

## ***The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, October 31, 2017***

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

#### **Alex Bregman, Blake Swihart left impression on Red Sox scouts**

Alex Speier

The link between Alex Bregman, Blake Swihart, and the Red Sox seems at times as if it's stretched forever. When area scout Matt Mahoney and Red Sox scouting director Amiel Sawdaye drove across Albuquerque to work out Swihart (then a high school senior) in the spring of 2011, Bregman – then a high school junior at the Albuquerque Academy – joined his best friend in the workout just because he couldn't imagine any place he'd rather be.

The impression made by both players was considerable.

“It was clear that Blake was the best player in the state of New Mexico in 2011 and Alex was going to be the best player in New Mexico in 2012,” Mahoney recalled.

When the Red Sox plucked Swihart in the first round that year, signability questions swirled around the highly regarded catcher. When Mahoney needed a pulse for what Swihart was thinking, he could connect with Bregman.

The following year, when Bregman's stock fell (due to a broken hand) from that of a first-rounder to the 29th round, it was the Sox who selected him. Swihart would have loved to have seen his close friend join the Sox, but he knew that the future star wouldn't stand for slipping, and would instead go to Louisiana State.

“I could have told you at 17 he was going to compete at the big league level, the way he played the game. You knew he was a special player since he was young,” Swihart recalled this month. “He would have been a first rounder out of high school if he didn't break his finger. I think that scared teams away a little bit, because he missed the whole year with a broken hand. I think if anyone would have picked him and signed him, he would have been exactly where he is now.”

The long history between the two helps to explain why the final days of the 2017 regular season had long been circled by both the Bregman and Swihart families, who planned to convene when the Astros wrapped up the season in Boston in order to enjoy the shared station of the duo.

Just weeks later, however, they're in drastically different spots. Bregman's walkoff single in the bottom of the 10th inning capped one of the craziest games in World Series history – a 13-12 Houston victory – while adding to a remarkable playoff run that has seen him homer twice off Chris Sale, once off Clayton Kershaw, and once off of Kenley Jansen. The 2015 No. 2 overall pick is an emerging star.

Swihart, meanwhile, wrapped up his game with Escogido in the Dominican Winter League shortly before the first pitch of Game 5 between the Dodgers and Astros. At a time when Bregman is arriving somewhere near baseball's summit, Swihart is playing winter ball in search of a toehold in his professional career after a two-year slide from a lofty perch.

Yet the sight of Bregman's success – with the shared history between the two players – nonetheless offered something of a reminder. Swihart has been all but forgotten in the last two seasons, hard years in which he lost his job as the Red Sox' Opening Day catcher early in 2016, suffered a season-ending ankle injury while playing leftfield in early June of that year, and never truly rebounded physically during an awful, injury-riddled 2017 campaign.

But in 2015, when Bregman was being drafted out of LSU, Swihart looked like a potential star. He hit well (.274/.319/.392 in 84 games) and improved over the course of the year. Down the stretch, he gained growing comfort with Red Sox pitchers, whom he helped navigate through a strong finishing kick. And he carried some measure of the same sort of self-confidence and swagger that has endeared Bregman to his teammates in Houston; as had been the case dating to his time in the lower levels of the Sox system, young teammates seemed to feed off Swihart's energy and growing belief in himself.

At a time when the Sox not only need to add star power to the middle of their order but also to improve their depth with players who are both versatile and possess upside – ideally while adding energy to the clubhouse mix – Swihart has a chance to check a lot of boxes.

The 25-year-old is off to a strong start in the Dominican, hitting .417/.517/.500 with five walks and four strikeouts through eight games as a catcher and designated hitter. While he has yet to play a defensive position other than catcher, he's also available to Escobedo as both a first baseman and leftfielder. (The former position is notable because it's one that Swihart started playing late this season; the latter is significant because Swihart hasn't played it in a game since suffering his 2016 injury.)

In some ways, Swihart has the potential to make a considerable impact on the state of the 2018 Red Sox. If he cannot move past the injury, then at a time when he is out of minor league options, Swihart's time in the organization may be nearing its conclusion. It wouldn't come as a shock to see him traded before Opening Day.

On the other hand, if he can regain health and tap back into a good fraction of the potential he showed in 2015, then as a switch-hitting catcher/first baseman/corner outfielder, he has at least a chance to follow the path of other forgotten players who took longer paths to major contributions.

Players like Marwin Gonzalez, Chris Taylor, Austin Barnes, Justin Turner, Kike Hernandez ... all of them required twisting paths before ultimately finding their way into impact roles for teams now competing for the title. If Swihart can do the same, then he'd once again find himself on terrain similar to that of his good friend Bregman.

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

### **If Boston Red Sox trade for Stanton, his contract presents advantages, disadvantages**

Christopher Smith

The Miami Marlins plan to trade Giancarlo Stanton and the Boston Red Sox have been linked in trade rumors to the slugger for years.

Contract aside, Stanton is just what the Red Sox need. He led the majors with 59 home runs and 132 RBIs during 2017.

Meanwhile, the Red Sox ranked last in the majors in home runs (168). So Stanton hit 35 percent of the number of home runs the Red Sox bashed as a team.

Now onto that contract ...

Stanton signed a record 13-year, \$325-million megadeal in November 2014.

The contract is backloaded with the smaller yearly salaries at the beginning of the deal and the much larger yearly salaries in the later years.

The extension officially began in 2016 with him earning \$9 million. He then earned \$14.5 million in 2017.

The remaining deal:

2018: \$25 million; 2019: \$26 million; 2020: \$26 million; 2021: \$29 million; 2022: \$29 million; 2023: \$32 million; 2024: \$32 million; 2025: \$32 million; 2026: \$29 million; 2027: \$25 million; 2028: \$25 million team option, \$10 million buyout.

He can opt out of his contract following the 2020 season but that seems unlikely.

#### THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGE

The money he's making each season -- such as \$32 million in 2023, 2024 and 2025 -- isn't as important as his average annual salary.

A players' average annual salary -- Stanton's is \$25 million -- is what counts toward the team's yearly payroll.

His \$25 million is pretty reasonable for a superstar, especially as contracts will continue to inflate in the coming years.

David Price's average annual salary is \$31 million -- \$6 million more than Stanton's.

The Red Sox pay Hanley Ramirez an average annual salary of \$22 million and Rick Porcello \$20.625 million.

The 2018 offseason's free agent class might be the strongest ever. It will be headlined by Bryce Harper, Manny Machado, Josh Donaldson, Andrew McCutchen, Dallas Keuchel, Andrew Miller and potentially even Clayton Kershaw and Price if they choose to opt out of their contracts.

Harper, Machado, Kershaw and other players next offseason are bound to earn average annual salaries exceeding \$30 million.

Major League Baseball's base tax threshold is set at \$197 million for 2018. It increases to \$206 million in 2019, \$208 million in 2020 and \$210 million in 2021.

Teams are hit with steeper tax penalties for exceeding the threshold by \$20 million, \$20-\$40 million and \$40 million or more. Exceeding the base tax threshold by \$40 million also causes a team's top draft pick to be moved back 10 spots in the following MLB draft.

#### THE BIGGEST DISADVANTAGE

The actual money isn't the major issue. The Red Sox and Fenway Park are money-making machines.

The main focus should be the \$25 million average annual salary and the advantages and disadvantages of a \$25 million average annual salary in the later years of this contract (11 years remain).

A \$25 million average annual salary is reasonable --and it might be a bargain for a superstar in 5-10 years. But Stanton must stay healthy and relatively productive in the later years of the deal for it to remain reasonable.

The final year of the contract (2028) is Stanton's age 38 season.

The Red Sox released Pablo Sandoval during the 2017 season. Not only do they have to eat Sandoval's remaining contract, but his average annual value of \$19 million still counts toward the Red Sox's payroll in both 2018 and 2019 despite him no longer being in the organization.

That's how these multi-year contracts can really sting.

And so if the Red Sox chose to release Stanton in 2025 because of a serious drop in production, his \$25 million average annual salary would continue to count toward the team's payroll in 2026, 2027 and 2028.

Stanton has played an average of 127 games over the past seven years (or since his first full major league season in 2011).

So he has dealt with injuries already. That said, being a DH could help him to stay on the field.

The Red Sox certainly need to weigh the risk/reward of a \$25 million average annual salary and its advantages/disadvantages now and in the future.

### **Michael Chavis, Red Sox power-hitting prospect, named to Arizona Fall League All-Star team**

Christopher Smith

Boston Red Sox power-hitting prospect Michael Chavis has been selected to play in the Arizona Fall League All-Star Game.

He was the only Red Sox prospect chosen.

The game is this Saturday at 8:08 p.m., eastern.

He'll play for the Western Division All-Star team.

Chavis, a 2014 first-round draft pick who is ranked the No. 2 prospect in the Red Sox system, is 14-for-52 (.269) with a .316 on-base percentage, .423 slugging percentage, .739 OPS, one homer five doubles, nine RBIs, nine runs, three walks and nine strikeouts in 12 games for Peoria.

The 22-year-old won the 2017 Red Sox minor league Offensive Player of the Year award.

A right-handed hitter, Chavis finished with 31 homers, 35 doubles, two triples, 94 RBIs and a .282/.347/.563/.910 line in 126 games between High-A Salem (59 games) and Portland (67 games).

He'll likely start the 2018 season with Triple-A Pawtucket.

### **Red Sox can prevent Brentz from reaching minor league free agency and it makes sense to do it**

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox and Bryce Brentz have one final chance to make things work.

Boston chose not to add Brentz to its 40-man roster as a way to promote him as a September call-up in 2017.

President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski's decision was somewhat surprising. After all, the Sox could have used a right-handed hitter off the bench, especially with Chris Young struggling mightily vs. left-handed pitching.

Brentz bashed 31 home runs, stroked 21 doubles, one triple and slashed .271/.334/.529/.863 in 121 games for Triple-A Pawtucket during 2017. .

The 2010 36th-overall draft pick -- who leads the Mexican Winter League with five homers in 13 games -- is eligible for minor league free agency this offseason.

He and other minor leaguers can become free agents on the fifth day after the final game of the World Series.

But the Red Sox also have the ability to prevent him from reaching free agency if they were to add him to the 40-man roster before he officially becomes a free agent.

So why would Dombrowski do this now if he didn't do it in September?

The Red Sox's 2018 payroll already is approaching the \$197 million tax threshold in place for 2018 before Dombrowski is able to make any trades or signings this offseason.

Boston almost certainly will exceed the threshold in 2018 to improve its offense. It just depends how much they plan to go over.

Teams are hit with steeper penalties for exceeding the threshold by \$20 million, \$20-\$40 million and \$40 million or more. And so it might be wise to save some payroll in one area: fourth outfielder.

Chris Young will be a free agent this offseason and so his \$6.5 million average annual salary is off the books.

Maybe Dombrowski should let some less expensive alternatives, including Brentz, compete for the fourth outfielder job during spring training.

The Red Sox might be one of the teams to pursue top free agent power hitter J.D. Martinez. They also might be interested in Jay Bruce.

Martinez is an outfielder but he also might be better suited for DH.

In that scenario, he could play outfield on occasion if needed there and provide some insurance if the Red Sox chose a cheaper option as their fourth outfielder.

Bruce has the ability to play outfield and first base. So he also could provide outfield insurance if the Red Sox were to use him at DH or first base.

If Brentz did not make the Red Sox's 25-man roster out of spring training and he cleared through waivers, he then could elect for free agency. So he'd still receive an opportunity with another team in 2018 if things didn't work out in Boston. He wouldn't be stuck in Pawtucket.

Any player who is outrighted for a second time has the chance to elect for free agency. It would be Brentz's second outright.

The Red Sox weren't willing to designate any players on the 40-man roster to make room for Brentz in September. Seven 40-man spots will clear when Mitch Moreland, Blaine Boyer, Fernando Abad, Chris Young, Doug Fister, Rajai Davis and Eduardo Nunez declare for free agency following the World Series.

But the Red Sox also will have to add five players (Steven Wright, Josh Rutledge, Tyler Thornburg, Robbie Ross Jr. and Marco Hernandez) from the 60-day DL to the 40-man roster.

And they will add free agents and Rule 5 Draft players to the 40-man roster during the offseason.

And so Dombrowski and the Red Sox might feel Brentz again is not worth one of those 40 roster spots.

But it seems like smart business to give him one final chance.

Brentz was on the 40-man roster last spring training. But he was out of minor league options and didn't make Boston's Opening Day roster. And so the Sox had to designate him for assignment. He cleared waivers and was outrighted to Pawtucket where he had a sensational season.

## \* **RedSox.com**

### **Inbox: JBJ trade a possibility in offseason?**

Ian Browne

Do you see the Red Sox trading Jackie Bradley Jr. to sign J.D. Martinez to play left field, as well as signing an impact bat at first base such as Eric Hosmer or Carlos Santana?

-- @J\_SAB34

It could happen. Bradley is an elite center fielder who would be attractive to a lot of other teams, and the Red Sox could get something for him to help fill another need on the club.

Crystal-ball gazing, what's the Opening Day starting lineup against Tampa Bay?

-- @keiranmbellis

Eduardo Nunez 2B, Andrew Benintendi LF, Mookie Betts RF, Hosmer 1B, Martinez DH, Rafael Devers 3B, Xander Bogaerts SS, Bradley CF, Christian Vazquez C.

Obviously, this would entail going way over the luxury tax, but if we've learned anything this October, it's that you now need a heavy-hitting lineup to have legitimate championship aspirations. The Red Sox finished last in the American League in homers in 2017 with 168. It's no coincidence that the Yankees and Astros, the two teams who played in the AL Championship Series, ranked 1-2.

Martinez, with a right-handed swing built for Fenway, could quickly help Boston climb up the rankings in this department. He clubbed 45 homers in 2017, third to Giancarlo Stanton and Aaron Judge. Hosmer is a left-handed hitter who has power to the opposite field -- something that would play well in Fenway. The Red Sox also have several players capable of hitting more home runs than they did last year, including Betts, Bogaerts and Hanley Ramirez. Manager Alex Cora will soon name a new hitting coach, and it won't be surprising if the Red Sox start focusing more on launch angle as an organization.

Think the Red Sox will make a run at Jake Arrieta?

-- @BigSexy\_22

My hunch is that president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski will go all in on the offense this winter, and if there are still needs in the starting rotation, he will be more likely to address those by midseason.

Is David Ortiz even a consideration for hitting coach?

-- @oxypez

No. Ortiz has far too many interests in his post-career life to take on the rigors of being a full-time coach on the Major League staff. As you've seen during this postseason, Big Papi is having a lot of fun with his studio-analyst role. He also has many business ventures. Players who spend two decades in the game don't often want to get right back into it as a full-time coach.

With Cora on board, would you expect Rusney Castillo to be put on the 40-man roster?

-- @ogp44

Look for Castillo to get an invite to Spring Training like he did last year. Given the luxury-tax implications of putting Castillo back on the roster, I don't see him making the club as a backup. Castillo does serve as

insurance if anyone suffers a significant injury and Cora did manage Castillo in winter ball, so it will be interesting to see how that relationship evolves.

Best guess at starting rotation at the beginning of the season?

-- @KPD\_1895

Chris Sale, David Price, Drew Pomeranz, Rick Porcello, Steven Wright.

Other than a power bat, what's the biggest move the Red Sox should make?

-- @zacsimoneau

They need to re-sign free agent Nunez. This would have been a priority even if Dustin Pedroia didn't have surgery that will keep him out the first couple of months of the season. Without Pedroia, it's vital the Red Sox retain Nunez for his bat at the top of the order.

### **Chavis to represent Red Sox at Fall Stars Game**

Jonathan Mayo

For the past quarter-century, the Arizona Fall League has served as a springboard for players to leap up to the big leagues and reach stardom there. Since 2006, the AFL has gathered all of the future stars on one field for the Fall Stars Game. The rosters for this year's edition were announced on Monday and, as usual, they are jam packed with talent.

The 12th edition of the Fall Stars Game will take place at Salt River Fields at 5 p.m. local time (8 p.m. ET) on Saturday and will be broadcast on MLB Network and streamed live on MLB.com. The collection of talent on the East and West teams currently includes a total of 10 members of MLB Pipeline.com's Top 100 prospects list.

Three of the top 10 prospects will be participating, starting with No. 2 overall prospect Victor Robles of the Nationals, the outfielder on the East squad who just joined the AFL after being on Washington's Division Series roster. Braves outfielder Ronald Acuna, the No. 5 prospect, will be in the opposing outfield, as will Astros prospect Kyle Tucker (No. 7).

Pirates right-hander Mitch Keller is the highest-ranked pitching prospect in the AFL, and in the game as a member of the West. His Top 100 counterpart on the East is Yankees lefty Justus Sheffield. The other Top 100 prospects playing in the game are Brewers outfielder Corey Ray on the East, while the West roster has the Indians' Francisco Mejia, the Padres' Luis Urias, Yusniel Diaz of the Dodgers and Michael Chavis from the Red Sox.

"It's an honor to come here and be recognized as one of the best here," Ray said. "It's an honor and a testament to the hard work I've put in and hopefully I'm an MLB All-Star one day.

"You play against the talent and you admire because guys are really good so just to play against the guys and play with the guys and pick their brains. Hopefully I can take something from that game that will make me a better baseball player."

This kind of game isn't new for eight of the participants. That group played in the SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game in Miami this past July. In addition to Top 100 players Robles, Acuna, Tucker, Mejia (he also went in 2016) and Ray, Orioles lefty Tanner Scott, Astros first baseman Yordan Alvarez and Padres first baseman Josh Naylor played in that super-prospect game. Including Scottt, Alvarez and Naylor, there are 28 additional prospects not on the Top 100 list who are on their individual team's Top 30, helping to make the game one-stop shopping for prospect fans.

"My first reaction was shocked," said Braden Bishop, No. 5 on the Mariners' Top 30. "I think anytime you can put yourself in this league alone, it's an honor. But then when you get named to something like that it definitely takes you back for a second. I'm honored and I think it's going to be a great experience."

#### Final 2 Vote

Fans have the opportunity to add even more talent to both rosters via the Fall League Final 2 Vote. Three players have been nominated for the East and West. The East choices are Billy McKinney and Estevan Florial from the Yankees (Florial would give the game one more Top 100 and Futures Game player), as well as Angels first baseman Matt Thaiss. Options for the West are Indians first baseman Bobby Bradley, Royals shortstop Nicky Lopez and Rangers outfielder Yanio Perez. Voting concludes at 2 p.m. ET on Wednesday.

This slightly different fall classic has a strong track record of predicting big league success. One Dodgers prospect who homered in last year's Fall Stars Game is currently playing in the World Series and is almost certainly going to be the National League Rookie of the Year. Yep, that would be Cody Bellinger. The 2015 edition of the game featured Yankees catcher Gary Sanchez, while current Major League stars like Francisco Lindor and Corey Seager played in the game in 2014.