

## ***The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, November 1, 2017***

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

#### **Red Sox hope new voice will help young outfielders fulfill promise**

Peter Abraham

At first glance, the Red Sox seem to have a strong outfield, three players with game-changing abilities at the plate, in the field, and on the bases.

Right fielder Mookie Betts is one of the best all-around players in the majors. Left fielder Andrew Benintendi has shown All-Star capabilities in his two seasons. Jackie Bradley Jr. combines power and uncanny defensive skills in center.

Based on WAR, Betts, Benintendi, and Bradley were the three best position players on a team that won 93 games and the American League East. Many teams would happily swap their outfield for what the Red Sox have.

But something was missing in 2017, and it was part of what led to the Red Sox firing John Farrell and selecting Alex Cora as manager.

Statistically, Betts, Benintendi, and Bradley all took steps back from 2016. Bradley's OPS fell 109 points to .726. Betts's took a tumble from .897 to .803. And while Benintendi played only 34 games in 2016, his numbers dropped from that initial level, too.

When the Sox fired Farrell on Oct. 11, Dave Dombrowski did not mention any players by name when explaining his reasoning. But his motivation was apparent when he mentioned what he was looking for in the next manager.

"I think it's important for whomever it is to relate to those youngsters and not only relate to them but help them get better as players," Dombrowski said.

That encompasses the outfielders. Dombrowski also mentioned players "capable of having better years." That, too, was an oblique reference to Betts, Benintendi, and Bradley.

That Betts spent much of spring training tamping down expectations by saying he couldn't hope to repeat his success in 2016 was something the Sox should have corrected.

Benintendi fell into a three-week slump after the All-Star break, came out of it in August, then was pedestrian again in September. The rookie was hard on himself in slumps but also claimed there was nothing he needed to change. That mind-set also needed adjustment.

Bradley, too, was beset by long slumps, a career-long issue. He should be better equipped to end those dips.

Whether Cora alone can change that is uncertain. But Dombrowski believed a new voice was needed for the young players to reach their potential.

Betts and Benintendi would seem untouchable on the trade market, Bradley less so.

But there would be risks to moving Bradley. Benintendi is at best an average left fielder at this stage of his career and may not be suited for center field over the long term. Bradley also is just the sort of player who could flourish with a different manager.

There is an organization-wide lack of depth in the outfield that almost certainly will be addressed in the offseason.

Chris Young started 41 games last season (34 in left field) but is unlikely to return. Young was signed for two years and \$14 million for his skill at hitting lefthanded pitching. But he hit only .254 with a .762 OPS in 199 plate appearances against lefties as a member of the Red Sox.

Via free agency or trade, the Red Sox need a righthanded-hitting outfielder capable of filling in for Benintendi or Bradley.

Brock Holt, a lefthanded hitter, played only 11 games in the outfield last season. Since playing in the 2015 All-Star Game, Holt has dealt with a series of injuries, including a concussion, and hit .246 with a .653 OPS.

In switch hitter Blake Swihart and righthanded-hitting Sam Travis, the Sox have two intriguing depth options. But are they reliable outfielders?

Swihart has not played the outfield since June 4, 2016, the day he severely sprained his left ankle trying to make a catch against the wall in foul territory at Fenway Park.

Swihart is out of minor league options and the Sox plan to bring him to spring training as a utility player who can catch and play at least first base, third base, and left field. But he would have to earn that spot.

Travis, a first baseman since college, played left field in the Dominican Winter League on Oct. 22.

Travis has hit only 28 home runs in 1,380 minor league at-bats and to this point does not project as an everyday first baseman. But if he has the athletic ability to play in left field, he could help the major league team in a bench role.

Beyond that, the Sox do not have much depth. Tzu-Wei Lin, who made his major league debut last season, has played 32 games in center field in the minors. He is a utility candidate.

Danny Mars, a sixth-round pick in 2014, played at Double A Portland last season and hit .304. He had six home runs, giving him 10 in 331 career minor league games.

Aneury Tavarez, a veteran minor leaguer, was a Rule 5 Draft selection by Baltimore last season. He was returned to the Sox and hit .244 with a .692 OPS in 58 minor league games.

The Red Sox also have Rusney Castillo, a 27-year-old Triple A All-Star. He is a potentially helpful player, but there are complications.

Castillo was signed to a seven-year, \$72.5 million contract in 2014, then was dropped off the 40-man roster in 2016. If Castillo returns to the roster, his salary would count against the luxury tax. It's unlikely the Red Sox would want a significant portion of their payroll devoted to an oft-injured fourth outfielder.

#### OUTFIELD:

Primary 2017 starters: Andrew Benintendi (LF), Mookie Betts (RF), Jackie Bradley Jr. (CF).

Projected 2018 starters: Benintendi (LF), Betts (RF), Bradley Jr. (CF).

Major league depth: Brock Holt, Blake Swihart.

Prospects to watch: Tzu-Wei Lin, Danny Mars, Sam Travis, Aneury Tavarez.

In limbo: Rusney Castillo.

### **Will the Red Sox just throw money at their problems again?**

Alex Speier

With the end of the World Series approaching, the onset of the offseason is nigh.

If the Astros beat the Dodgers in Game 6 of the World Series Tuesday, free agency will commence at 9 a.m. on Wednesday. With it, a question of organizational direction confronts the Red Sox.

The top end of the free agent market offers the Red Sox clear upgrades in areas of need. Slugging outfielder/designated hitter J.D. Martinez would transform the middle of the order. A trade for Giancarlo Stanton would likewise alter drastically the look of a lineup that ranked last in the America League in homers. First baseman Eric Hosmer has a chance to offer the Red Sox one of the top pure hitters in the AL, a lefthanded hitter who might thrive at Fenway like few others.

Those are the obvious answers to a season-long problem in 2017. Yet there is a question that lords over potential solutions: Are the Red Sox nearing a point where they need to take a more measured – and creative – approach to their shortcomings?

The Sox have reached the playoffs in back-to-back years, and they are in a position to remain competitive. Yet the remarkable assets – prospects and financial flexibility – that characterized their recent offseasons look drastically different now.

The Sox have moved aggressively over the last three years to address deficiencies with high-end solutions. The team outspent the field to add Rusney Castillo and Hanley Ramirez in hopes of upgrading its woeful outfield production in 2014, while signing Pablo Sandoval to address a disaster at third base. After 2015, the Sox addressed their rotation shortcomings by signing the best pitcher on the market, David Price, while solidifying the back end of their bullpen with another elite option in trading for Craig Kimbrel. After 2016, the team dealt for Chris Sale – a pitcher whose production came at a relative financial bargain, but who required the team to deal from the top of an elite farm system.

The Sox must decide if it's in their best interests to pursue the top end of the free agent or trade market. In some ways, this offseason could represent a fascinating choice between surface and depth – with the Sox potentially facing a choice between, say, making a move for Martinez or pursuing multiple shorter-term and less-expensive options such as Eduardo Nunez and Carlos Santana or Jay Bruce.

The obvious answer, the one that would be in line with what the Red Sox have done in recent offseasons, would be to sign the best available solution – a Martinez or Hosmer. Yet the two teams in the World Series offer a reminder that the most expensive solutions aren't always necessary ones.

The Dodgers, for all of their financial might, haven't signed a free agent to a multi-year deal with an average annual salary of more than \$16 million since Andrew Friedman took over as the team's president of baseball operations after the 2014 season. Astros GM Jeff Luhnow's most expensive free-agent signing was a four-year, \$52 million deal for Josh Reddick this past winter.

At some point, teams with competitive aspirations have to make a choice to pay a steep price for players they want. But at some point, teams with aspirations to remain competitive for the long haul – rather than positioning themselves for short-term excellence followed by a steep crash – have to step out of the cycle of addressing every problem with the most expensive solution (in terms of dollars, prospects, or both).

The Sox have spent the last three winters shopping at Tiffany's. Can they afford to keep doing so? Can they afford to not keep doing so? With free agency set to commence on either Wednesday or, if there's a Game 7 of the World Series, on Thursday, the team's answer to that question may be nearing.

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

### **Red Sox Top 25 Prospects 2017: Groome, Chavis, Mata, Houck head the list**

Christopher Smith

With Rafael Devers graduating from prospect status, the Boston Red Sox have a new No. 1.

Southpaw Jason Groome leads MassLive.com's final 2017 top 25 Red Sox prospect list despite his injury-plagued season in 2017.

The top 10 includes three 2017 draft picks (Tanner Houck, Cole Brannen and Alex Scherff) as well as 2017 top amateur international signee Daniel Flores, a catcher who has drawn early comparisons to Yankees' Gary Sanchez.

Danny Diaz — another 2017 international free agent — appears in the top 25.

#### **MASSLIVE.COM'S TOP 25 RED SOX PROSPECTS**

##### **1. JASON GROOME**

Left-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 19

The seventh-overall pick in the 2016 draft had an injury-plagued season in 2017, his first full year of professional ball.

Groome — a hard-throwing lefty who has drawn early comparisons to Clayton Kershaw — left his Low-A Greenville season debut April 10 with a lat injury. He returned in June to make three rehab starts with Short Season Lowell before returning to Greenville on July 4.

A forearm strain ended his season in late August.

The 6-foot-6, 220-pounder went 3-9 with a 5.69 ERA and 1.43 WHIP in 14 starts. But he did strike out 72 batters in 55 1/3 innings (11.7 strikeouts per nine innings).

He needs to cut down on his walks (4.9 per nine innings).

Groome has the potential to be special if he puts everything together. He won't turn 20 until next Aug. 23. Baseball America ranked him 87th on its midseason list after he began the 2017 season at No. 41.

##### **2. MICHAEL CHAVIS**

Third Baseman/First Baseman, age 22

Michael Chavis earned the organization's minor league Offensive Player of the Year award.

The right-handed batter 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).

Chavis is playing in the Arizona Fall League and was named a Western Division All-Star. He's learning first base in Arizona and has started games there for Peoria.

He started 70 games at third base and 55 games at DH during the 2017 season. His playing time in the field was limited because of an elbow injury.

Baseball America ranked Chavis the No. 96 prospect on its midseason top 100 list.

### 3. BRYAN MATA

Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 18

Mata, who turned 18 in May, went 5-6 with a 3.74 ERA, 1.31 WHIP, .259 batting average against, 74 strikeouts and 26 walks in 17 starts (77 innings) for Low-A Greenville.

Boston signed the 6-foot-3, 160-pounder to an international amateur free agent contract Jan. 27, 2016, out of Venezuela.

Brian Bannister, Red Sox vice president of pitching development, told MassLive.com about the young righty earlier this year: "Good body control Still projectable. He's got a good feel for pitching already. "Changeup's ahead of the breaking ball. But depth to the changeup. So you have a nice lean body. He can command the fastball, work the changeup off of it. And I think the breaking ball is going to continue to get better. But just an advanced feel (for pitching)."

### 4. TANNER HOUCK

Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 21

The Red Sox drafted Houck out of Mizzou with the 24th overall pick in the 2017 draft. He has an aggressive delivery which is somewhat reminiscent of Cy Young winner Max Scherzer's delivery. Scherzer also pitched at the University of Missouri.

Boston eased Houck into professional ball during his first half season like it does with all its newly-drafted young hurlers. The Sox had him an innings count per start.

The 6-foot-5, 218-pound righty posted a 3.63 ERA, 1.30 WHIP, .239 batting average against, 25 strikeouts and eight walks in 11 starts (22 1/3 innings) for Short Season Lowell.

Baseball America called him "the second coming of Jake Peavy."

During his junior season at Mizzou in 2017, he went 4-7 with a 3.33 ERA and 95 strikeouts in 14 starts (94 2/3 innings). The opposition batted .220 against him. He posted a 3.26 ERA and 292 strikeouts in 300 2/3 innings during college

### 5. DANIEL FLORES

Catcher, age 16

Both MLB Pipeline.com and Baseball America ranked Flores, a 16-year-old from Venezuela, the No. 2 overall prospect in the 2017 amateur international free agent class.

Boston signed Flores to a \$3.1 million bonus.

Baseball America's Ben Badler dubbed Flores the best international catching prospect since Gary Sanchez signed with the Yankees on July 2, 2009.

"We liked the overall package (with Flores)," Red Sox assistant GM Eddie Romero said. "The more we got to know him off the field, too, we determined he had really good catcher makeup. He cared about winning the game and guiding his pitcher through a game over any personal stats.

"Skill-wise, he's got a very advanced defensive profile. He's got very soft hands. He's got a very quick release. He's got an above-average arm right now."

### 6. SAM TRAVIS

First Baseman/DH, age 24

Travis, who turned 24 in August, had an inconsistent year for Triple-A Pawtucket in 2017 after his 2016 season ended May 29 because of a torn ACL.

He batted .270 with a .351 on-base percentage, .375 slugging percentage, .726 OPS, 14 doubles, six homers and 24 RBIs in 82 games for Pawtucket.

Travis — who also appeared in three different stints with Boston — summed up his season as "unacceptable."

"There were a number of times I came up with runners in scoring position and I didn't come through or hit into a double play," he told MassLive.com. "That's not me. That's not who I am. I'm a guy that drives in runs. I live for that situation. I live for driving in runs, helping the team win. And I want to be that guy at the dish with runners at scoring position and two outs. I want the game in my hands."

Travis, a second-rounder in 2014 out of Indiana, does feel he improved defensively at first base.

He needs to improve vs. right-handed pitching.

The right-handed batter went 16-for-42 (.381) with five doubles against lefties in his three major league stints. But he went only 4-for-34 (.118) vs. righties.

He's a blue-collar player who eats, sleeps and drinks baseball. He certainly has the right attitude to be successful.

#### 7. COLE BRANNEN Center Fielder, age 19

The left-handed hitter, who Boston selected with its 63rd-overall pick in 2017 out of The Westfield School in Perry, Ga., batted .231 (31-for-134) in the Gulf Coast League. All but two of his hits were singles.

But he showed a patient approach at the plate. He posted a .383 on-base percentage. He showed the same patience during a late-season promotion to Short Season Lowell.

He stroked only one hit in nine at-bats for the Spinners but walked four times (.385 OBP). He has speed. He was 10-for-12 in steal attempts in 42 games after signing.

Mike Rikard, Red Sox Vice President of amateur scouting, called Brannen a five-tool player.

"We like a lot of things about his approach and swing," Rikard said after the June Draft. "We were able to see him a lot in the summers. We really had a good comfort level that was developed through seeing him have successful at-bats against some of the better high school pitching in the country.

"We do see some power projection there, and he's a good runner, a well above-average runner."

Brannen batted .439 with five homers, 23 doubles and three triples in 82 at-bats during his senior year of high school in 2017.

He just turned 19 in August. He'll likely begin 2018 at Low-A Greenville.

#### 8. MIKE SHAWARYN Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 23

Shawaryn — who the Red Sox drafted in the fifth round in 2016 out of Maryland — had a solid first full professional season.

The 6-foot-2, 200-pounder went 3-2 with a 3.88 ERA, 1.07 WHIP and .222 batting average against in 10 starts (53 1/3 innings) for Low-A Greenville, then earned a promotion to High-A Salem.

He went 5-5 with a 3.76 ERA, 1.30 WHIP and .232 batting average against in 16 starts (81 1/3 innings) for Salem.

He averaged 11.3 strikeouts per nine innings and 3.2 walks in his 26 starts combined.

"What we've tried to do is reshape the breaking ball," Brian Bannister said earlier this season. "He was throwing a slurvier breaking ball in the mid-to-high 70s. Kind of a sweeping slurve. And he's added a true slider, kind of the 85 to 87 (mph) range. Gotten more aggressive with the changeup, the action on it. And also, he never elevated the fastball. So from that low slot, you see guys, your Scherzgers of the world, your Pedros, they're good at picking spots and elevating."

He just turned 23 on Sept. 17.

#### 9. ALEX SCHERFF

Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 19

Boston drafted the hard-throwing righty in the fifth round (161st overall) in the 2017 draft out of Colleyville Heritage in Colleyville, Texas.

The 6-foot-2, 209-pounder did not pitch in any professional games during 2017 after signing but he did participate in the fall instructional league. MLB.com's Jim Callis wrote Scherff "was especially impressive. He has a mid-90s fastball and an advanced changeup for a prep product."

He might be the most intriguing player the Red Sox took in the entire draft because of how hard he can throw and his very high ceiling coming out of high school.

Baseball America ranked him the No. 43 prospect entering the 2017 draft.

MLBPipeline.com ranked Scherff the No. 52 prospect entering this year's draft and noted, "He has hit 98 and held his velocity deep into games this spring. ... Scherff has one of the best changeups in the high school ranks, throwing it with deceptive arm speed and fade and earning plus grades from some evaluators, but there's still some question about his feel to spin a reliable breaking pitch."

Scherff likely dropped because of questions over his signability. But the Red Sox inked the Texas A&M commit to a contract June 23.

#### 10. JALEN BEEKS

Left-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 24

The 2014 12th-round draft pick — who played at Arkansas with Andrew Benintendi — earned the Red Sox's 2017 minor league Pitcher of the Year award

The 5-foot-11, 195-pounder finished 11-8 with a 3.29 ERA, 1.21 WHIP and .224 batting average against in 26 starts (145 innings) between Double-A Portland and Triple-A Pawtucket.

He averaged 9.6 strikeouts per nine innings and 3.4 walks.

He overhauled his mechanics and added a cutter to his repertoire last offseason.

"I wasn't allowing myself to get out and manipulate the baseball, so I made some mechanical changes," Beeks explained. "All of a sudden, I was able to do stuff that I wasn't able to do before. I was able to spin the ball better, be more consistent, which I'm still working on that."

Beeks is Rule 5 Draft eligible this offseason. And so the Red Sox would have to add him to the 40-man roster this month to protect him.

#### 11. JOSH OCKIMEY

First Baseman, age 22

Ockimey, a left-handed slugger, batted .274 with a .385 on-base percentage, .436 slugging percentage, .820 OPS, 14 homers, 27 doubles, two triples and 74 RBIs in 131 games for High-A Salem and Double-A Portland.

The 2014 fifth-round draft selection out of Neumann & Goretti Catholic (Penn.) slashed .272/.372/.427/.799 with three homers, seven doubles and 11 RBIs in 31 games for Portland after his late-season promotion.

He needs to improve vs. left-handed pitching, and he also has faded a bit each of the past two seasons after very hot starts.

Ockimey posted a .780 OPS in his final 34 games at Salem after he posted a .853 OPS in his first 66 games.

#### 12. BOBBY DALBEC

Third Baseman, age 22

The 6-foot-4, 225-pounder, who the Red Sox drafted in the fourth round in 2016 out of Arizona, missed two months during the 2017 season with a wrist injury.

He posted only a .246/.345/.437/.781 line with 13 homers, 15 doubles and 39 RBIs in 78 games for Low-A Greenville.

But the right-handed hitter finished strong. He slashed .278/.395/.519/.914 with six homers, eight doubles and 16 RBIs in 29 games during August before finishing with a homer and two doubles in three games during September.

He must cut down on his strikeouts (123 in 284 at-bats).

He participated in the fall instructional league.

#### 13. DARWINZON HERNANDEZ

Left-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 20

The Red Sox signed the 6-foot-2, 185-pound lefty out of Venezuela in August 2013.

He went 4-5 with a 4.01 ERA, 1.30 WHIP and .221 batting average in 23 starts (103 1/3 innings) for Low-A Greenville. He went 2-1 with a 3.20 ERA and .193 BAA in 11 starts to begin the season.

He'll need to cut down on his walks. He averaged 10.1 strikeouts per nine innings but also averaged 4.3 walks.

He did improve the control from 2016 when he averaged 6.7 walks in 14 starts for Lowell.

He'll turn 21 on Dec. 17.

#### 14. C.J. CHATHAM

Shortstop, age 22

Chatham played just one game (1-for-3) for High-A Salem because of a hamstring injury that derailed his 2017 season.

He appeared in six rehab games for the Gulf Coast League, going 5-for-16 with a homer and .389 on-base percentage.

He participated in the fall instructional league. A healthy and productive 2018 season is crucial for his development.

He posted a .259/.319/.426/.745 line with four homers, four doubles, one triple and 19 RBIs in 27 games for Short Season Lowell last year after signing a \$1.1 million bonus.

He's tall for a shortstop (6-foot-4) but he's an above average defender. The Red Sox were one of multiple teams to show interest in him as a pitcher coming out of high school.

#### 15. JAKE THOMPSON

Right-Handed Starter, age 23

The Red Sox drafted Thompson in the fourth round in 2017 out of Oregon State where he went 14-1 with a 1.96 ERA in 20 outings (19 starts) this past spring. Opponents batted .189 against him.

Boston eased him into professional ball during his first half season like it does with all its newly-drafted young hurlers. The Sox had him an innings count with Short Season Lowell.

He posted a 3.18 ERA, 1.41 WHIP, .238 batting average against, 11 strikeouts and six walks in seven starts (11 1/3 innings).

The 6-foot-2, 201-pound right-hander features a mid-90s fastball and MLB Pipeline.com ranked him the No. 71 prospect entering the draft while Baseball America had him ranked No. 83.

#### 16. RONIEL RAUDES

Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 19

The 6-foot-1, 160-pound righty, who Boston signed out of Nicaragua in 2014, earned the Red Sox's 2016 minor league Pitcher of the Year award.

But 2017 didn't go as well.

He went 4-7 with a 4.50 ERA, 1.53 WHIP and .296 batting average against in 23 starts (116 innings). His walk rate increased significantly during 2017. He averaged 3.4 walks per nine innings compared to 1.8 walks in 2016 (24 starts) and 1.1 walks in 2015 (15 games, 14 starts).

Bannister though said something very interesting about Raudes' development earlier in the season.

"We have plans for his mix, and he knows, a harder breaking ball in the future," Bannister explained. "But still being so young, still being kind of ahead of his age level, just being a little bit more conservative on what he's throwing and just focusing on fastball command with him."

#### 17. DANNY DIAZ

Third Baseman, age 16

The Red Sox inked Danny Diaz to a \$1.6 million signing bonus in July. They already have moved him from shortstop to third base.

"He's impressive physically," Red Sox assistant GM Eddie Romero told MassLive.com in August. "He's 6-foot-4, 215-pounds. We just got him in a couple weeks ago, and he's a power guy. He's big and strong and he's got a swing that's got some loft to it. He can drive the ball to all fields. He's got all-fields power."

"He loves playing defense, which I love," Romero added. "He's got very good hands. He's got a very good arm. He loves playing shortstop, but I just think he's going to get a little too big for it. So we've moved him over to third base now and he's taken to it.

"Our little league that we have in the Dominican right now, he's also just been performing very well, which is good to see because usually this early on, guys are just trying to get their feet wet. But he's taken to it really quickly. And I think he'll be able to impact the ball playing the third base position."

#### 18. TRAVIS LAKINS

Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 23

The 2015 sixth-round draft pick out of Ohio State dominated at High-A Salem to begin the season. He posted a 5-0 record, 2.61 ERA, 1.18 WHIP, 43 strikeouts, 13 walks and a .225 batting average against in seven starts (38 innings).

But he struggled after being promoted to Double-A Portland where he went winless in eight starts. He posted a 6.23 ERA, 1.81 WHIP and the opposition batted .301 against him.

His season ended July 3 because of a stress fracture in his elbow. The same injury shortened his 2017 season.

He had added a cutter/slider this season and things were looking so promising. And so it was an unfortunate way to end his season again.

"He has the potential to spin and shape four pitches," Bannister said earlier this year. "There's velo to the fastball. Working on that and power and depth to the changeup. He's always been able to spin a curveball."

#### 19. BRETT NETZER

Second Baseman, age 21

He became the third highest draft pick in UNC Charlotte program history when the Red Sox selected him 101st overall (third round) in 2017.

He began his professional career at Short Season Lowell where he batted .317 with a .376 on-base percentage, .390 slugging percentage, .767 OPS, six doubles, 14 RBIs, nine walks and 20 strikeouts in 22 games.

The Red Sox promoted him to Low-A Greenville where he slashed .260/.327/.300/.627 with four doubles, 13 RBIs, nine walks, 24 strikeouts and five steals in 26 games.

#### 20. AUSTIN MADDOX

Right-Handed Reliever, age 26

Austin Maddox made the Red Sox's ALDS roster after being a non-roster invitee to spring training camp and then spending most of 2017 in the minors. He even began the season with Double-A Portland.

The 2012 third round draft pick out of Florida — where he played with Red Sox pitcher Brian Johnson — appeared in 13 games over four major league stints. He allowed just one run and posted a 0.87 WHIP in 17 1/3 innings.

He showed tremendous command in his time with Boston, walking just two of the 67 batters he faced. He had much better control in his time with Boston than with Pawtucket.

He stranded all eight inherited runners and opponents went 0-for-10 with runners in scoring position. The only run he allowed came on a solo homer.

He's a candidate to make the 2018 Opening Day roster, but he does have minor league options remaining.

#### 21. BEN TAYLOR

Right-handed Reliever, age 24

Taylor made the Red Sox's 2017 Opening Day roster after entering spring training as a non-roster invitee. The 6-foot, 225-pounder, who Boston drafted out of South Alabama in the seventh round in 2015, posted a 5.19 ERA in 14 outings (17 1/3 innings). He recorded a 2.70 ERA in 12 outings (13 1/3 innings) for Pawtucket.

He posted a 3.12 ERA with Boston if you don't include his one really poor in Oakland (4 earned runs without recording an out May 20).

He missed some time with both a forearm injury and a left intercostal strain.

#### 22. CHANDLER SHEPHERD

Right-Handed Reliever, age 25

The 2014 13th-round draft pick out of Kentucky impressed quite a bit last spring training as a non-roster invitee. He made it all the way through to the final day of camp with the big league team while competing with Austin Maddox, Ben Taylor and Jamie Callahan for the final 25-man roster spot.

The 25th spot ended up going to Taylor.

The 6-foot-3, 185-pound Shepherd, who features a fastball, curveball and changeup, pitched for Triple-A Pawtucket in 2017.

He recorded a 4.07 ERA and 1.29 WHIP in 34 outings (59 2/3 innings). He had a 3.25 and 1.19 WHIP in 16 outings (27 2/3 innings) during the second half.

He has been starting games in Winter Ball for Naranjeros de Hermosillo of the Mexican League. He has allowed just three runs in 14 2/3 innings (three starts).

He's Rule 5 eligible this offseason and so the Red Sox will need to add him to the 40-man roster if they want to protect him.

#### 23. HECTOR VELAZQUEZ

Right-Handed Starting Pitcher, age 28

Velazquez had a terrible major league debut in Oakland on May 12. He allowed six runs on nine hits (three homers) in 5 innings.

But he then went 3-0 with a 0.92 ERA (2 earned runs, 19 2/3 innings) over his final seven outings (two starts).

He'll turn 29 on Nov. 26. He's not a hard thrower — his fastball averaged only 89.6 mph per Fangraphs.com — but he certainly has a good feel for pitching and knows how to record outs as more of a finesse pitcher.

He went 8-4 with a 2.21 ERA, 1.00 WHIP and .213 batting average against in 19 outings (102 innings) for Triple-A Pawtucket.

#### 24. YOAN MARTINEZ

Right-Handed Reliever, age 21

Boston signed Martinez out of the Dominican Republic in January 2016.

He posted a 1.11 ERA, 0.87 WHIP and .170 batting average against in 19 relief outings (32 1/3 innings) between Short Season Lowell and Low-A Greenville during 2017.

He pitched even better at Greenville after his promotion there, allowing one earned run and striking out 18 in 15 innings.

He just turned 21 on Aug. 29.

**TZU-WEI LIN**

Shortstop, Second Baseman, Third Baseman, age 23

Lin made the jump straight from Double-A Portland to Boston after slashing .302/.379/.491/.870 with five homers, nine doubles and three triples in 48 games for the Sea Dogs.

He filled in admirably at third base for Boston after Pablo Sandoval gave the Red Sox little production there. He slashed .268/.369/.339/.709 with two triples in 25 games.

He's a slick defender who has the ability to be a solid utility player for this club.

The Taiwan native, who nearly quit baseball in middle school, increased his OPS by 165 points from 2016 to 2017.

### **David Ortiz gives Alex Cora vote of confidence as incoming Boston Red Sox manager**

Jen McCaffrey

David Ortiz has been cast back into the World Series spotlight this October, if only on the broadcast side.

The former World Series MVP joined the FOX Sports broadcast this postseason and, by and large, has been received well by viewers.

Ben Reiter of Sports Illustrated documented Ortiz's transition from player to broadcaster in the magazine's latest issue.

Among the many topics discussed, include Ortiz's vote of confidence for his former teammate Alex Cora, who was recently named manager of the Red Sox.

"That's my boy," Ortiz told Reiter. "We played together in 2007, when we won the World Series, and we always stay in touch. He's a baseball guy. Very smart, man. He's going to be successful there."

Cora played for the Red Sox from 2005 to 2008 alongside Ortiz.

Despite his current FOX broadcasting role, Ortiz will remain in advisory position with the Red Sox after the club announced a long-term deal with the former designated hitter in September.