

## ***The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, October 25, 2017***

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

#### **Alex Cora is well-versed for his challenge in Boston**

Alex Speier

Within the news release announcing the hiring of Alex Cora as the 47th manager of the Red Sox, team president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski offered what seems like a self-evident claim: “The fact that he is bilingual,” Dombrowski said in the statement, “is very significant for our club.”

Yet it is one thing to appreciate the value of the trait, quite another to recognize the hard-earned — and life-changing — fashion in which it was forged. Cora’s challenging path to bilingual fluency not only allows him to relate to the diverse members of a big league roster but also offers a window into some of the character attributes that helped define him as the type of leader whom the Red Sox are willing to entrust their club.

Cora grew up speaking Spanish in his native Puerto Rico. When he arrived at the University of Miami as a college freshman in the fall of 1993, the simultaneous language and cultural adjustments proved overwhelming.

“It’s hard for a lot of freshmen, going to college, leaving home, going from where he’d primarily spoken Spanish to the States where it was English, and it was broken English,” recalled J.D. Arteaga, a fellow freshman with Cora that year who is now the Hurricanes’ pitching coach. “Less than a month into the semester, he asked me to give him a ride to the airport, that his mom was sick or something. I said, ‘Yeah, sure. No problem.’”

“I gave him a ride to the airport. He had all his bags with him. I said, ‘Where are you going with all your stuff?’ He said, ‘I’m going to do laundry when I’m home.’ I didn’t think anything of it. I dropped him off, came back to the field for workouts. As soon as I walked in, the coaches stopped me and said, ‘Where’s Alex? Where’s Alex?’”

Cora’s mother wasn’t sick. The young infielder was homesick.

He returned to Puerto Rico, prepared to leave college in search of another avenue into pro ball. But after a few days, Cora changed course and returned to school.

That decision proved pivotal. Cora, who had been shy and aloof in his first weeks of school, recognized that he needed to dive into the deep end.

“He came back as a different person, like he’d been here for five years. He kind of took off from there,” said Arteaga, a bilingual Miami-area native who became roommates with Cora and whose family embraced him as something of an adopted family member. “When he came back, it was like, ‘Who cares? I’m here. I’m staying. This is Alex Cora. This is who I am.’ He just kind of took off, and everybody fell in love with him.”

Those around the Miami program quickly came to recognize aspects of Cora that distinguished him from other college players, starting with his upbringing.

His brother, Joey Cora, was in the middle of an 11-year big league career. And so as Alex Cora showed an uncommon feel for the game as a freshman, Miami coach Jim Morris was curious whether his brother had been his baseball mentor.

“He goes, ‘No, no, no, Joey was always playing, doing winter ball, whatever he was doing, he was always playing. So it was some of the old guys like Luis Aparicio,’ ” recalled Morris, whose first year at Miami was also Cora’s freshman season. “I started laughing. I said, ‘Do you even know who Luis Aparicio is?’ ”

Cora had met Aparicio, a Hall of Famer considered one of the greatest defensive shortstops ever, during his brother’s time with the White Sox. He also became close with Ozzie Guillen, a three-time All-Star and future manager who was one of his brother’s teammates.

At Miami, it became clear that Alex Cora had been an attentive student of such luminaries. He wasn’t a standout athlete or a great hitter, yet he proved a difference-maker on the field, someone whose game awareness produced outs on defense as well as timely hits in the batter’s box.

“He saw the game in a different way, from a different angle,” Arteaga said. “He knew what was going to happen before it happened almost. As a shortstop, as a player, he wasn’t the most gifted athletically as far as foot speed, 60 times, and all that, but he was literally moving before the ball was hit. . . . He wasn’t a great hitter physically, but he learned how to hit and it was almost like he knew what was coming ahead of time by studying the game, studying the players.”

With that preparation, Cora projected a confidence that spread to teammates and defined him as a leader — someone who was unafraid to communicate with teammates in both English and Spanish — by the time he was a sophomore, a stature that continued to grow as a junior. Arteaga recalled how, in the regional tournament for the right to advance to the 1996 College World Series in Omaha, Cora made a bold proclamation.

“He said, ‘If I get a groundball to end the game, I’m going to put my hands up in the air and then throw to first.’ I said, ‘You’re crazy,’ ” recounted Arteaga. “Sure enough, against UCLA in Austin, Texas, groundball to short, threw his hands up in the air, and threw across the infield.”

It was at that College World Series that Cora had a particularly unforgettable performance on and off the field. Miami advanced to the championship game against LSU. In the top of the ninth inning, Cora’s two-out, run-scoring single gave the Hurricanes an 8-7 lead. But with two outs in the bottom of the ninth, LSU’s Warren Morris ripped a two-run, walkoff homer down the right field line.

Cora collapsed to the turf, stunned and sobbing after seeing the title ripped away in his final college game. He wasn’t alone. A disoriented Miami team retreated to an agonized clubhouse.

Morris, the Miami coach, was at a loss for words. One player wasn’t. Less than three years removed from his struggles to find a voice in a second language, Cora commanded the room.

“Cora stands up before I can say anything and tells everybody that he loves them. [Closer] Robbie Morrison, who threw the pitch, first-team All-American, [Cora] tells him how much he loves him, that if it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t be there,” said Morris. “If you weren’t crying before that, you were crying after he stood up.”

“I remember it like yesterday,” added Arteaga. “He was emotional, and that’s how he played the game. He gave it everything he had, and I think that’s what he’ll expect from his players. He’ll be a great player’s coach, but he’ll expect his players to play with heart and with love for the game.”

The ability to communicate that expectation with everyone, coupled with the swagger of a person who could foresee pumping his fists in triumph before making a game-winning throw, all helps to explain why those who have known Cora the longest believe he is well-suited for what awaits him in Boston.

As much as he will be challenged in baseball’s ultimate crucible, he has gone through even more dramatic adjustments in the past and emerged stronger for them.

“He’s come a long, long way from the kid who took off and went back home because he was homesick,” Arteaga said. “Alex is going to be Alex. He’s not going to be someone you want him to be. He’s going to be Alex. But the good thing is, everyone likes Alex and who he is. He doesn’t have to be fake or someone he is not to be liked. Everything you need in a leadership role, it’s truly him. He doesn’t have to change to be that guy.

“Some of those life experiences are obviously going to help him be better in relating with people. But what’s going to make him a great manager is his baseball IQ. He’s born for this. He’s going to be a manager for a long, long time.”

### **World Series filled with Red Sox story lines**

Alex Speier

Welcome to the World Series clash of the titans.

The 104-win Dodgers and 101-win Astros open the Fall Classic Tuesday, pitting teams that demonstrated uncommon dominance during the regular season. In 48 World Series since the playoffs expanded to a multi-round format in 1969, this matchup marks just the third time — and the first since 1970 — it featured two 100-win teams.

Both teams have remarkable depth — the Dodgers in every facet, the Astros in their lineup — that allowed them to cruise through the regular season without overtaxing any of their key players.

As much as the Dodgers’ enormous payroll is a factor in what they’ve accomplished, their success has been built around great scouting — both at the amateur level (starting with the selection of Clayton Kershaw in 2006, then continuing with players like Cody Bellinger and Corey Seager) and particularly at the pro level, with shrewd buy-low acquisitions of players like Justin Turner, Chris Taylor, and Alex Wood paying huge dividends.

Houston, meanwhile, capitalized on its great draft position achieved by some dismal years by nailing many of their early-round picks (a group headlined by No. 1 overall selection Carlos Correa in 2012, who was joined by players such as Lance McCullers Jr. and Alex Bregman) and finding some diamonds in the rough both through their player development system (Dallas Keuchel) and pro scouting (Marwin Gonzalez, Charlie Morton, Brad Peacock, among others). Those efforts yielded a core that Houston supplemented this year with a tremendous blend of veterans (Josh Reddick, Brian McCann, Carlos Beltran), and finally topped off with an ace (Justin Verlander).

There are fantastic batter/pitcher matchups to contemplate in what could be a singularly entertaining series. Beyond that, there are numerous Red Sox story lines and potential templates that merit notice as the Fall Classic unfolds. Among them:

**IN THE DUGOUTS:** The next Red Sox manager, Alex Cora, will be a fixture at the side of Astros manager A.J. Hinch as he concludes his tenure as Houston’s bench coach. In the opposite dugout, former Red Sox outfielder Dave Roberts will helm the Dodgers.

While former Red Sox manager Terry Francona has declined to talk about Cora until the end of the World Series, he talked to Dan Shaughnessy about the attributes of Roberts — virtually all of which are shared by Cora — during his time in Boston that suggested a managerial future.

Cora would do well to examine what Roberts has done in Los Angeles. After all, as noted in yesterday’s story, since the playoffs expanded to multiple rounds in 1969, Roberts is the only first-time manager who inherited a team that made the playoffs and led them deeper into the postseason than his predecessor.

**IN SEARCH OF DEEP DEPTH:** Both the Astros and Dodgers represent model franchises in their relentless approach to building depth. Both displayed small-market sensibilities in seeking constant, marginal upgrades not just through their stars but in terms of platoon complements and reserves.

The focus on gaining competitive advantages through all 25 spots on the big league roster — rather than focusing on an elite top end — has positioned both teams not just as competitors for the title this year but as long-term forces with whom the rest of their leagues will have to contend.

**PLAYERS EVOLVE — AND TEAMS CAN, TOO:** In the wake of the Red Sox' disappointing offensive season in 2017 (they had the fewest homers in the American League), it's worth noting how the Astros went from a 724-run team in 2016 to an 896-run monster this year.

Yes, there were upgrades — particularly the additions of Reddick and McCann, as well as the late-2016 signing of Cuban free agent Yuli Gurriel — but there was also dramatic improvement. Springer, Gonzalez, and Correa all showed fantastic strides in pitch selection and offensive approach (particularly with two strikes), resulting in sizable decreases in their strikeout rates and a ton of hard contact.

Gonzalez cut down his ground ball rate considerably, helping him launch 23 homers — nearly matching the 25 he'd hit in 2015-16 combined.

Put another way: Player development doesn't stop in the minors. Players in the big leagues are capable of going from obscurity to excellence. Teams can facilitate such a development through the types of approaches they preach, as seen in an Astros team that had the lowest swing-and-miss rate in the big leagues (8.5 percent) or a Dodgers team that swung at the lowest percentage of pitches outside the strike zone (26.2 percent).

**THE TIES THAT BIND (OR ALMOST BOUND)?** On the player side, the Dodgers feature former Red Sox lefty Rich Hill, while righthanded reliever Josh Fields had a breakthrough minor league season with the Red Sox in 2012 before being plucked in the Rule 5 draft.

Turner nearly signed a minor league deal with the Red Sox after the 2013 season, and catcher Yasmani Grandal was drafted by the Red Sox in the 27th round in 2007. (He didn't sign and was a first-rounder three years later.)

The Astros have Reddick, one of the Red Sox' best pure scouting finds of the last 15 years when he was plucked in the 17th round of the 2006 draft. The Red Sox drafted (29th round) but didn't sign Bregman out of high school in New Mexico in 2012. They pursued McCann as a free agent following the 2013 season but were outbid by the Yankees.

**THE BRAIN TRUSTS:** Both organizations have numerous former members (or near-members). Beyond Roberts, the Dodgers coaching staff features bench coach Bob Geren (a Red Sox minor league manager in the late 1990s), first base coach George Lombard (a minor league player, coach, manager, and coordinator in the Red Sox system for several years), third-base coach Chris Woodward (briefly a Sox in 2009), assistant hitting coach Tim Hyers (a Red Sox scout and minor league hitting coordinator prior to joining the Dodgers).

The front office has former Sox assistant GM Josh Byrnes (now senior VP of baseball operations in Los Angeles), with ex-Sox outfielder Gabe Kapler serving as the team's farm director and former Sox front office members David Finley (VP/amateur and international scouting) and Galen Carr (director of player personnel), among others, all playing key roles.

Aside from Cora, the Astros have little Red Sox representation on their coaching staff and in their front office, though a fellow named Roger Clemens is a special assistant to the GM.

**A-GONE INDEED:** Adrian Gonzalez left the Dodgers prior to the World Series to vacation with his family in Europe. Bill Shaikin of the Los Angeles Times writes that he did so with the blessing of the Dodgers.

If the Dodgers win the World Series, it is somewhat staggering to think that it will mark the second time in five seasons that a team won a championship by figuring out ways to either escape or offset the payroll-choking burden of Gonzalez and Carl Crawford — the two most expensive position players being paid by this year's Dodgers, and the two players whose contracts the Red Sox needed to shed (along with that of Josh Beckett) in 2012 to set the stage for their 2013 roster remake that yielded a championship.

All of those complementary story lines, however, shouldn't obscure the most fundamental one: Two great teams will compete for baseball's ultimate prize.

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

### **Fenway OK'd for dugout seating**

O'Ryan Johnson

Fenway Park has the city's go-ahead to install dugout-style seating for fans, provided the plan receives the approval of Major League Baseball.

Architect Charles F. Izzo told the Boston Landmarks Commission last night that the seating will give ticket holders along the first base line a player's-eye view of the game.

"Other ballparks have installed them," Izzo told the board. "They've been a big hit."

The area will be placed below the field level, with a drink rail area for snacks and refreshments and bar stools. Izzo said fans with tickets to the area will be free to stand and mingle during the game as they will be below the level of those seated behind them.

To make room for the dugout seating, Izzo did not state what occupancy of the dugout area would be, but plans show as many as 25. He told the board the Sox are removing 12 seats from the stands on that side of the field. However, as part of the plan, Fenway is adding 30 seats to the third-base side. The Red Sox have said they are "still evaluating" whether they will add more protective netting.

The commission approved the plan pending Major League Baseball sign-off of the seating's encroachment on foul territory. That approval is pending.

### **Alex Cora must find a way to make Red Sox likable again**

Steve Buckley

That Dave Dombrowski was sitting alone at the table to discuss the John Farrell firing was no accident.

He was, after all, brought in by Red Sox ownership to be president of baseball operations. What John Henry and Tom Werner were saying by their absence, then, was this was Dombrowski's decision to make.

And it was a decision he alone needed to explain — even if High Horse Dave wasted an opportunity to share with loyal Red Sox fans his reasons for making the change. (If nothing else, a little candor would have allowed New Englanders a chance to get to know him a little better.)

Was the hiring of Alex Cora as Farrell's replacement also a singular call by Dombrowski? Yes, presumably. But let's not kid ourselves: Henry, Werner and president/CEO Sam Kennedy were clued in. They weren't merely sent a memo from Dombrowski revealing Cora as his choice.

And while nobody wants non-baseball ops people filling Cora's head with lineup suggestions and ideas on how to deploy his bullpen, I'm betting the owners, as well as Kennedy, will be having a very long talk with

their new manager to discuss how to make baseball more exciting at 4 Yawkey Way. (Or should we just start calling it 4 Jersey Street right now so the name is all broken in by Opening Day?)

The term “more exciting” is tricky. Teams that win a ton of games are generally “more exciting” than teams that lose a ton of games. But there are exceptions. This year’s Red Sox were an exception.

It’s weird. The Sox finished first in the AL East. They drew 2,917,678 million fans to Fenway Park. And even though Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Xander Bogaerts regressed in 2017, most people believe there will be improvement next time around. As for Andrew Benintendi, Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez, they’re gonna be stars, right?

And yet . . . we have to say it again . . . likability is an issue with the Red Sox. I’ll bet my house one of the whiz kids in marketing has scrawled that very word on a whiteboard during recent brainstorming sessions.

It’s not just the rollover against the Houston Astros in the Division Series that got people a-grousin’. It started long before that. You know the drill: No more David Ortiz, the clumsy handling of the Manny Machado incident, David Price going after Eck, the Apple Watch sign-stealing caper, etc.

So Alex Cora has three tasks awaiting him:

- He must provide the in-game X’s and O’s that sometimes win or lose ballgames and, whatever the outcome, are constantly dissected and analyzed throughout Red Sox Nation.
- He must find a way to bring calm and order to the clubhouse.
- He must play a role in inspiring Red Sox fans to genuinely love their team again.

Cora can’t get it done with actions. But he can get it done with attitude.

So no, those hackneyed, over-the-top arguments with umpires won’t do the trick. Being folksy and whimsical, a la Joe Morgan, won’t get it done. Nor will being edgy and combative, as Bobby Valentine was during his lone, and often lonely, season as manager of the Red Sox.

Attitude.

If somebody takes out a Red Sox player at second base, the payback should be handled quickly, decisively and in a fashion that announces everybody is on board.

Attitude.

What’s that? A player has a gripe with a sportswriter or broadcaster? Fine. Talk to the sportswriter. Talk to the broadcaster. But don’t be a schoolyard bully about it.

Attitude.

There is a difference— a huge, huge difference — between running the bases aggressively and running the bases like that scene in “Airplane” in which the flight attendant announces there’s no more coffee.

Attitude.

Sign-stealing is a time-honored baseball art form. It is done with cunning, with guile, with smarts. It is not done in concert with Apple Watches and members of the training staff.

Attitude.

When you hit a home run, style a little. Watch it, pimp it, trot up the line a couple of steps and then flip your bat. This isn't 1950. It's two-thousand-and-freakin'-seventeen. The sooner Major League Baseball — and especially the Red Sox — come to grips with this, the more fun the games are going to be.

Attitude.

In the old, old, old days, it was said the Red Sox were “25 men, 25 cabs.” I like to think that went away even before the glorious World Series run of 2004, and that guys like Mo Vaughn and John Valentin, and then especially Pedro Martinez, had a lot to do with that. Those guys were fun. They were human. They could be petty and insecure, but they were always — and that's always with a capital A — answerable and accountable.

That's what has been lost.

That's what needs to return.

This is part of the task that awaits Alex Cora.

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

### **Boston Red Sox potential trade targets: Giancarlo Stanton to Joakim Soria**

Jen McCaffrey

The Red Sox figure to have a busy offseason with the priority of adding a power bat to the lineup. But injuries at the end of the season have left other questions that might force the Red Sox to add more to the roster.

The uncertainty surrounding Dustin Pedroia's knee means adding a reliable infielder might be among the priorities. Meanwhile, the loss of Eduardo Rodriguez for at least the first few months of next season as he recovers from knee surgery, means the rotation may need an addition, too.

Admittedly there are plenty of options on the free-agent market for the Red Sox to pursue both offensively and on the mound.

However, if the Red Sox choose to add via trade, these are some players they might target and what it might take to acquire them.

OF/DH Giancarlo Stanton

Stanton is the most obvious trade target for the Red Sox and the club has been linked to him over the last several months. As Miami rebuilds under new ownership and looks to shed Stanton's monstrous contract (he's owed at least \$25 million each of the next 10 years) the Red Sox are one of a handful of teams that can afford him.

The 27-year-old led the majors last season with 59 homers and a posted a 1.007 OPS. He would seem to be a strong fit for a power-dry Red Sox team.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

In order to get Stanton, the Red Sox would likely have to give up one of their young major leaguers in a package deal.

Stanton would likely serve as designated hitter for the Red Sox, but Miami would probably be looking for at least three players in return. Stanton played 149 games in right field for Miami last year, but it's doubtful the Red Sox would part with right fielder Mookie Betts. If the Red Sox were to deal one of their young outfielders, Jackie Bradley Jr. would seem to be the option at this point.

But that wouldn't be enough. Boston would likely have to part with a couple of top prospect like third baseman Michael Chavis and potentially 2017 first-rounder RHP Tanner Houck and power-hitting first baseman Josh Ockimey.

#### 2B/SS Brian Dozier

Dozier, 30, has one year, \$9 million left with the Twins before free agency next winter. Last season, he hit 34 homers with a .271 average and an .856 OPS. The uncertainty at second base remains real with Dustin Pedroia's future unknown at this point. A power hitting second baseman (he hit 42 homers with an .886 OPS in 2016) would certainly be a boost to the lineup.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

It's possible Dozier could be acquired for a handful of top prospects like first baseman Josh Ockimey or Sam Travis, especially with an aging Joe Maurer with one year left on his deal. With the departure of Dozier leaving a void at second maybe the Twins would want Red Sox utility man Tzu-Wei Lin. The Twins need pitching so it's possible a deal for one of three mentioned here in addition to a top 10 Red Sox pitching prospect like 2016 fifth-rounder Mike Shawaryn would be enough.

#### 1B/OF Eric Thames

Thames in an interesting case having returned to the majors last season after a three-year stint in Korea and before that the Venezuelan Winter League. Thames, a lefty-hitter, signed a three-year, \$16 million contract with the Milwaukee Brewers last offseason with a \$7.5 million club option for a fourth year. He hit 26 doubles and 31 homers last season and could serve as a fourth outfielder and first baseman for Boston.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

Thames had a strong 2017 but doesn't necessarily have a track record to ensure future success so there's a bit of a gamble in taking on the remaining \$11 million guaranteed over the next two years.

Maybe the Red Sox could get Thames for a handful of prospects, like the previously mentioned Sam Travis or Josh Ockimey. Boston needs power now and the Brewers would have either of those prospects under contract for several years. The Brewers need pitching and could be interested in High-A Salem right-hander Mike Shawaryn or Double-A Portland right-hander Travis Lakins.

#### RHP Ervin Santana

It's not likely the Twins would want to trade away their best starter, but Boston might be able to make an enticing offer. Santana has two years left on his deal with the Twins with \$13.5 million in 2018 and a team option of \$14 million in 2019. For a proven major-league starter, that's not a bad price. The Red Sox face uncertainties in the rotation now with Eduardo Rodriguez set to miss the beginning of the year and Steven Wright still recovering from major knee surgery. If they want a more sure option in the rotation, they may opt for a trade. Santana posted a 3.28 ERA this season and has been strong over the last two years with a 3.38 mark in 2016. It might be a good time to check in on him.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

Santana likely would require the Red Sox to part with three or four prospects, including a handful of pitchers. While lefty Jay Groome might be too much for Boston to part with now, Minnesota would likely want Boston's next best top pitching prospect in right-handers Bryan Mata or Tanner Houck, both in the low minors. A more established pitcher like lefties Jalen Beeks or Brian Johnson could be potential pieces as well. In other words, Santana wouldn't be cheap, but Dombrowski has proven he's will to make big deals and Santana could provide more stability in the rotation for a price.

#### RHP Joakim Soria

The Red Sox could use another sturdy arm in the bullpen even if Tyler Thornburg is set to return, there's no telling what kind of shape he'll be in. Soria is set to make \$9 million next season with a \$10 million team option the following year. He pitched well in 59 appearances for the Royals this season with a 10.3 K/9 and 54.8 percent groundball rate, 22nd best in the majors. If the Royals are tying to re-sign Eric Hosmer or any of their free-agents-to-be they could use the extra money.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

The Red Sox have seen what a depleted bullpen looks like and could use another proven piece. Kansas City has a variety of needs with several players headed for free agency. If they can't retain first baseman Eric Hosmer, those same Red Sox prospects in Josh Ockimey and Sam Travis might be options the Royals want in a trade. It would take more than that, though, with the possibility of lefty Jalen Beeks or righty Mike Shawaryn added into the package.

RHP Julio Teheran

The Red Sox have been tied to Teheran in past years so there's no reason to believe they wouldn't be interested again. The Braves are in the midst of a rebuild and while they likely want to build around Teheran, the Red Sox could offer an interesting package. The 26-year-old is owed \$8 million and \$11 million over the next two seasons, a bargain for his 3.59 career ERA.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

It would take a lot for the Braves to part with Teheran, who is viewed as the ace of their rotation. Atlanta might want Andrew Benintendi or Mookie Betts, but it's doubtful the Red Sox would go that far to get Teheran. Jackie Bradley Jr. could be an option, but otherwise it would probably take a group of top prospects like third baseman Michael Chavis, righty Tanner Houck, first baseman Josh Ockimey and lefty Jalen Beeks.

1B/DH Paul Goldschmidt

Goldschmidt hit 36 homers and posted a .966 OPS this season. He's set to make \$11.1 million next year, a bargain for an established hitter like him, but he does have a \$14.5 million team option in 2019. He would fit an obvious whole at first base for the Red Sox, is a Gold Glove winner and but makes roughly twice as much as free-agent-to-be Mitch Moreland made this season.

What would the Red Sox have to give up?

Goldschmidt is a key piece in the Arizona offense, a team that hopes to keep in contention for the foreseeable future after reaching the wild card game this year. Again, a power bat like first basemen Josh Ockimey and Sam Travis as well as third baseman Michael Chavis would be in play for a trade. The Diamondbacks are led by general manager Mike Hazen, who spent the first 10 years of his career in the Red Sox front office and knows Boston's prospects as well as anyone. That means he'd likely push for a lot for Goldschmidt.

**\* *WEEI.com***

**Steven Wright is ready to resurface in Red Sox rotation**

Rob Bradford

Steven Wright walked down the Kenmore Square sidewalk Tuesday morning, heading for another meeting with the Red Sox' medical staff at Fenway Park. There was no hitch in his step, or doubts in his mind.

It was a far cry from five months earlier.

Wright, the pitcher who entered 2017 spring training with more expectations than at any time in his life, had been feeling bad for himself, and his team. The 33-year-old finally succumbed to his knee soreness after just five starts, ultimately undergoing the kind of surgery that ends seasons. And this time, it also put a halt to the optimism the knuckleballer had finally uncovered after years of major league uncertainty.

"It was depressing for a while because not only am I not with the guys, I'm not even at the field. What got me through was how much it hurt just to move," Wright told WEEI.com. "Then I was able to cope with it and then I started feeling better, so then I was getting that itch again even if I was limited what I could do. It took a while to get to that point [of not being depressed] because even though I'm young in the knuckleball world, I'm not young in the baseball world. I'm 33 years old and I get it. But it took a while for me to be like, 'OK, I can come back from this,' because of how excruciating the pain was after the surgery."

The story of Wright has been well-documented. The position-player-turned-knuckleball pitcher finally getting his chance to prove himself, ultimately making the 2016 American League All-Star team. It led the Red Sox to rely on the righty as a starter heading into 2017, particularly with the loss of David Price. Even after a 2014 sports hernia surgery, 2015 concussion, and 2016 baserunning-induced shoulder ailment, he was actually ready to be counted on by a big league baseball team.

But after tweaking his knee during a spring training game of catch, the road took another detour.

Something didn't feel right all through the exhibition season and then into April. This, however, was the first time Wright was actually lock-solid certain he was starting the year in the big leagues, so the knee pain would have to start out as nothing more than an inconvenience.

"It wasn't one of those things where I got hurt and I might have to work for a rotation spot. No matter what, I'm going north as long as I'm healthy," he said. "I didn't know that going into '16. I thought I had a good opportunity because I was out of options, but I had no idea. I didn't get my apartment until two weeks into camp. If I got designated I didn't want to have signed a lease. This time I had everything set up in January. I was going north unless I got hurt."

But without the leg power knuckleballers rely so much on, his results weren't in line with the season before: Five starts, 8.25 ERA, .377 batting average against.

It was after his final start, April 29 against the Cubs, the pain reached untenable levels. As it turned out, his articular cartilage had finally ripped off the bone, necessitating the season-ending surgery.

"Before the surgery, I walked into the surgery. I got on the table myself," Wright remembered. "I walked in just like I walked down the street and I'm like, 'Dude, you've got to be kidding me.' I was about to have this pretty crazy knee surgery and I walked to the hospital. I'm thinking this was going to be an easy fix. Was I wrong."

"It took a while. It was depressing. I had gotten the sports hernia surgery, but that happened in the offseason. So this was the first time really had been hurt throwing a baseball, and it was my knee, it wasn't even my shoulder. It was hard because when I was trying to pitch through it, it was all I thought about. And then you have surgery, and the whole time I'm thinking I finally got an opportunity that I had been dreaming about for years, having a spot going into spring training knowing I was on the team."

Now, Wright's optimism has finally returned.

He will head to Fort Myers in early January with the goal of hitting the ground running when spring training rolls around. And now, with Eduardo Rodriguez sidelined for the beginning of the 2018 season with his own knee injury, Wright knows there is a very real chance to slide back into the spot he left behind.

"I feel good now, and that gives me that energy where I'm doing everything harder and everything I'm doing I'm trying to do perfect. You're trying to use it as a blessing instead of a curse," he said. "I don't feel like I'm anywhere close to where I want to be going into spring training, but I'm way ahead of where I normally am because of the fact that I rested. I got checked out on my shoulder, and I haven't had to have one person look at my shoulder since May. Everything is firing the way it should be. I know what I'm doing is right, now it's just about kicking it up a little bit."

"I feel like the way I'm approaching pitching this year is like I did in 2016. Do I have a good chance to make the team? I do. I know I do. Could I easily be designated? Yeah. I know that. Could I be released? Yeah. Could I be traded? Yeah? ... I just want to get back to being an athlete. That's my goal right now. Obviously, the baseball stuff will come, but I need to forget about crap and concentrate on getting my body ready for spring training. I just want to make sure I'm 100 percent and ready to go come April."