker, Terry Collins, Pete Mackanin and John Farrell – were each 55 or older. In fact, three of the four (all but Farrell) were 60 or older, led by Baker and Collins who are both 68.

That’s noteworthy in considering that the two known candidates remaining for the Red Sox managerial opening are both in their 40s: Alex Cora turned 42 earlier this week and Ausmus is 48.

(The Sox did interview and consider Ron Gardenhire, 59, as part of their managerial search. Gardenhire was introduced as the new manager of the Detroit Tigers Friday afternoon).

With Baker out of the picture in Washington, the Chicago Cubs’ Joe Maddon is now the oldest manager in the game at 63, followed by San Francisco’s Bruce Bochy (62), Atlanta’s Brian Snitker (62), Kansas City’s Ned Yost (62), Baltimore’s Buck Showalter (61), Minnesota’s Paul Molitor (61), Colorado’s Bud Black (60) and Pittsburgh’s Clint Hurdle (60).

All the other managers in the game are in their 40s or 50s, with the exception of Tampa Bay’s Kevin Cash, who, at 39, is, for now, the youngest manager in the game.

Many of the managers connected to the open jobs are also younger. Before choosing Gardenhire, who turns 60 later this month, the Tigers considered, among others, Omar Vizquel (50), Manny Acta (49), and Mike Redmond (47).

The New York Mets and Philadelphia Phillies are also said to have a number of younger candidates on their wish list, including Cleveland pitching coach Mickey Callaway (42) and current Oakland coach and former Arizona manager Chip Hale (52).

Why is this happening?

- 1) In an era when communicating with and relating to players seems to have taken on greater importance, it’s natural that teams would seek younger candidates for the dugout, on the theory that they should more easily bond with players in their 20s and 30s rather than a more experienced figure who might be old enough to be the father of some players, or in some cases, grandfather.
- 2) The reliance on analytics as a critical part of today’s game could prejudice some GMs and owners from hiring older managers who may be more reluctant to adapt. Reportedly, Gardenhire won over Detroit executives with his willingness to utilize more data, having learned to do so while working with Torey Lovullo and Mike Hazen in Arizona.
- 3) A cynic might suggest that younger managers are less experienced, and thus less likely to command a bigger salary, while also offering less resistance to the input provided by members of a Baseball Operations staff. It’s one thing to get a 60-something manager to buy into “new school” thinking and take instruction from an actively involved GM; it’s easier to do so with a younger, first-time manager who brings less cachet to the position.

Unless the Red Sox add any additional candidates – which seems highly unlikely at this point – their next manager will be in his 40s, continuing the industry-wide trend.