

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, October 24, 2017

*** *The Boston Globe***

There has to be a good Yankees-Red Sox playoff series coming

Chad Finn

Saw a few scattered national stories during the Yankees' postseason run that carried a headline suggesting that the franchise of Mickey Rivers's sucker punches, Derek Jeter's smirks, and Alex Rodriguez's annoying all-around A-Rodness had somehow become likable.

I couldn't tell you how this specious case was made below the headline, because I did not click to read further. You could tell me Aaron Judge spends his off days taking puppies to visit orphans and then adopting all of the puppies and orphans at the end of that day, and it still would not persuade me to alter the golden rule of New England baseball fandom:

The New York Yankees can never be likable, on account of them being the New York Yankees.

Again, this is a rule, and it is unassailable no matter the particulars of the current circumstances. Heck, there is just one time when the Yankees have even approached likability that I can recall, and it was a single Yankee rather than the whole smug gaggle of them.

It was gracious of the incomparable Mariano Rivera to blow a couple of games in the 2004 American League Championship Series, and even more gracious of him to laugh along with Red Sox fans' mock cheers during the ring ceremony on Opening Day 2005.

That's it. That's how you become a semi-likable Yankee. You blow it in a moment that redefines the history of your rival, and you own it.

If there were any self-proclaimed Red Sox fans who found the Yankees even remotely rootable during their seven-game defeat to the Astros in the ALCS, it must be assumed that you are a Ramiro Mendoza-caliber embedded Yankee, someone who is in concussion protocol in your chosen line of work, or wanted to see the Yankees win just to allow Dave Roberts to steal their dreams once more in the World Series.

Likable? C'mon now. The Yankees have one obvious and real-life villain: closer Aroldis Chapman, who has a background of alleged domestic violence. His presence alone was almost enough to root against the Cubs in their pursuit of history last year. He's certainly reason enough to pull against these Yankees.

In the more trivial sense, the Yankees have other villains — baseball villains. They just haven't revealed themselves yet, for a couple of reasons. The rivalry with the Red Sox has barely been at a simmer lately. Amazingly, the Red Sox and Yankees have not met in the postseason since everything changed in October 2004. The Red Sox have won two World Series since then (2007, 2013) and the Yankees one (2009), but they accomplished those feats without encountering their longest-running enemy along the way.

What this rivalry needs is a tense and tight playoff series. And it's coming. Both franchises have rebuilt or reloaded with young talent. The Red Sox were supposed to be well ahead of the Yankees in that regard with the emergence in recent seasons of farm-system jewels Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr., and most recently, Andrew Benintendi.

But the Yankees caught up in a hurry, and it's as impressive as it is annoying. Judge suddenly turned into '87 Mark McGwire, minus the surliness. Didi Gregorius outplayed his countryman Bogaerts this season.

Gary Sanchez already is building a reputation as a Red Sox killer, though as a catcher he looks like a born designated hitter.

And general manager Brian Cashman has proven savvy time and time again, most notably when he traded Chapman to the Cubs in the summer of 2016, getting top prospect Gleyber Torres in return . . . and then re-signed Chapman as a free agent after that season. That's what the Red Sox should have done with Andrew Miller post-2014.

Don't look now, but the Yankees are only going to get better. They'll have between \$70 million and \$100 million coming off the books this season, including the final \$21 million of A-Rod's absurd contract. They are rich with prospects, Torres being the best among them, and are positioned as well as any franchise to trade for Miami's Giancarlo Stanton if they so desire.

How high are their hopes and dreams? Consider what Billy Witz wrote in his season wrapup article in the New York Times Monday:

"It does not take pinstriped glasses to envision World Series title No. 28 in the near future — with 29 and 30 not that far behind."

Hey, at least they still owe Jacoby Ellsbury \$66 million.

This is not to suggest that the Red Sox should cower and cede the AL East to the Yankees for 2018 and beyond. They are the reigning division champions, winners of 93 games, and they should be better next year for a couple of reasons. Dave Dombrowski will find some way to acquire the slugger that was so glaringly absent from their post-David Ortiz lineup in '17.

And it's highly unlikely that there will be continued regression from every established young player in the lineup again. The relative struggles of Betts, Bogaerts, and Benintendi reflected on manager John Farrell, whose stoicism didn't always serve them well.

As colleague Alex Speier wrote in the aftermath of Farrell's firing two days after the Sox' season ended: "Betts, Bogaerts, and Andrew Benintendi tend to be unrelentingly hard on themselves when struggling. Failure gnaws at them. They had a coaching staff that was willing to work with them through their struggles, but not necessarily one that struck the right chords of reassurance — at least not often enough — that permitted them to regain their footing."

The Red Sox have since replaced Farrell with Alex Cora, a bright, optimistic sort with a reputation for connecting with and mentoring young players. Time will tell whether he's a tactical upgrade on Farrell, but it's almost certain he will be in terms of culture.

Plus, he has this going for him: As the Astros bench coach, he already has been part of dealing those unlikable Yankees a disappointing blow.

Alex Cora is all about making connections

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox and Houston Astros worked out at Minute Maid Park on Oct. 4, the day before their American League Division Series started. The Astros had the field first, then the Sox.

As the Astros finished batting practice, bench coach Alex Cora came over to the visiting dugout. He shook hands with Sox president Sam Kennedy, hugged Dustin Pedroia, and had a quick conversation in Spanish with Christian Vazquez.

It was 90 seconds, maybe. But Cora interacted with a dozen or so people on that side of the field — players, coaches, staff members, and others.

This was a week before the Red Sox fired John Farrell, so Cora was not campaigning for the manager's job. He was simply reconnecting with friends who would be foes in that series.

It was a window into Cora's personality and perhaps what kind of manager he will be with the Red Sox.

A quick grin and a slap on the back doesn't mean anything, otherwise Bobby Valentine would have lasted more than 10 months. But as a player, broadcaster, and coach, Cora has shown an ability to connect with a wide spectrum of people across baseball.

"He's got a great baseball mind," Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said Sunday. "He was a heck of a teammate; he was one of those guys that was always trying to learn the game and talk the game. You could see he was going to be a manager at some point in time."

Roberts won a championship with the Red Sox in 2004, Cora in 2007. Roberts followed a more traditional path to managing, working as a coach with the Padres for five years before the Dodgers hired him as manager prior to the 2016 season.

Cora was with ESPN for three seasons and the Astros for one. Roberts was 43 when the Dodgers hired him, Cora is 42.

"As a former Red Sox player, I think it's a great fit," Roberts said. "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."

The Red Sox return the bulk of a team that won 93 games and its division this season. They will have a powerful team in 2018 even if the only improvements come from within.

But they were an oddly joyless bunch.

Mookie Betts, who finished second in the 2016 MVP voting, said from the start of spring training that he couldn't be expected to repeat that level of success. Sure enough, he did not.

Andrew Benintendi and Xander Bogaerts beat themselves up when slumping. Hanley Ramirez, a positive force in spring training, became more withdrawn as the season progressed, and he didn't play well.

Pitchers Rick Porcello, David Price, Eduardo Rodriguez, and even Craig Kimbrel went about their business with a dour reserve.

That the Sox would have a different tone without David Ortiz around was certain. But the difference was startling at times, and Farrell, to a degree, was held accountable for that.

In the press release to announce Cora's hiring, principal owner John Henry was quoted as saying, "In Alex we have found a natural leader to guide our clubhouse." That was telling.

That this is a new direction for the Red Sox is evident in many ways. Cora has an active Twitter account with nearly 24,000 followers. That includes 15 current or former Sox players, five front office staffers, and even a few minor league prospects.

On Instagram, Cora posted photos of Astros players celebrating when they won the pennant. His way of connecting to players may take a different form than Terry Francona, Torey Lovullo, or Joe Maddon, but it's a connection all the same.

Before the Division Series, Houston shortstop Carlos Correa was asked about Cora's influence on the Astros.

“It’s a long season, you know?” he said. “Alex is one of those guys who makes it easier on us. He’s always checking how you’re doing. He’s fun to be around.”

Another Terry Francona ‘glue guy’ lands a managing job

Dan Shaughnessy

LOS ANGELES — Terry Francona managed Alex Cora for 3½ seasons in Boston. He knows that Cora can be a good major league manager in Boston. But he’s reluctant to talk about Cora while Major League Baseball asks the Red Sox, the Astros, and Cora to refrain from commenting during the World Series.

“I told guys on Sunday that I wouldn’t comment on this because of the Boston thing,” Francona said from Cleveland Monday. “Just because it’s Boston I don’t need to be sticking my nose in there.”

OK, then. What about Dave Roberts, I wondered? The manager of the Dodgers has a lot in common with Cora, who is still employed as the Astros’ bench coach for this World Series.

Like Cora, Roberts played for Francona in Boston and won a World Series with the Red Sox. Like Cora, Roberts was one of those “glue” bench players that Francona liked having in his clubhouse. Like Cora, Roberts got his managing job at a young age without having experience in the majors or minors. Like Cora, Roberts was thrust into a major media market with a big payroll and great expectations. Like Cora, Roberts was his franchise’s first minority manager.

We understand that you won’t talk about Cora, Tito. So what about Roberts? Can you talk about the manager of the National League champion Dodgers?

“Sure,” said Francona. “What about him?”

He was your player in 2004 (Cora was Francona’s player from mid 2005-08). Did you see anything that led you to believe he might be a major league manager someday?

“What I saw was a player that had gone from playing every day to coming over and playing part time and handling it above and beyond,” said Francona. “You tell someone, ‘Stay ready.’ He was the ultimate ‘stay ready.’ And it helped win us a World Series.

“That’s the side of a player you see. He’s a great teammate who handles himself well. You don’t even know if a guy is going to want to continue in the game after, but when I found out he was coaching, I was glad because you want guys like that to stay in the game.”

Sounds exactly like Cora.

Francona wanted bench players who rounded out his team and did little things to make themselves “glue” guys in the clubhouse. Roberts was one of those guys.

“It was especially good when you had guys who could do that after coming to the team in the middle of the season,” said Francona (Roberts came to the Sox in mid 2004, Cora in mid 2005). “Dave was being asked to do less, to stay ready, but he was tremendous about it. He was a great kid at the time. Now he’s showing that he’s a great manager.

“Every manager has different challenges. Dave might have a payroll that’s \$250 million, but I guarantee you that he’s got challenges in other areas that other managers don’t have.”

Just like Cora will have in Boston.

What about the fact that Roberts didn’t have managerial experience in the big leagues? Was that a drawback for him?

“I can only answer personally,” said Francona, who managed four seasons in Philadelphia before taking over the Red Sox. “I could not have done it, but you see plenty of guys. You see Mike Matheny [in St. Louis].

“Managerial success to me is often ranked incorrectly. If you win, people say you’re successful. If you lose, you’re unsuccessful. It’s about whatever talent your team has. I see Kevin Cash [another bench player for Francona in Boston] and I’m biased, but I see him doing a great job. They [the Rays] haven’t won yet, but I think he’s a great manager and going to be better. The playing field is not even.”

Roberts (like Cora) started his big league managing career in a giant, moneyed, pressure-packed market. What’s that like?

“Sure. Those challenges are different, but Dave was able to handle what was thrown at him,” said Francona. “From what I hear, he went into his interview and killed it. They just fell in love with him.

“And he’s handled all the things he’s had to handle. You don’t hear much squawking going on. Those are things that show me that he knows his job and he knows his team.”

Doesn’t almost everything about the Dave Roberts experience in Los Angeles apply to Alex Cora?

“I’m not comfortable talking about Alex, because I said I wouldn’t,” said Francona. “It’s not my place to be commenting on the Red Sox manager. But you know how I feel about AC and you can say that.

“He was tremendous. He was a manager-in-waiting. I think everybody sees that. I don’t want people to think I don’t like him because I said I won’t talk about him right now. I love him. I just need to be consistent in staying away from this process.

“It seems kind of silly that we can’t talk about it, but he’s probably having the time of his life. Think about it. His team’s in the World Series. He knows that a week from now he’s going to go manage the Red Sox.”

OK, Tito. Thanks for talking about World Series manager Dave Roberts . . . who has an awful lot in common with Alex Cora.

Red Sox prospect Sam Travis tries his hand in left field

Alex Speier

For the first time in his professional career, Red Sox prospect Sam Travis played a position other than first base on Sunday. The 24-year-old, who is playing for the Gigantes del Cibao in the Dominican Winter League, started and played seven innings in left field while going 1-for-3. He was involved in just one defensive play, fielding a double to left.

Travis, the Red Sox’ second-round pick in the 2014 draft, is hitting .250/.333/.350 through six games of winter ball. He’s coming off a season in which the thrill of his major league debut (he hit .263/.325/.342 in 33 games for the Sox) was qualified to some degree by what Travis viewed as a disappointing overall performance, particularly offensively.

“It’s probably the worst year of my life offensively – simple as that,” Travis said late in the season. “I know I’m going to be better. That’s it.”

Travis hit .270/.351/.375 with six homers in 82 games with Triple A Pawtucket. While evaluators continued to speak highly of his ability to make solid contact – especially on fastballs – and show a solid overall approach, his lack of power for a first baseman raised questions about whether he can profile as an everyday big league corner bat. His .508 slugging percentage in the minors against lefties, compared with a

.340 mark against righties, has raised questions about whether his future ultimately will be in a reserve/platoon role. He did make notable defensive strides at first base.

After Travis had his 2016 season cut short in late May by a ruptured ACL, he found some satisfaction in playing a complete, healthy season. He played in 119 games between Pawtucket and Boston – a number that was limited by his reserve role during multiple call-ups to the big leagues, thus creating a desire on the part of both Travis and the Red Sox for him to get additional playing time in winter ball.

As the year progressed, he felt that he returned to “baseball shape – more agile moving around after being on my feet. ... To be able to keep that going is, I think, very important going forward.”

The time in the Dominican appears to be serving multiple purposes, giving Travis more opportunities to compete while also broadening his defensive profile in a way that could allow him to factor into the Red Sox’ big league depth equation in multiple ways.

“I’ve got to keep moving, keep being out there, keep playing,” said Travis.

*** *The Boston Herald***

We’ll all have to wait on Astros to finish World Series before hearing from Alex Cora

Michael Silverman

LOS ANGELES — Well, this is a little awkward.

Alex Cora, the next manager of the Red Sox, is right under our noses, he’s in our thoughts, he’s in your prayers and he’ll be in the Astros dugout for the World Series staying completely mum about his next job.

Too much of a distraction, he said all he was going to say for now in the press release, sorry, hope you understand — the two Boston print reporters here heard all the explanations, but not even our considerable charm and knee-buckling good looks could get Cora and the Astros to change their minds came to naught.

We’re all just going to have to wait until Cora comes to town for his Welcome-to-Boston press conference to find out what’s been going through his head. He’s had a ton going on, that’s for sure, which when you think about it is a nice little warm-up act for what’s going to hit him nearly every day for the next couple of years. His actions will count for far more than his words, but still, it’s going to be great to hear from Cora one of these days.

Until then, the best we can do is scour the Fall Classic to collect clues about what makes Cora tick and whether his qualities will help make him a successful manager. That’s really what anyone cares about, which is why Dodgers manager Dave Roberts is the perfect place to start.

After all, two seasons ago, the Dodgers picked him to be their next manager and Roberts, just like Cora, had no managerial experience. Also like Cora, Roberts is known for being an effortless communicator, a positive clubhouse source, good with both young and old players, and a keen observer of the game.

Roberts and Cora were Dodgers teammates from 2002-04, before Roberts headed over to the Red Sox for a memorable three-month stint. And now, two years into his Dodgers job, that first-time manager is on the cusp of leading a team to a championship.

So, if Cora won’t talk about Cora, Roberts will. He’s certainly qualified.

“I think he’s going to do well,” Roberts said. “He’s very intelligent, understands the game tremendously. I think that he connects with players, and there’s got to be a trust. He’s a grinder; he likes to work. But obviously until you do it, there’s going to be some challenges as far as managing your time. And it’s

considerably different than just being a coach, a major league coach. But the core of understanding the game of baseball, connecting with players, and taking on information and how you sort of get it to the players and the coaches — I think that he'll do very well. And obviously he played well there in Boston, and has some relationships with certain players that are still there, which I think is a good thing. And I think he's a great leader."

Let's see, who else?

Astros right fielder Josh Reddick had Terry Francona as his first big league manager from 2009-11 with the Red Sox, and for the next week or so, he'll continue to have Cora as his bench coach.

Reddick spoke about Cora, and he spoke quite highly of him. Fans are "going to love him," said Reddick. And so will the players.

"He's in there working his butt off, every half inning he was working with us about something, about getting a sign, working on pitching and stealing, every aspect he seemed to cover really well," Reddick said. "He's real personal with the players, gets close to you, talks to like he's a friend — he is a friend. He does that with everybody, treats everybody the same. He's versatile, he speaks Spanish, he's got that going for him."

Don't expect any Apple Watch sign-stealing fiascos with Cora, either. He can do it himself.

"He's pretty good at it, he's been really good at it this year, so we're going to have to keep an eye on him when we get to him next year," Reddick said.

Cora's into details.

"He's really good at realizing what pitchers may or may not do when they're picking or going home for stealing a bag, what pitchers don't field bunts well — he covers a lot of things, whether guys are bunt threats, first to third threats on a base hit, everything he breaks down into a smaller core to analyze things, he does that so well," Reddick said. "He lets everyone know. He doesn't just call a meeting, he goes around one to one and lets everybody know about it."

It's a tribute to the Red Sox and their enduring popularity that everyone wants to know everything there is to know about Cora.

Soon enough, it will be all Cora, all the time.

We might as well watch a few more baseball games while we wait.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Alex Cora will try to further success of successful predecessor

Tim Britton

BOSTON — Alex Cora is stepping into an unconventional situation.

Managers get fired in baseball all the time. They get fired for poor performance on the field, they get fired for disagreements with the front office, they get fired for fighting with the players, both literally and figuratively.

But managers are rarely fired after making the postseason, and their replacements often find it difficult to replicate, let alone further, their success. That's the situation in which Cora finds himself, as a relatively

inexperienced first-time manager taking over a team in a win-now competitive window, replacing a man who won the World Series in his first year in Boston.

Heady stuff.

Boston's dismissal of John Farrell after a second consecutive division title was unusual but not unprecedented. It's the 28th time a team has had to replace its manager after a postseason appearance since World War II; the Nationals became the 29th team to be in that spot when they elected against renewing Dusty Baker last week.

Those 27 previous teams to make a change at the manager spent have won an average of 6.5 fewer games the subsequent season.

Now, not all of these changes were driven by the respective club; Bobby Cox left Toronto and Dallas Green Philadelphia to become general managers elsewhere. Cox, Tony LaRussa and Jim Leyland retired after playoff appearances. Dick Williams resigned because he didn't feel like dealing with Charlie Finley in Oakland anymore.

But 17 of those 27 teams made the change themselves by firing a skipper who had led them to the postseason, from the Yankees forcing Casey Stengel out in 1960 to the Dodgers and Don Mattingly agreeing it was best to part ways after the 2015 season. Of those 17 teams that essentially fired their managers, only seven returned to the postseason the following year. Five went farther in the playoffs, and three — Ralph Houk's 1961 Yankees, Joe Torre's 1996 Yankees and Terry Francona's 2004 Red Sox — won the World Series.

On average, though, they won about seven games fewer than they had during the previous, purportedly unsuccessful season.

The outlook is worse for teams that fired managers coming off consecutive playoff campaigns, as the Red Sox did with Farrell. That's happened six times before this winter, with only one of those teams — Dave Roberts' 2016 Dodgers — returning to the playoffs. The half-dozen teams averaged nearly 10 fewer wins the next season.

After consecutive playoff appearances, the Orioles moved on from Davey Johnson in 1998; they won 19 fewer games the next season and didn't get back to October baseball for 14 years. The Indians moved on from Mike Hargrove after five consecutive playoff appearances through 1999; Cleveland has made it five times in the 18 years since. The Reds fired Baker after consecutive playoff appearances in 2012-2013, and they've won an average of 69 games since.

Joe Girardi's Yankees took a brief step back in 2008 after 12 consecutive playoff appearances under Joe Torre. But then they won the World Series in Girardi's second season.

"I think the relationships are important with the guys, and you work at those. It takes time to build those. My first year, I had to build relationships," Girardi said back in 2012. "When you replace someone that's been there a long time and players are really comfortable with and know, it's something you have to work at. It's not easy."

Clearly, Roberts' stint with the Dodgers is the model for Cora's with Boston. Roberts was 43 when he was hired; Cora just turned 42. They both had long major-league careers as complementary players, including stints in the major market where they would eventually manage. They were lauded for their ability to connect with a younger generation of players and for their fluency with analytics.

It's worked like a charm for Roberts in Chavez Ravine. Taking over a team that had won three straight divisions but only one postseason series under Mattingly, Roberts led Los Angeles to the NLCS last season and the World Series this year, with baseball's best record in the last 13 years during the regular season.

Like Cora, Roberts inherited a complex clubhouse with some large personalities. He has deftly handled Adrian Gonzalez's demotion from an everyday player this season, he's gotten more out of Yasiel Puig, and he's juggled a starting rotation with about 15 different pieces.

One difference between the man the Dodgers hired and the one the Red Sox just did, though, is the amount of experience at the major-league level. Roberts had been on the Padres' major-league staff for five seasons before the Dodgers hired him, whereas Cora has been in Houston for just one.

In fact, the Red Sox haven't hired a manager with as little major-league coaching experience as Cora since Butch Hobson in 1992, and Hobson at least had a half-decade of minor-league managing under his belt. The last time the Red Sox hired a manager with as little professional coaching experience as Cora, Marty McManus was also serving as an infielder in 1932.

Roberts and Cora will be on opposite ends of the field this week, the former's Dodgers battling the latter's Astros in the World Series. Perhaps they'll have a chance to chat, with Roberts passing on some words of wisdom. It's not easy.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Alex Cora brings persistence, energy to Red Sox

Tom Caron

Alex Cora will be introduced formally as the 47th manager in Boston Red Sox history after the World Series. Cora's a little tied up until then, trying to finish off his stint as Astros bench coach by helping the franchise secure its first World Series championship.

Whether the Astros win over lose, Cora won't have much time to savor the 2017 postseason. He'll have to get right to work in his new job, becoming a first-time manager and taking over a team that won two straight American League East titles but didn't perform well enough in October to save John Farrell's job.

We always knew Cora would some day be a manager. In his three-and-a-half seasons as an infielder for the Red Sox, he was always thinking about the game, talking about strategy and trying to do his part as a role player to help his team maximize its potential. He did just that in 2007, helping the Sox win their second championship in four seasons.

A Red Sox manager must have many qualities. He'll have to be patient with his young players. He'll have to be consistent with his in-game strategies. And he'll have to be persistent if he hopes to achieve his goal leading the Sox back to the Series.

He showed all of those traits in a legendary at bat while with the Dodgers in 2004.

Cora was never much of a power hitter, with just 35 home runs in his 14 major league seasons. So when he stepped up to the plate to face Matt Clement in the seventh inning of a game in 2004, there was no reason for the fans at Dodger Stadium to expect anything memorable.

Clement had thrown 86 pitches in the game for the Cubs, and had retired Cora twice on fly balls. He quickly fell behind Cora 2-1. Then Cora started to grind out one of the greatest at bats the game has ever seen. He fouled off 14 consecutive pitches as the count stayed at 2-2. At one point during the showdown the scoreboard operator began to keep track of the pitch count, and the crowd came to its feet.

"You never see so much excitement," said Hall of Fame broadcaster Vin Scully. "And nothing has happened. That's really what's so funny about it."

Then, on the 18th pitch of the at bat, Cora hit a two-run homer. The L.A. crowd roared and Cora's teammates jumped like they had just won a championship. It still stands as the third-longest at bat since pitch counts started being documented in baseball. And an epic reminder that Cora never backed down from a challenge.

A year later, Cora and Clement would become teammates in Boston. Clement would be gone by the '07 championship, but Cora remained.

Cora wasn't hired by President of Baseball Operations Dave Dombrowski because of an 18-pitch at bat 13 years ago. He was hired because of his unique skill set. At 42, he'll be the youngest Red Sox manager since 40-year-old Kevin Kennedy took over the Sox in 1995. Cora's youth and energy are expected to help him connect with the core of young Red Sox players, a group that seemed to stagnate in 2017. He's bilingual, which should help him connect with young Latin players such as Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez. He spent four seasons working in television, which should help him deal with the relentless media in Boston.

Two of the last three Boston titles were won in the first year of a manager's tenure: the 2004 squad under Terry Francona and the 2013 Sox under Farrell. Each time a new voice was needed to spark a team that expected to compete.

Now Cora will have to provide that voice. He'll sit at the helm of a team with a high payroll, a team that won 93 games in each of the last two seasons yet will undoubtedly be picked behind the Yankees when predictions are made for 2018.

As bench coach in Houston Cora helped eliminate the Yankees in Game 7 on Saturday night. That pleased a lot of baseball fans in New England. Now Cora will face the much tougher task of pleasing that fan base during the Red Sox season. It's a difficult task, but one Cora thinks he can handle.

Just like fouling off 14 consecutive pitches before hitting a home run.

*** *WEEL.com***

Why Alex Cora can use Brad Stevens as a guide

Rob Bradford

WALTHAM -- Alex Cora has a pretty good idea what he's getting into. He played in Boston. He's hung around Boston. He has listened to everything that has gone in Boston from people who are knee-deep in working in Boston.

But when it comes to running a team in Boston, it never hurts to get a little guidance.

It's a reality that Brad Stevens learned when coming here more than four years ago. Talking to the select few who have lived the same life is never a bad thing.

"I've texted with John [Farrell] quite a bit, and seen him on a couple of occasions. I knew Claude [Julien] pretty well. Texted Bruce [Cassidy]. I've known Bill [Belichick] probably better than any of them because of my relationship with Josh McDaniels," the Celtics coach told WEEL.com after his team's practice, Monday. "I've taken advantage of it every which way."

Coaching and managing in this market is just different. Cora understands that, as do the people who hired him. If it was believed that dealing with the unique level of scrutiny and drama would be an issue, the 42-year-old's candidacy might be viewed in significantly different light. The same probably could be said for Stevens, whose primary experience with major markets before taking this job was living life on the outskirts of Indianapolis.

New York? Two teams, more to focus on. Los Angeles? Also too many other shiny objects to zero in on. Everywhere else? Try and find the local tone and tenor you'll read, listen to and watch -- zeroing in on one team per sport -- anywhere outside of European soccer landmarks.

Like Cora, Stevens is smart. He doesn't try and diminish the importance of adjusting to the landscape. That's why it's worth giving him a listen.

"Obviously, the difference between this market and other market is that you get a lot of attention. A lot of things that may not be a discussion point in other markets, they are here," Stevens said. "You just have more people covering you so you have more eyes on you so you have more attention. But I think the way you go about it doesn't change. I've always appreciated the fact that everybody has a job to do. Part of professional sports is the attention that we get. That's part of the reason we get paid what we get. So ultimately there's a responsibility that comes with that.

"I don't look at it as any extra pressure or anything else. You just look at it as that you need to understand that there are going to be more things talked about and ultimately you just have to keep focused on what's important to your team and manage all of that appropriately."

But there's the macro, and then the micro. The former, of course, is none other than problems involving individual players.

It's one thing for the head man to come to grips with what this whole scene represents. Yet, if even one player comes off the aforementioned rails, the whole approach can take a hit. It's why the Patriots do things the way they do. (Which is only made possible because of the limited availability and the absurd amount of winning.) The Red Sox, on the other hand, have had their struggles in this respect. Believe me, John Farrell tried to make David Price see the kind of vision Stevens references. But, for whatever reason, the pitcher was going to formulate his own plan of action.

This will be one of Cora's biggest challenges -- making the message stick with all of his players. With the exception of a few hiccups, Stevens has seemingly managed the feat. And when there was an unfortunate reminder that young men will sometimes be young men, it was quickly reeled in.

"Each situation is a little bit different," Stevens said. "There are probably big deals that need to be discussed immediately and handled immediately, and there are things that aren't as big a deal in this room as it's being made out to be outside this room. We handle that appropriately. We talk about the reality how lucky we are to do what we do and part of that is the scrutiny that comes with it. So we talk about that and we make it part of being able to being able to navigate the process of growth. You can't have things that distract or pull you away from it that you create, or that you let others create."

Sounds like he knows what he's talking about. When this World Series business is done, Cora might want to give his new compatriot a ring.

*** CSNNE.com**

As Red Sox manager, Cora must keep conviction, honesty that got him job

Evan Drellich

BOSTON -- Just as a batter can subconsciously play to avoid losing, rather than to win, a manager can operate with a fear of failure. Such an unwitting approach may have contributed John Farrell's downfall, and is an area where Alex Cora can set himself apart.

A lot has been written about the value of authenticity in leadership. It's one thing to have the charisma and conviction needed to land a position of power. It's another to take over a pressure-cooker job, like manager of the Red Sox, and carry the fortitude to stay true to yourself, continue to let those qualities shine.

Cora did not appear to pull any punches in his days with ESPN. The 42-year-old engaged in Twitter debates with media members and fans. And throughout his baseball life, he showed his colors.

Last year, Cora spoke out against the league office's rule requiring minorities always be interviewed.

Perhaps most interesting of all, when Chris Sale cut up White Sox jerseys, Cora was Dennis Eckersley-like in his assessment:

“What he did is not acceptable,” Cora said of Sale. “If I’m a veteran guy, I’m going to take exception. If I’m a young guy, I’m going to take exception. Because as a young guy on a team that is actually struggling right now, somebody has to show me the ropes of how to act as a big leaguer. And this is not the way you act as a big leaguer. Forget the trades, forget who you are.

“What you do in that clubhouse, you got to act like a professional. And that’s one thing my agent, Scott Boras, used to tell me when I got to the big leagues: act like a professional. Chris Sale didn’t do it. He’s not showing the veterans that you respect the game. He’s not showing the rookies how to be a big leaguer, and that’s what I take exception to.”

Take out Chris Sale’s name from the above quotation and insert David Price’s. Describes Price's incident with Eckersley perfectly, doesn't it?

Now, no manager can say what they’re really thinking all the time. Cora’s not in the media anymore. His new job description is different.

But when you consider the great success of Terry Francona -- and why he succeeded in this market beyond simply winning -- what stands out is how comfortable Francona appears in his own skin. How genuine he seems.

There is a way to acknowledge, as a manager, when something is off. A way to do so gently but genuinely. A way to say what you feel -- and a way to say what you feel must be said -- while operating without fear of the players you manage.

Ultimately, most every comment Francona makes is intended to shield his players. But Francona shows his personality as he goes (or if you want to be a bit cynical, he sells his personality marvelously). Those little self-deprecating jokes -- he charms the hell out of everyone. The media, the fans. The Cult of Tito has a real following, because he feels real. Because he is real.

Farrell was not fake. But he did have a hard time letting his personality come across consistently, to his detriment. He was reserved, in part because that just appeared to be his nature. But the job must have, with time, forced him to withdraw even further. As everything Farrell said (and did) was picked apart in the market, it likely became easiest just to play it safe in every facet -- speaking to the media, speaking to players.

The Sox’ biggest undertaking in 2017 seemed to be a nothing-to-see-here campaign. It was all fine. No David Ortiz, no home runs, no problem. Manny Machado was loved. The media was the problem, not any attitude or attitudes inside the clubhouse. Base running was a net positive -- you name it, none of it was ever tabbed as a problem publicly by the manager, or anyone else.

A perpetually defensive stance was the public image. Issues were never addressed or poorly defused, so questions always lingered.

Maybe Cora cannot admonish Sale as he did a year ago now that he’s managing Sale. Not publicly, anyway. But even as a quote-unquote player's manager, the job still requires authority, which should be doled out just as it was earned: through authentic comments and actions.

"My job as the manager is to set the culture, the expectations, the standards, the baseball," Cora's present boss, Astros manager A.J. Hinch, said the night the Astros clinched the pennant. "It's the players' job to develop the chemistry."

"And obviously good teams always say that, we want chemistry, and what comes first, the chemistry or the winning. But when you have it, you want to hold on to it as much as possible . . . We've got a good thing going because we have one common goal, we have one common standard, and that's to be your best every day."

Cora has to remain true to his best, too -- not what he thinks, and hears, and reads, people want his best to be.

*** NESN.com**

Ex-Red Sox All-Star Explains Why Alex Cora Will Be Good MLB Manager

Ricky Doyle

The Boston Red Sox's decision to hire Alex Cora as their new manager has Mike Lowell's stamp of approval. Lowell, who played alongside Cora in Boston for three seasons from 2006 to 2008, knew back then his teammate might have a future as a Major League Baseball manager.

Cora was a part-time player, but Lowell, an All-Star for the Red Sox in 2007, noticed his good friend's impact extended beyond the diamond and into the clubhouse, where Boston was loaded with high-profile superstars.

"I think his biggest attribute was not being an everyday player, but commanding the respect of almost any elite-type player," Lowell recently told WEEI's Rob Bradford on the "Bradfo Show" podcast. "On the road, I lifted weights in the mornings with him and Manny Ramirez, and the one guy that got on Manny's case for showing up 10 minutes late in the lobby or not showing to workout was Alex. And Manny took to it."

"I think he kind of liked a guy could relate to his situation and get on him in the sense, 'We aren't going to win without you, Manny. We need you.' I think he understood Manny's personality was more that you had to put your arm around him and maybe someone else was the type you have to kick them in the butt a little bit. Guys react differently, and that's where managing personalities are just as important as managing the X's and O's and what you do during the game."

Cora, who last played in 2011 for the Washington Nationals, certainly is qualified for the job, having earned a reputation as one of baseball's most respected up-and-coming managerial candidates. He's worked in television, which should help him deal with the tough Boston media, and he's currently drawing rave reviews as the Houston Astros' bench coach.

But the best managers often have qualities that are difficult to quantify. And while Cora's in-game managing could prove to be a strength, Lowell always has been impressed with the former infielder's ability to connect with people.

"The fact that guys like David Ortiz, and Curt Schilling, and Josh (Beckett) and Manny were respectful and felt like they had to respect Alex because of the way he went about his business, I think speaks volumes of what he can do now as a manager," Lowell told Bradford. "You can be the best X's and O's guy, but if your players don't feel like the manager has their backs, that clubhouse can deteriorate quickly. In that sense, I think Alex is prepared for it."

Cora is the 47th manager in Red Sox history. The club recently parted ways with John Farrell, who spent the last five seasons as Boston's manager, earning three trips to the postseason and winning a World Series in 2013.

*** *The Boston Sports Journal***

Next step for Alex Cora and Red Sox: putting staff together

Sean McAdam

Now that Alex Cora has been confirmed, if not introduced, as the Red Sox' next manager, the Sox are onto their next step: putting together a coaching staff to work with him for 2018.

The current Red Sox' coaching staff – bench coach Gary DiSarcina, third base coach Brian Butterfield, first base coach Ruben Amaro Jr., hitting coach Chili Davis, pitching coach Carl Willis, assistant hitting coach Victor Rodriguez and bullpen coach Dana LeVangie – are all under contract through 2018 and are free to seek jobs elsewhere after manager John Farrell was fired.

Willis has interviewed for the pitching coach vacancy in Minnesota, while Davis has spoken with the San Diego Padres. DiSarcina is among a handful of candidates for the Philadelphia Phillies managerial opening.

Additionally, a report in Chicago over the weekend said that former Tampa Bay Rays pitching coach Jim Hickey, a candidate to replace the fired Chris Bosio with the Chicago Cubs, had already interviewed with the Red Sox.

Dave Dombrowski, the Red Sox president of baseball operations, would not comment about Hickey.

Hickey would be reunited with Cubs manager Joe Maddon in Chicago. His hiring in Boston would undoubtedly be welcome by David Price, who had Hickey as his first pitching coach in the big leagues in Tampa from 2008 through 2014. With Hickey, Price enjoyed his two best seasons, finishing second in the Cy Young Award voting in 2010 and winning the Cy Young Award in 2012.

Hickey has already interviewed with the St. Louis Cardinals and is scheduled to interview with San Francisco Giants, who last week bumped longtime pitching coach Dave Righetti into a front office position.

A number of high profile pitching coaches — including Mike Maddux, released when the Washington Nationals fired Dusty Baker – remain on the market.

Dombrowski, responding to an email about the status of the current coaches and the assembly of next year's staff, wrote: "Presently, I am not at liberty to discuss where we are with our coaching staff. Many of these questions need to be discussed with Alex, and respecting his situation with the Astros limits his availability to discuss some of these questions."

It's widely assumed that Cora, who has not yet managed in the big leagues, will want an established hand as his bench coach to help him navigate through games. It's possible that that bench coach could be a former manager, or, at the very least, someone who has served as bench coach elsewhere.

Cora has a long list of friends in the game, and some of the closest include former Sox players Mike Lowell and Jason Varitek. Though neither has experience as a bench coach, either could serve in another capacity.

For Varitek, who has worked as a special assistant the last few seasons with the Sox, the issue would be more a question of whether he would want to commit the time to be a full-time major league coach, replete with all the travel. Varitek has a young family and may not be ready to make that commitment at this stage of his career.

The expectation is that the Red Sox would prefer to retain Butterfield, who is recognized as one of the better infield instructors in the game and who could continue to work with 20-year-old third baseman Rafael Devers.

A baseball source said Butterfield had received no further clarification on his status since Cora's hiring was announced.

LeVangie is also a strong candidate to remain, having been a member of the organization – as a minor league player, advance scout and bullpen coach – for more than 25 years.