

## ***The Boston Red Sox Monday, April 1, 2019***

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

#### **Rick Porcello, Red Sox roughed up in loss to Mariners**

Peter Abraham

SEATTLE — As the Red Sox drew up the blueprint for their title defense, the starting rotation represented the bedrock upon which hopes of repeating would be built. The team's defining move of the offseason was the decision to re-sign Nathan Eovaldi to a four-year deal, with the expectation that his presence next to that of Chris Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, and Eduardo Rodriguez would limit losing skids and set the stage for sustained runs of excellence.

That outlook may well be borne out over the long expanse of the season, but a season-opening, four-game set veered from those expectations in startling fashion. On Sunday, Porcello became the fourth straight Red Sox starter to get mashed by the Mariners, with his nine-run yield in just 2⅓ innings dooming the Red Sox to a 10-8 defeat that dropped them to 1-3 after four contests.

In 2018, the consistency of the rotation helped the Red Sox to bulldoze their way unrelentingly toward 108 regular-season wins and 11 more in October. At no point did the team have more than two consecutive games in which the starting pitcher gave up six or more runs.

In the first series of the year, the Red Sox have already departed from that script. Porcello became the fourth straight Red Sox starter to allow at least six runs, the first time since at least 1902 that the Red Sox rotation had started a year so inauspiciously. The quartet of Sale, Eovaldi, Rodriguez, and Porcello combined to allow 28 runs (22 earned) in 15 innings, good for a 13.20 ERA. The 34 total runs allowed by the Red Sox staff were the most by the team in any series of four or fewer games since 2003.

The turn of events proved shocking but despite their disappointment, the Red Sox suggested that the poor stretch should be viewed more as an oddity than cause for alarm.

"It starts with the rotation. If they can go six [innings], we can go from there," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "The bullpen did an outstanding job. . . . If you told me coming into the series it was going to be this way, I'd say no chance. But it's baseball."

Though the Red Sox claimed an early 3-0 lead, Porcello soon gave it back with interest to the Mariners, allowing two runs on a bases-loaded, two-out single to center by Dee Gordon in the second inning and then, thanks in part to a defensive misplay, another seven during a third inning that he could not finish.

Mariners slugger Mitch Haniger led off the third by lofting a routine fly ball to left field. But J.D. Martinez — playing outfield in order to give Andrew Benintendi a day to rest after he slammed a foul ball into his right knee on Saturday night — lost it in the glare of a cloudless sky.

Porcello compounded his teammate's mistake by issuing a four-pitch walk to Jay Bruce, then hanging a slider to Omar Narvaez, which the catcher crushed into the right-field seats for a three-run homer and a 5-3 Seattle lead.

The Mariners kept adding on, taking advantage of uncharacteristic control issues by Porcello (four walks, tied for his second-most with the Sox, including three in the third) to plate four additional runs that inning — one on a Gordon sacrifice fly, one on a Mallex Smith RBI single that chased Porcello from the game with two outs, and two more when Haniger rifled a two-run double down the third base line against reliever Brian Johnson.

“Not good enough,” lamented Porcello. “You can’t give out four free passes in two innings. That was a big part of it for me. Just turn the page and get better.”

Still, as was the case while facing significant early deficits throughout the four-game series, the Red Sox bullpen performed brilliantly to limit the damage (Johnson, Brandon Workman, Colten Brewer, and Ryan Brasier allowed one run over 5⅓ innings while striking out eight), and the lineup did not back down.

Martinez blasted a three-run homer to left (his second of the year) off starter Wade LeBlanc in the fourth inning, a milestone mash that gave the Red Sox slugger 1,000 hits in his career.

“I didn’t know until I came back in and guys were telling me congrats,” said Martinez, who bartered a bat for the ball. “I was like, ‘Oh, that’s pretty cool.’”

After Bruce crushed a solo homer off Johnson to increase Seattle’s lead back to 10-6, Mookie Betts returned serve with a solo homer — his first of 2019 — off reliever Nick Rumbelow in the sixth to get within 10-7.

The Sox then threatened to complete the comeback in the final two innings. They put two on with two out for Rafael Devers in the top of the eighth. But the third baseman — who, like Martinez, crushed the ball throughout the season-opening series — hit a hard liner against ex-Sox reliever Roenis Elias that settled in the glove of leftfielder Domingo Santana to quell the threat.

The Red Sox mounted a final uprising in the ninth when Mariners reliever Cory Gearrin walked three batters to load the bases with one out. But after Chasen Bradford forced in one run with a bases-loaded walk to Blake Swihart, Christian Vazquez struck out on a slider and Jackie Bradley Jr. grounded out to second to end the contest.

With the defeat, the Sox dropped to 1-3 – matching the total number of losses they suffered in the first 20 games of their rampage to 108 regular-season victories in 2018.

“The first week of the season gets magnified,” said Cora. “We probably lost three out of four somewhere last year and the team has lost three out of four the last three years [each of which ended in AL East titles]. It’s part of it. We have to go to Oakland — they have a good team, they swing the bat well — and we’ll try to play good baseball, win the series, and move on.”

### **Red Sox close to 6-year deal worth \$120m with Xander Bogaerts**

Alex Speier

SEATTLE — The Red Sox are nearing agreement with shortstop Xander Bogaerts on a long-term deal that would keep the 26-year-old and two-time World Series winner in Boston well beyond his eligibility for free agency after the 2019 season.

According to multiple major league sources, the sides are nearing agreement on a six-year, \$120 million deal that will take effect in 2020, after the conclusion of Bogaerts’s one-year, \$12 million deal for the 2019 campaign. The deal, which is not yet finalized, includes an opt-out after 2022 and a \$20 million team option for 2026, which will become guaranteed with 535 plate appearances in 2025, so long as he is healthy at the end of that season.

Both Bogaerts and Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski declined to comment on the status of an agreement.

Bogaerts is the second Red Sox player in less than two weeks to eschew free agency in order to extend his time in Boston. Chris Sale likewise agreed to an extension, reaching a five-year, \$145 million deal that runs through 2024.

Bogaerts was signed along with his twin brother, catcher Jair Bogaerts, by the Red Sox as an amateur out of Aruba almost 10 years ago, in August 2009. He flew through their minor league system and in late 2013 became the youngest position player, at age 20, to make his big league debut with the Red Sox in more than 40 years, and played a key role in the Red Sox' title run that October.

Though Bogaerts struggled in his first full season of 2014, he emerged as a Silver Slugger winner as the top offensive shortstop in the American League in both 2015 and 2016, claiming the starting nod in the 2016 All-Star Game in San Diego. After injuries led to a down year in 2017, Bogaerts rebounded with a standout campaign in 2018, hitting .288 with a career-high in on-base percentage (.360), slugging (.522), homers (23), RBIs (103), doubles (45), and extra-base hits (71).

Manager Alex Cora frequently places Bogaerts among the top shortstops in the league, and his 2018 season certainly gave credence to the claim. According to Fangraphs, Bogaerts's overall performance was worth 4.8 Wins Above Replacement, 24th among big league position players and sixth among big league shortstops.

To the Red Sox, the performance wasn't shocking. To the contrary, it represented confirmation of the player the team thought he could become throughout his minor league career.

"If we were to project something going back five, seven years, yeah, this is the shortstop I hoped he'd be — an above-average hitter with above-average power. He's played very consistent defense," assistant GM Eddie Romero, who saw Bogaerts coming through the minors, said last fall. "I do think this is the Xander that [the Red Sox expected], someone who's a stalwart in the middle of your lineup."

Now that he has emerged in such a role, he appears likely to spend much if not all of his prime years with the only team for whom he's ever played.

### **Could light spring workload be the cause of Red Sox rotation's abysmal start?**

Peter Abraham

SEATTLE — That the Red Sox had all five of their starting pitchers working out at Fenway South a week before spring training officially opened seemed like a good sign.

But essentially that was all they did for seven weeks — work out.

Once the games started you had to get lucky to see Nate Eovaldi, Rick Porcello, David Price, Eduardo Rodriguez or Chris Sale in an actual game.

Porcello made three starts against major league teams and threw 12 innings. Eovaldi, Price and Sale each made two starts. Eovaldi threw only seven innings, Sale nine and Price 6⅔.

Rodriguez was the real workhorse; he started five games and pitched once in relief for a whopping 15 innings.

The Red Sox said it was all part of the plan. Because their pitchers had worked 14 games in the postseason, they wanted to protect their valuable arms with extra rest in spring training.

It made sense and was the product of much deliberation. But based on the four-game series against Seattle Mariners that finished up Sunday with a 10-8 loss, the Sox may have been too focused on rest and not enough on preparation.

Porcello was the latest Red Sox starter who didn't look ready. Given a 3-0 lead in the first inning, he allowed nine runs on six hits and four walks.

That five of the runs were unearned because J.D. Martinez dropped a fly ball in left field didn't change how poorly Porcello pitched.

"I've got to be a lot better," he said.

It was only the third time in 128 starts for the Sox that Porcello had four walks. Did that speak to his lack of action in spring training?

Manager Alex Cora was adamant it did not.

"Whoever is doubting us, check what happened last year. We did the same thing," he said.

But it was not the same. Sale had two fewer starts in spring training this season and Porcello and Price had one less. Eovaldi had three fewer starts than he did with Tampa Bay in 2018.

Cora and pitching coach Dana LeVangie have pointed to the behind-the-scenes work the starters did in spring training that replaced the missing games.

There were sessions of live batting practice and what the Sox call "aggressive" bullpen days along with minor league games or scrimmages.

But those serve mostly to build arm strength. Whatever competition exists is imagined. Pretending to face a major league hitter in the bullpen is not the same as actually facing one with a crowd watching.

Even the minor league games are glorified practices. The inning ends after a certain pitch count is reached or when LeVangie decides it's enough.

"It's easy to second-guess now what we did," Cora said. "Nobody second-guessed us last year. It's a program; you have to be disciplined. That's the way I see it.

"We played until Oct. 28. The previous year, when I got here, everybody was talking about how they were out of bullets in October against the Houston Astros."

But something is going on. Through four games, Sox starters have allowed 22 earned runs on 28 hits and 11 walks over 15 innings. Fourteen of the hits were for extra bases, eight of them home runs.

It's the worst four-game stretch for a rotation to start a season in 10 years.

"I felt ready to pitch," Porcello said. "I don't look at spring training as an issue. I felt ready but I didn't get it done."

Price makes his season debut in Oakland on Monday night and may need to go six innings to save the team from having to make a roster move to get a fresh arm. The bullpen has already thrown 18 innings and there are seven games in the next seven days.

This terrible turn through the rotation reminded me of the Feb. 28 game in Fort Myers against the Washington Nationals.

Max Scherzer made the nearly three-hour drive across Florida to pitch three innings against the Sox and I asked him why.

"I want to come over here and face the Red Sox," he said. "These guys are champs. I'll drive anywhere to get a chance to face these guys."

Scherzer, who led the majors with 220 innings last season, made six starts in spring training and pitched 26⅔ innings. He started on Opening Day against the Mets and allowed two runs over 7⅔ innings.

Jacob deGrom and Justin Verlander also had traditional spring workloads and were dominant in their first starts.

Not every pitcher is the same. Ultimately this lost weekend in Seattle will probably be forgotten and the Sox will benefit later in the season.

But for the moment the defending champions are 1-3, in last place and it looks like the season snuck up on them.

### **Dustin Pedroia continuing to make progress**

Alex Speier

SEATTLE — A familiar voice filled the Red Sox clubhouse on Sunday morning.

As sleepy members of the Red Sox filed into T-Mobile Park, they heard Dustin Pedroia talking a mile a minute. Pedroia, who traveled to Fort Myers from the Red Sox' exhibition games against the Cubs in Arizona last week, was on FaceTime with pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez, delivering what amounted to a monologue that had members of the team cracking up.

Pedroia's boisterous communique reinforced the notion that the second baseman continues to make steady progress toward a return to the big leagues as he continues to strengthen his surgically repaired left knee and gradually build his workload to the point of being able to play without restrictions.

"He played eight [innings Sunday] at 9:30 in the morning," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "That's a good sign."

So good, in fact, that Pedroia is soon scheduled to leave Fort Myers in his ongoing effort to play in the big leagues for the first time since last May 29. After an off-day on Monday, he's slated to play nine innings in extended spring training on Tuesday, and then barring a setback, he'll join Single A Greenville on a rehab assignment for the Drive's Opening Day on Thursday.

Greenville was chosen as the venue for the start of Pedroia's rehab assignment largely due to weather conditions that are more favorable than those in the other Red Sox minor league affiliates that will start play this week. Cora doesn't think that the veteran necessarily needs to compete against more advanced minor leaguers before he's ready to play in the big leagues.

"Whenever he gets here, he'll step it up a notch," said Cora.

Pedroia has told Cora that he's been swinging well in extended spring, resulting in a number of baserunning opportunities that have given the team further indications about how he's handling the physical demands of playing in games. The Red Sox do not yet have a timetable for when Pedroia will play in back-to-back games (a critical box to check in his progression), how long he might be in Greenville, or whether there's a chance he could join the big league team in Boston for the April 9 home opener.

But the fact that he continues to increase his playing time suggests that he's moving steadily in the right direction, as does the impending start of a 30-day rehab assignment.

"So far so good," said Cora. "There's no setbacks."

### **Price debuts Monday**

David Price will make his first start of the season on Monday in Oakland after his first start of the season was delayed slightly by illness in the team's waning days in Fort Myers. Instead of pitching in Seattle, the Red Sox had him start their final spring training game in Arizona against the Cubs last Tuesday, followed by five days of rest entering the series opener against the A's.

Price is coming off a year in which he twice adapted his arsenal significantly, first in the middle of the year after a poor outing against the Yankees (moving from the third to first base side of the rubber and leaning heavily on two-seamers, cutters, and changeups), then again in the playoffs, when he started throwing fewer cutters and more four-seamers up in the zone, with changeups diving below it.

To open this season, Price envisions using the mix that proved dominant in his final outings of 2018, but he also recognizes that there will come a time when he alters his repertoire over the course of the season to disrupt opponents' game plans.

"I think [the pitch mix] does change throughout the season, the type of pitcher that you can be – I guess more for myself than other people. I know that I'll change pitching styles throughout the course of the season," said Price. "I definitely switched stuff up there at the end. I was using different pitches, using them differently. I do want to try and stick with what I had success with at the end of last year. But stuff isn't going to be the same at times, and you've got to be able to adjust."

Kimbrel congratulates Barnes

Among those to reach out to Matt Barnes to offer congratulations for his save on Friday: Former Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel. "It was awesome," said Barnes. "He's a good dude." . . . J.D. Martinez drove in four runs, in the process becoming the first Red Sox player since Shea Hillenbrand in 2003 to drive in at least one run in each of the team's first four contests of the year. However, his plus/minus took a hit thanks to the misplayed fly ball that resulted in four unearned runs. The Red Sox made a number of misplays during the series, committing six errors and allowing six unearned runs . . . The Red Sox bullpen allowed one run over 5½ innings on Sunday, concluding the four-game set with an outstanding performance. In 18 innings, Red Sox relievers forged a 2.50 ERA while striking out 25 batters . . . Andrew Benintendi was out of the lineup on Sunday after smashing a foul ball off his right kneecap against Mike Leake on Saturday night. He pinch-hit in the ninth inning, and Cora expects him to start on Monday in Oakland . . . First baseman Steve Pearce (left calf) played in extended spring training on Saturday, and was described by Cora as "getting closer" to a return to the big leagues.

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

### **Rick Porcello adds to Red Sox World Series hangover**

Jason Mastrodonato

SEATTLE — The World Series champions were humbled in Seattle.

The Red Sox have begun their title defense with a historically poor four-game stretch from their starting rotation, complete with a nine-run outing from Rick Porcello on Sunday as Mariners trounced them with a 10-8 win to finish the four-game set.

A makeshift Mariners team that wasn't supposed to do much of anything this season — and a team that played awful defense while losing their closer to the injured list during the series — took three of four as the Sox begin the year 1-3 and in last place in the American League East.

Manager Alex Cora didn't mince words after this ugly series.

"We didn't play well," he said. "We're actually lucky we won one, we came back. Great that we tried to come back yesterday, great that we tried to come back today, but that can't happen. It's going to be hard, we were already in a tough spot this week because of the bullpen and obviously the starters not going deep, but we'll find a way."

The World Series hangover seems like it's taken effect.

“Spring training felt like it was quick,” said J.D. Martinez, one of the few Red Sox off to a hot start. “That’s about it. Otherwise it feels normal.”

The Sox offense had little chance to catch up to a Mariners team that scored 34 runs in three games

“Nobody is really panicking or anything like that,” Martinez said. “Everyone is in a sense, not laughing about it, but brushing it off. In a sense like, whatever, what are you going to do, you know? You have to give credit to those guys. They hit the ball really, really well. They were really driving the baseball. Just seemed like every time we scored a run or come back, they’d get a guy on or hit a homer.”

Next it’s off to Oakland, where David Price will start on Monday and try to buck the trend.

Somebody needs to step up and set the tone.

Porcello began well on Sunday, as he became the only Sox starter to have a one-two-three first inning this season. But the Mariners jumped on him for two runs in the second inning, erasing a 3-0 lead the Red Sox built in the first, and then added seven more runs as they ran Porcello out of the game in the third.

It was Porcello’s worst start since 2017, when he allowed 11 runs to the Orioles in late August.

“Not good,” he said. “I’ve got to be a lot better. Only covered 2-2/3 innings or whatever it was. Not good enough. Absolutely. No excuses. Gotta pick it up, turn the page, and get ready for the next one.”

And it’s how it happened that ought to have the Red Sox second-guessing themselves.

Porcello was incredibly aggressive in the strike zone and the Mariners seemed OK with it. Of the 19 batters he faced, he threw a first-pitch strike to 15 of them. This after Red Sox starters in the first three games threw 72 percent first-pitch strikes, third-highest percentage in the majors entering Sunday.

Even when Porcello was ahead in the count, it didn’t matter. After falling behind 0-1, the Mariners still went 5-for-10 off him. Combined in the four-game series they hit .362 (17-for-47) after falling behind 0-1 to Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez and Porcello combined.

Overall against those four starters, the Mariners hit .389 (28-for-72) and connected on eight home runs. They went deep 11 times overall in the series.

The pitching woes negated the Red Sox’ offensive success.

After scoring three in the first, they added four more in the fourth when Martinez destroyed an 84-mph cutter from Wade LeBlanc for a three-run home run, his second homer in four days. He’s hit six balls with an exit velocity of 100 mph or more. Entering Sunday, only the Dodgers’ Joc Pederson had hit more (seven).

Mookie Betts connected on a solo shot in the sixth inning for his first home run of the season.

For the third straight night, the Sox put together a ninth-inning rally. Martinez, Andrew Benintendi, Mitch Moreland and Blake Swihart each drew walks to push one run across, but Christian Vazquez struck out and Jackie Bradley Jr. grounded to second to end the game.

“I think we got behind right away and guys still faught, came back, just like last night,” said bench coach Ron Roenicke. “They’re going to keep fighting. We’ll just keep em down a little bit in the runs and we have a good offense. We know they’re going to pitch better. We’ll be fine.”

How difficult is it for a team that just won the World Series to maintain that level of focus into a new season?

“I don’t know, I think they realize what it takes and what we need to do,” Roenicke said. “Last year we lost the first game and then won a bunch. Every year is different. We’ll bounce back and be fine. The focus has been fine.”

Martinez laughed at the idea of being concerned over the Red Sox starting rotation, considered one of the best in baseball entering the year.

“Any concerns? No,” he said. “You can’t look at — I know this is going to be the thing that everybody wants to talk about, but I’m a firm believer you look at track records. Guys’ track records and what they’re doing, that speaks for itself. So I’m really not concerned about it.”

### **J.D. Martinez collects 1,000th hit in Red Sox loss to Mariners**

Jason Mastrodonato

SEATTLE — The Red Sox aren’t winning, but J.D Martinez is destroying the baseball.

Martinez was 2-for-3 with two walks, a home run and four RBIs in the Sox’ 10-8 loss to the Mariners on Sunday and is now hitting .412 (7-for-17) with two homers in four games.

He’s smoking the ball, adding two more hits with an exit velocity of 100 mph or harder on Sunday, per Statcast. He now has six such hits this season. Entering the day, only the Dodgers’ Joc Pederson had more (seven).

Martinez added a milestone with his home run on Sunday. It was his 1,000th career hit.

“Honestly, I didn’t even know,” he said. “I didn’t know until I came back in and guys were telling me congrats and stuff and I was like, ‘oh, that’s pretty cool.’ I asked them if they could get the ball and I was able to get the ball which was pretty cool.”

Martinez lost a fly ball in the sun while playing left field for his first error of the season, but his hot bat has been a bright spot on the otherwise slow start for the Sox.

“Today was his best day as far as approach,” manager Alex Cora said. “He wasn’t swinging early. He was very patient with pitches. That’s who he is. The walk was a great at-bat. Obviously the home run. When he starts swinging at pitches in the middle of the zone like Mookie did today, good things happen.”

### **Red Sox’ ‘fresh in October’ message rings hollow for now**

Michael Silverman

SEATTLE – The Red Sox don’t want you to be concerned by what you just saw in Seattle.

Four bad starts in a row from their starters?

Well, those Mariners hitters, they sure were better than everybody thought.

And Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez and then Rick Porcello, the way they gave up those 22 earned runs in 15 combined innings for a 13.20 ERA – they were just leaving pitches out over the plate.

If the Red Sox had lost three out of four in the middle of the season then nobody would think this was such a big deal was the message Alex Cora wanted to put out after the 10-8 loss to Seattle on Sunday.

Just don’t question the Red Sox’ plan, man.



Because the slow-bake process the Red Sox used on their starters this spring, limiting their exposure and their innings in order to keep them fresh in October – that’s more important than the results that just happened.

In other words, the Red Sox are 1-3 but their starters are still going to be fresh in October.

The logic in that line of thinking is twisted. It may very well turn out to be right, but right now, the look is a bad one for the Red Sox.

The quartet of awfulness everybody just saw was a concern, so go ahead and be concerned.

Just because somebody says you have to take your medicine to feel better later, doesn’t mean you have to like how you’re feeling right now.

Because that’s real, and the rotation right now looks real bad.

“We expect them to throw the ball well regardless, we did the same thing last year and Chris went seven in Tampa, five in Miami – I don’t know why people now all of a sudden, ‘it’s a bad program,’ ” said Cora. “It worked last year, everybody was cool when the starters were pitching in October and coming out of the bullpen and be rovers. It’s easy to second-guess now because we didn’t pitch well here.”

Cora’s defensiveness is fine for his purposes, but that doesn’t mean it’s going to translate into the kind of comfort Red Sox fans need and are looking for right now.

The Red Sox are starting off at an extreme deficit because of the excessive workload the failure of the starters placed on the bullpen as well as the lineup to rally. They have seven games left on this road trip, against two good teams, the A’s and Diamondbacks.

The bullpen is already overworked.

The pitching staff allowed 34 runs over four games here, with the starters accounting for 22 of those runs.

It’s great to be thinking about October right now, but the Red Sox just closed out March with their fourth concerning start in a row.

For a team that is always stressing staying in the moment and not getting too far ahead of itself, the idea that the rotation is still going to be fresh in October rings hollow – even if it’s true.

Again, though, that was Cora’s chief talking point.

“Yeah but when I got here I remember people said that Chris was throwing 100 the first game in 2017,” said Cora. “It’s easy to second guess now what we did but nobody second-guessed us last year. It’s a program, you have to be disciplined, so that’s the way I see it. If people think they didn’t start 20 games or they didn’t have too many innings, they should get back to what we did last year in spring training. I mean, we played until October 28th. The previous year, when I got here, everybody was talking about how they were out of bullets in October against the Houston Astros, so.”

There was more to bemoan, of course.

The Red Sox played bad defense as well.

But again, it got back to the starters.

And all Cora and the starters could say was basically “pay no attention to these results.”

Said Cora: “We’ll be fine, yeah.”

Being “fine” is well and good, and perhaps David Price will apply the tourniquet Monday in Oakland.

“We didn’t play well” in Seattle, said Cora. “We’re actually lucky we won one, we came back. Great that we tried to come back yesterday, great that we tried to come back today but that can’t happen, it’s going to be hard, we were already in a tough spot this week because of the bullpen and obviously the starters not going deep, but we’ll find a way, tomorrow we’ve got DP, hopefully he gets us rolling and then everybody starts throwing the ball well.”

The Red Sox are hoping for better results from a starter, any starter, the sooner the better.

That makes sense.

Just don’t confuse hope with comfort by saying this will all make sense in October.

Because right now October baseball is a memory, not a given.

### **Source: Xander Bogaerts, Red Sox nearing contract extension**

Jason Mastrodonato

SEATTLE — Pending free agent shortstop Xander Bogaerts and the Red Sox are nearing a contract extension worth \$120 million over six years in addition to the \$12 million he’s making this season, an industry source confirmed.

The deal also has a vesting option for a seventh additional year. If Bogaerts reaches 525 plate appearances in 2025, the contract for 2026 will vest at \$20 million. In total, that could be a seven-year extension for \$140, plus the \$12 million he’s making this year, giving him an eight-year deal worth \$152 million.

Bogaerts also has the option to opt-out of his contract after the 2022 season, when he’ll be 29 years old.

ESPN.com was first to report the terms and WEEI.com was the first to report news of the nearing agreement, which could be announced as soon as Monday.

Bogaerts, 26, is in the final year under team control with the Red Sox and was set to be one of the most sought after free agents on the open market next winter after Nolan Arenado was extended by the Rockies before the season.

Instead, he’ll get a new deal worth \$20 million per season, what would appear to be a fair sum for both sides but certainly looks at first sight to be a team-friendly deal, particularly when considering shortstop Manny Machado signed for 10 years, \$300 million this offseason.

Over the past three seasons, Bogaerts has hit .286 with an .808 OPS compared to Machado’s .283 average and .855 OPS in that same span. Machado is known for being more flashy with the glove, though the sure-handed Bogaerts went nearly the entire season without making a fielding error last year. The majority of his errors were of the throwing variety.

Bogaerts is represented by agent Scott Boras.

### **Red Sox notes: Andrew Benintendi out with sore knee**

Jason Mastrodonato

SEATTLE — Andrew Benintendi was held out of the Red Sox’ lineup on Sunday to let his sore knee get some rest.

Benintendi rocketed a foul ball into his right knee on Saturday night and was down on the ground in pain for a minute or two, though he did finish the game.

“It’s something I’ve done before,” he said. “Just have to give it time. It didn’t feel good. It just squared me up. I knew right away it was nothing serious. It just hurt a lot. It was right on the kneecap.”

Seen limping in the locker room afterward, Benintendi said he was feeling better and thought he’d be fine to play, but manager Alex Cora wanted him to rest.

“He’s doing OK,” Cora said Sunday. “He told me he wanted to play today. Obviously he wasn’t going to play. Give him one day, he should be ready for tomorrow.”

Without Benintendi in the lineup, Mookie Betts returned to the leadoff spot for the series finale against left-hander Wade LeBlanc.

The lineup: Betts RF, Devers 3B, Martinez LF, Bogaerts SS, Travis DH, Moreland 1B, Núñez 2B, Vázquez C, Bradley Jr. CF, Porcello RHP.

#### ADJUSTMENT NEEDED FROM STARTING PITCHERS

Looking back on Saturday’s game, when pitching coach Dana LeVangie was disappointed of the implementation of his gameplan carried out by Eduardo Rodriguez and Blake Swihart (for more on that, [click here](#)), Cora said LeVangie also blamed himself for Rodriguez’s poor performance.

“Talking to Dana, he was accountable himself,” Cora said. “Everybody is, myself included. We need to be better. We need to do a better job adjusting. I think Eduardo yesterday, he wasn’t able to have a feel for certain pitches. He decided to go with something else. That’s part of it. Those are adjustments. Did it work? If you go back to the game, the walk in the first inning and the homer in the fifth, that’s the ballgame right there. He knows it. He needs to dominate lefties. He did it last year. He’ll do it again. I don’t think it was Eduardo or us. It was a team thing. We didn’t make adjustments and we paid the price.”

The Mariners have walloped the Red Sox starting pitchers to the tune of a 13.14 ERA, the highest of any starting staff in the majors entering Sunday.

As other teams adjust to the Red Sox, they need to adjust back, Cora said.

“We always do,” he said. “They’ve got different personnel over there, not only in the lineup but also the hitting coaches, game-planners. I saw it Opening Day. There are a lot of coaches over there. The league is making adjustments all over the place now. I saw it in spring training. We always talk about the vertical attack, pitch up and down. I notice a little bit that in spring training, teams weren’t as aggressive with the pitch up in the zone. They’ve done an outstanding job not expanding the zone with two strikes. That’s what teams do. That’s what we do.

“People are going to keep making adjustments, changing swings. I do feel their lineup is a good lineup. They have balance, they have guys who can put the ball in play and run, at the same time they can hit the ball out of the ballpark. They have veterans now. There’s a different vibe in that team, more energy compared to last year. I don’t want to give them too much credit because we’re still playing against them, but I do feel there’s something different going on there and we do have to adjust.”

#### **Dustin Pedroia to rehab with Red Sox affiliate in Greenville**

Jason Mastrodonato

SEATTLE — Dustin Pedroia is getting one step closer to a return to the Red Sox.

Pedroia will begin a rehab assignment with the Greenville Drive on Thursday, which is Opening Day for the Sox' High-A affiliate based in South Carolina.

Pedroia played eight innings in an extended spring training game on Sunday and will play a full nine on Tuesday before going to Greenville on Thursday.

He's yet to play on back-to-back days, which is the final step of his rehab phase before the Sox can give him a chance to prove himself again on the big league field.

"We'll see how he bounces back," manager Alex Cora said.

Asked if there's a chance Pedroia could be ready for Opening Day at Fenway Park a week from Tuesday, Cora said, "I don't want to get ahead of myself."

The Sox chose Greenville for the rehab assignment because of the weather, Cora said. Games are rarely cancelled there.

"I think whenever he gets here (in the majors) he'll step it up a notch," the manager said. "Just depending on how he reacts on a daily basis. So far so good. There's no setbacks. We actually expect that from him the rest of the time but let's see how he goes with nine innings and see how he goes whenever he plays back-to-back. See the workload.

"He's saying he's swinging the bat well and getting on base a lot so hopefully he can keep doing that, not for his benefit, but for our benefit so we can get more information."

## **\* *The Providence Journal***

### **Mariners 10, Red Sox 8: Porcello pounded as Boston drops opening series**

Bill Koch

SEATTLE --- Rick Porcello saved the worst for last in a series filled with bad Red Sox starting pitching.

The right-hander couldn't escape the third inning on Sunday at T-Mobile Park, joining a dishonor roll that includes fellow rotation members Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez.

The Mariners were only too happy to keep thundering their way through their opening home stand of the season, dismissing Boston in a 10-8 slugfest.

Seattle put up a touchdown and added the extra point in the bottom of the third inning, seven runs that opened up a 9-3 lead. These Red Sox became just the fourth team since 1908 to have starting pitchers allow at least six runs in the season's first four games. The Mariners' 34 runs in the four-game series came one shy of setting a new record in this ballpark, which opened as Safeco Field in 1999.

"They just kept rolling," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "The whole weekend was that way. They started swinging the bats well and we didn't stop them until it was too late."

It was the 128th start for Porcello with Boston and just the third time he'd issued as many as four walks. The second of those two outings came prior to the All-Star break last season, a 13-7 home pounding against the Blue Jays on July 13. Porcello was tagged for eight runs on that occasion – Seattle bettered that by one on Sunday.

"I walked four guys in two-plus innings and I think three of those guys came around to score," Porcello said. "You can't give four free passes in two innings. That was a big part of it for me."

The game-breaking rally was an extended one. The Mariners sent 11 men to the plate in the bottom of the third, as Omar Narvaez cracked a three-run homer to right to wipe out a 3-2 deficit. Mitch Haniger's double to left against Brian Johnson was the capper, as a pair of inherited runners came around to give Seattle a six-run cushion and close the book on Porcello.

"I've got to be a lot better," Porcello said. "I only covered 2 2/3 innings or whatever it was – not good enough, absolutely. No excuses."

It seemed like the Red Sox got off to the ideal start in their quest to split the series. J.D. Martinez lashed an RBI single to left and Eduardo Nunez grounded a two-run single through the left side to make it 3-0 in the first. Porcello needed just 13 pitches to work a 1-2-3 frame and Boston had what felt like real momentum.

Then Seattle began to chip away in the second. Porcello allowed the first two men to reach and nearly wriggled out of the jam, retiring the next two batters. A walk to Daniel Vogelbach extended the inning and Dee Gordon shot a liner up the middle for a two-run single that made it 3-2.

"A lot of pitches in the middle of the zone," Cora said. "He started off well. Then they started making adjustments."

A three-run homer down the line in left by Martinez in the fourth and a solo shot to left by Mookie Betts in the sixth were only enough to put the Red Sox within range. Rafael Devers flew out as the potential tying run in the eighth and four walks issued by Mariners' relievers amounted to only one run in the ninth. Christian Vazquez struck out swinging and Jackie Bradley Jr. grounded to second against Chasen Bradford, bringing an end to a disappointing opening weekend.

"Like I said, we didn't play well," Cora said. "We actually were lucky we won one. We came back (Friday). Then we tried to come back yesterday and we tried to come back today, but that can't happen. It's going to be hard."

### **Reports: Bogaerts, Red Sox nearing contract extension**

Bill Koch

SEATTLE --- The Red Sox appear to be on the verge of locking up another member of their championship core.

Boston is reportedly close to finalizing an extension with shortstop Xander Bogaerts, who is scheduled to hit free agency after the season. Bogaerts is playing out his final year of arbitration eligibility for \$12 million, and he's in line for a significant raise.

WEEI's Evan Drellich and ESPN's Jeff Passan report the deal would be for six years and \$120 million. That would take Bogaerts through the 2025 season, and he turns 33 that October. Those terms, if finalized, would effectively keep Bogaerts with the Red Sox for the entirety of his prime.

Bogaerts was named an American League All-Star in 2016, but he actually enjoyed his best statistical season last year. He racked up new career highs in OPS (.883), home runs (23), runs batted in (103) and doubles (45). Bogaerts notched his fifth straight season of appearing in at least 135 games and continues to develop like the player Boston hoped it signed as an international free agent out of Aruba in 2009.

Those 2018 numbers ranked Bogaerts among the elite offensive shortstops in baseball, and it's worth noting how much less he might be paid than the player who tops the market at that position. Manny Machado signed a 10-year, \$300-million deal with the Padres this offseason -- \$10 million more annually than Bogaerts would be in line to receive. That gives the Red Sox significantly more financial flexibility to retain the likes of Mookie Betts and others, a skillful bit of negotiation by president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

The reported Bogaerts deal comes just eight days after Boston announced a five-year extension with ace left-hander Chris Sale. The Red Sox have several of their key pieces locked up through at least the 2020 season, including Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Dustin Pedroia (2021), Christian Vazquez (2021), Matt Barnes (2021), Eduardo Rodriguez (2021), David Price (2022), Nathan Eovaldi (2022), Rafael Devers (2022), Andrew Benintendi (2022) and Sale (2024).

Bogaerts and Dombrowski both politely declined comment while leaving the visiting clubhouse at T-Mobile Park on Sunday night. Boston visits Oakland for a four-game series beginning Monday night.

### **Red Sox Journal: Pedroia to start rehab stint in Greenville**

Bill Koch

SEATTLE — Dustin Pedroia appears close to making his Red Sox return.

The second baseman will report to Class A Greenville this week and begin a rehab assignment. The Drive open their season at home in South Carolina on Thursday night against the West Virginia Power, a Class A affiliate of the Mariners.

“Right now it’s Greenville probably because of the weather,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “I think with him it’s more weather-related. They don’t cancel games. I think for him whenever he gets here he’ll step it up.”

Pedroia played eight innings at extended spring training on Sunday and is scheduled to play nine innings on Tuesday. He appeared in just three games last season before pain in his surgically-repaired left knee forced him out of action for the final four months of the regular season.

“He played eight today at 9:30 in the morning, so that’s a good sign,” Cora said. “We’ll see how he bounces back and we’ll go from there.”

The progression Boston needs to see from Pedroia involves playing back-to-back days. That’s the final hurdle before he can be activated off the injured list.

“Let’s see the workload,” Cora said. “He’s swinging the bat well. He’s been getting on base a lot. Hopefully he can keep doing that not for his benefit but for our benefit.”

Steve Pearce (left calf) also continues to recover in Fort Myers. He’s scheduled to play in a game on Monday and is back to running at full speed.

Benny gets a break

Andrew Benintendi was given the day off Sunday, opening the door for J.D. Martinez to make his first start of the season in left field.

Benintendi fouled a ball off his right knee in Saturday night’s 6-5 defeat against Seattle. He stayed on the ground in pain for about a minute and was tended to by Red Sox medical staff members before eventually continuing his at-bat.

“It just squared me up,” Benintendi said. “I’ve done that a lot of times. I knew right away it was nothing serious. It just hurt a lot.”

Left-handed hitters are generally at risk of such a thing against Mike Leake. The Mariners’ right-hander features a cut-fastball that darts inside off the plate, putting extra pressure on hitters to get the barrel of the bat out quickly.

“He was going to play,” Cora said. “After what happened yesterday it makes sense. Lefty on the mound anyway (Wade LeBlanc) and we had to find him a day during the week. It worked out perfectly for me to give him an off day.”

#### Pitchers at helm

To say the least, the current Boston clubhouse culture has changed from when Cora was a player in 2005-08.

That merry band of self-proclaimed Idiots featured Johnny Damon, Kevin Millar and a host of other characters. Jason Varitek served as the captain, a position player who played in 498 games over that four-year span.

Pitchers are among the most prominent Red Sox voices now, including Sunday starter Rick Porcello. He serves alongside David Price and Chris Sale on a de facto council Cora employs to keep order.

“He’s always paying attention to the game, looking at hitters, looking for details, looking for any advantage we can have to win ballgames,” Cora said. “He understands what we’re trying to preach and what we’re trying to do on a daily basis. He’s one of the leaders not only of the pitching staff, but of the whole team.”

Playing once every five days has little impact on how effective Porcello and his fellow starters can be in the role. They helped carry Boston to its World Series title last season, pitching out of the bullpen in the playoffs and sacrificing themselves for the group.

“They’ve got more time than anybody except Pedroia,” Cora said. “They’re very accountable — very genuine people. That’s why I feel like they’re the leaders of the club.”

#### Around the bases

Martinez made it four straight games with an RBI on his single to left field in the first. Shea Hillenbrand was the last Red Sox player to open a season with at least one run batted in over his first four games, doing so in 2003. Jose Canseco (1995) and Carl Yastrzemski (1973) are the other most recent Boston players to accomplish the feat...Price makes his season debut on Monday in Oakland. The Red Sox went 22-8 in his starts last season and won 19 of the last 23...Boston relief pitchers entered Sunday on a scoreless string covering 8 2/3 innings. The bullpen had retired 21 of its last 24 batters faced.

### **\* *MassLive.com***

#### **Boston Red Sox’s Rick Porcello pummeled in 10-8 loss in series finale vs. Mariners**

Chris Cotillo

SEATTLE -- Rick Porcello didn’t fare any better than the three Red Sox starters who preceded him.

Porcello lasted just 2.2 innings in his season debut Sunday, giving up nine runs (five earned) on six hits while walking four in a 10-8 loss to the Mariners. Seattle took three of four from Boston in the series, scoring 34 runs and pummeling a starting rotation that, entering the season, was supposed to be the Red Sox’s biggest strength.

Boston jumped out to an early three-run lead against M’s starter Wade LeBlanc in the first, with J.D. Martinez driving in Rafael Devers and Eduardo Nunez later making it 3-0 with a two-run single. A two-run single from Dee Gordon in the second made it 3-2.

Things completely unraveled for the Sox in the third, when Martinez lost a Mitch Haniger pop fly in the sun and left and dropped it for an error. After a Jay Bruce walk, Omar Narvaez hit his first homer of the season, giving Seattle a 5-3 lead.

A Gordon sacrifice fly and Mallex Smith RBI single made it 7-3, ending Porcello's day before the end of the third inning. Brian Johnson entered in relief and gave up a two-run double to Haniger to give Seattle a 9-3 lead.

Martinez atoned for his error an inning later, hitting a three-run homer to cut the deficit to three. But Bruce would answer with a homer of his own an inning later, making it 10-6.

Mookie Betts hit his first home run of the season, taking Nick Rumbelow deep to left center and cutting the deficit to three. Boston threatened with two runners in the eighth before former Sox lefty Roenis Elias got Devers to line out to left to escape the jam.

For the third straight night, Boston made things very interesting in the ninth. After de facto M's closer Cory Gearrin loaded the bases with three straight walks, he was replaced by Chasen Bradford who promptly followed suit by walking in a run to make it 10-8. Bradford struck out Christian Vazquez and got Jackie Bradley Jr. to ground out to second, ending the game and completing Seattle's second daring ninth-inning escape in as many nights.

With the loss, Boston fell to 1-3 on the season. Last year's team didn't pick up its third loss until April 21, in its 20th game of the season.

Rotation struggles continue for fourth day

Porcello's outing was the latest in a series of early-season stinkers for the Red Sox. He became the fourth starter in a row to allow at least five earned runs in his 2019 debut.

Seattle scored 29 runs (22 earned) in 15 innings against Red Sox starters in the four-game set. Boston's rotation has a 13.20 ERA so far.

Martinez's homer is 1,000th career hit

Martinez's fourth-inning homer was the 1,000th base hit of his career. He became just the fourth Red Sox hitter ever to have an RBI in each of the team's first four games, joining Carl Yastrzemski (1973), Jose Canseco (1995) and Shea Hillenbrand (2003).

Martinez has picked up right where he left off in 2018, hitting .412 in the first four games of the year. He was 2-for-3 with four RBIs, two runs and two walks Sunday.

Devers continues torrid start

Devers was 2-for-5 with a double and two runs scored in the finale. He's now hitting .353 on the year with two doubles and has looked considerably quicker on the basepaths.

Devers hit second Sunday with Andrew Benintendi out of the lineup after hitting third in two of the first three games. It's likely he'll continue to draw assignments at the top of the lineup, especially with the Sox facing two consecutive righties to start their series with the A's.

Athletics on tap for Sox

The Red Sox will fly to the Bay Area Sunday night and will face the Athletics in a four-game set that begins Monday night. Oakland is 3-3 on the season.

Pitching probables:



Mon. April 1, 10:10 p.m. ET: LHP David Price vs. RHP Aaron Brooks

Tue. April 2, 10:10 p.m. ET: LHP Chris Sale vs. RHP Mike Fiers

Wed. April 3, 10:10 p.m. ET: RHP Nathan Eovaldi vs. TBD

Thu. April 4, 3:37 p.m. ET: LHP Eduardo Rodriguez vs. TBD

**Chris Sale's velocity in first Boston Red Sox start not an issue, potential injury seems very unlikely; so what's the problem (if any)?**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Chris Sale's four-seam fastball averaged only 92.3 mph and he threw just 59 percent strikes when the Mariners crushed him Opening Day.

Sale allowed seven runs, all earned, six hits (three homers) and two walks while striking out four in 3 innings. Boston lost 12-4 at Safeco Field.

The ace, who signed a five-year, \$145-million extension at the end of spring training, will start again Tuesday in Oakland against the Athletics. Should concern exist over his velocity or a potential injury?

No and no.

Sale pitched at a low velocity last March/April. In his second start last year vs. Miami, the 46 four-seam fastball he threw averaged 92.1 mph.

His fastball averaged below 94 mph in each of his first seven starts last year. He was throwing harder than he ever has as a starting pitcher by June. His velocity will increase or it should. (See the chart below for his average velocities and max velocities from each start during 2018).

The lower velocity April is a concerted effort by the Red Sox and Sale as the southpaw tries to stay healthy an entire season.

“When I was the bench coach in Houston, a lot of people were saying he threw 99 from the get-go and ran out of bullets in October,” Cora said the other day. “So which one will you take? Him throwing 99 in March or April or him pitching in the World Series?”

The Red Sox also learned more last year when they tried to keep Sale healthy by limiting his workload in spring training and keeping his pitch counts down in April while also having him dial back velocity early.

He still spent two stints on the injured list because of shoulder inflammation. He pitched only 29 innings during the second half after he dialed up his velocity more than ever in June, maxing out at 100 mph or more in four starts. He perhaps dialed it up too much midseason after a concerted effort to dial it back in April.

Sale has a 6.04 ERA (28.1 innings, 19 earned runs) in his past eight starts dating back to being activated from the DL on Sept. 11, 2018.

The major issue is command, not velocity. It was last September and it was again in his first start of 2019. But that's not surprising after he made just two starts and pitched a total of nine innings in spring training.

He made four starts during spring training 2018.

Cora confirmed Sale is healthy when asked Friday.

He must be healthy. He underwent another physical before signing his five-year extension at the end of spring training. The Red Sox said all offseason his arm was perfectly fine. Principal owner John Henry said Sale was healthy when indicating early in spring training the Red Sox might reach an extension with him.

There's no way the Red Sox would have extended Sale unless MRIs showed a completely healthy elbow and shoulder.

Flash back to July 7, 2018, when Cora revealed the Astros' 2017 postseason game-plan against Sale.

"We looked at two starts, only two starts. It was the Cleveland starts," Cora said. "And we decided inside we were not going to offer. And now he's painting inside so you can't do that. That's why I'm able to say it. We decided to split the plate in half and look away and it worked."

Sale not only had exceptional velocity last June and July. He also painted the corners. Sale needs to find a way to curtail his velocity a little bit throughout the season but paint with his slider and fastball like he did in June and July last year.

That might be the only way he stays healthy and effective throughout 2019.

### **Xander Bogaerts extension: Boston Red Sox finalizing six-year deal with shortstop (reports)**

Chris Cotillo

SEATTLE -- The Red Sox are finalizing a six-year contract extension with shortstop Xander Bogaerts, as first reported by WEEI's Evan Drellich. Per ESPN's Jeff Passan, it's a \$132 million deal (including Bogaerts' \$12 million salary in 2019).

Bogaerts' deal, which guarantees \$120 million in new money and runs through 2025, will include an opt-out clause after 2022 and a \$20 million vesting option for 2026 (based on 535 plate appearances in 2025), according to Alex Speier of the Boston Globe. The deal will run through at least Bogaerts' age-32 season, giving the Red Sox a high-caliber shortstop for more than the next half-decade.

Both Bogaerts and president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski declined comment when asked about the reports Sunday at T-Mobile Park. An announcement could reportedly come as early as Monday.

Bogaerts, 26, was scheduled to hit free agency after this season. The former top prospect took his game to a new level for the World Series champions in 2018, finishing 13th in MVP voting and posting a .288/.360/.522 line in 136 games. He was an All-Star in 2016 and has won two Silver Slugger awards.

Bogaerts is the second key member of the Red Sox to receive a contract extension this month, joining lefty Chris Sale, who officially signed his five-year, \$145 million deal last weekend. Boston entered spring training with a plethora of players eligible for free agency after the season, with righty Rick Porcello and outfielder J.D. Martinez (if he opts out) now headlining a list of six players playing on expiring contracts.

Dombrowski has acknowledged the unlikelihood of the Sox being able to sign all of their main contributors to long-term deals, especially with Mookie Betts' free agency approaching after the 2020 season. The team identified Sale and Bogaerts as top candidates for deals at the beginning of spring training and were able to hammer out agreements with both.

Bogaerts joins Sale, David Price, Nathan Eovaldi, Rafael Devers, Andrew Benintendi and Eduardo Rodriguez as members of the Red Sox who are controlled through at least the 2022 season. Boston will likely continue to try to extend Betts before he reaches the open market after next year.

Bogaerts was originally signed out of Aruba in 2009 and has been in the majors since 2013. He expressed interest in a long-term arrangement with the Red Sox last month.

“The Red Sox have obviously treated me well throughout my career,” Bogaerts said. “Me and my family. I see how they treat other guys who come in. Me being here for a while, it’s a place any and everyone would want to play and stay.”

### **Rick Porcello among leaders of team in 10th big-league season, Steve Pearce inching closer**

Chris Cotillo

SEATTLE -- Some notes from Sunday’s action at T-Mobile Park, where the Red Sox are taking on the Mariners in the series finale of a four-game set.

Porcello a team leader in 10th big-league season

Ahead of Rick Porcello’s season debut, manager Alex Cora commended the veteran as one of Boston’s most outspoken leaders.

“He’s one of the leaders of the team,” Cora said. “He is. He’s always paying attention to the game, looking at hitters, looking for details. Looking for any advantage we can have to win ballgames. He understands what we try to preach and try to do on a daily basis. He’s one of the leaders not only of the pitching staff, but of the team.”

Cora views Porcello, Chris Sale and David Price as his go-to guys in the clubhouse, using the trio of pitchers to communicate messages from the coaching staff. Whether it’s something baseball-related or an off-the-field matter, Cora trusts in the three veteran pitchers to make sure the entire clubhouse is on the same page.

“There’s a presence,” Cora said. “They’re accountable. They’re very genuine people and that’s why I feel they’re the leaders of the team.”

Cora said the role of starting pitchers as leaders has evolved in recent years, noting it would have been unlikely to see a starter in that kind of role when during his playing career. Though some of Boston’s position players (like Jackie Bradley Jr., Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez) lead by example, the pitching staff is more vocal in their leadership.

Porcello, who just celebrated the 10-year anniversary of his major-league debut, is an integral part of Boston’s culture.

“He means a lot to us,” Cora said. “He’s very dependable, reliable. In the clubhouse, he’s amazing. He keeps looking for ways to be better.”

Mariners offense turning heads

The Mariners revamped their offense over the winter, trading players like Jean Segura, Mike Zunino and Robinson Cano in a rebuilding effort. This weekend, newcomers like Mallex Smith, Domingo Santana, Jay Bruce, Omar Narvaez, Tim Beckham and Edwin Encarnacion have made a huge impact against Red Sox pitching.

“I do feel their lineup is a good lineup,” Cora said. “They’ve got balance, they’ve got guys who put the ball in play. They can run. At the same time, they can hit the ball out of the ballpark. They’ve got veterans now. There’s a different vibe on that team. More energy compared to last year. I don’t want to give them too much credit because we’re still playing against them, but I do feel there’s something different going on over there and we have to adjust.”

Seattle pummeled starters Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez in the first three games of the series. Their offensive explosion continues a trend of Cora noticing offensive improvements from opposing teams in 2019.

“The league is making adjustments all over the place. I saw it in spring training,” Cora said. “We always talk about the vertical attack, pitching up and down. I saw a little bit in spring training, teams weren’t as aggressive with the pitch up in the zone. They’ve done an outstanding job not expanding the zone with two strikes.”

Cora views Rodriguez struggles as team failure

Pitching coach Dana LeVangie questioned Rodriguez’s decision to veer from the team’s gameplan after Saturday’s loss. Cora took a different approach, saying he believes Seattle’s offensive success was more of a systemic failure by the Red Sox.

“We need to be better. We need to do a better job,” Cora said. “I think Eduardo yesterday wasn’t able to have a feel for certain pitches and decided to go with something else. That’s part of it. Those are adjustments.”

Rodriguez lasted just 4.1 innings, allowing five earned runs and taking the loss. The back-breaker came in the fifth inning, when Bruce hit a three-run homer that all but put things out of reach.

“I don’t think it was Eduardo, or us. It was a team thing,” Cora said. “We didn’t make adjustments and we paid the price.”

Pearce inching closer, Price ready for Monday start

First baseman Steve Pearce (left calf strain) played in an extended spring game Saturday and is off Sunday. He’ll play again Monday in Fort Myers.

“He’s moving well,” Cora said. “I think he’s getting closer.”

Lefty David Price won’t be limited in his debut Monday night. Price dealt with illness at the end of spring training and was pushed back to the fifth spot in the rotation.

“He’ll be fine,” Cora said.

**Dustin Pedroia rehab assignment: Red Sox second baseman to join Class-A Greenville Thursday**

Chris Cotillo

SEATTLE -- Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia will play two more games in extended spring training before joining Single-A Greenville for a rehab assignment beginning Thursday.

Pedroia played eight innings in an extended spring game Sunday morning and will have Monday off before playing a full nine-inning game Tuesday. He’ll be in Greenville’s lineup for their Opening Day matchup Thursday evening.

Pedroia will need to play back-to-back games at some point and could serve as Greenville’s designated hitte to accomplish that. Cora doesn’t think Pedroia will need to move up to a higher level before re-joining the Red Sox.

“Right now, it’s Greenville probably because of the weather,” Cora said. “With him, it’s more weather-related. So they don’t cancel games. For him, whenever he gets here he’ll step it up a notch.”

Pedroia has been rehabbing his surgically repaired left knee for the last few months and is currently on the 10-day injured list. While the April 9 home opener has been speculated as a possible return date, the team has no timetable at this point.

"It's just depending on how he reacts on a daily basis. So far, so good. There's no setbacks," Cora said. "We actually expect that from him the rest of the time. Let's see how he goes with nine (innings) and then we'll see how he goes whenever he has to play back-to-back. See the workload. He says he's been swinging the bat well. He's been getting on base a lot. Hopefully, he can keep doing that."

## **\* *RedSox.com***

### **Sox drop opening series in troubling fashion**

Ian Browne

SEATTLE -- The Red Sox experienced an opening four games like no other defending World Series champion in history, and not in a good way.

They left T-Mobile Park frustrated on Sunday after another faulty starting-pitching performance (this time by Rick Porcello) led to a 10-8 loss to the Mariners -- the third defeat in four games for the champs.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the 11 homers by Seattle bats represents the most ever surrendered through the first four games of a season by a defending champion. The 34 runs allowed tied the 1984 Orioles for most allowed by a defending champ in its first four games.

Of course, what matters at the end of the day will not be what happened in Seattle, but how the Red Sox respond to it. And they have 158 games left to formulate exactly what that response will look like.

"I know this is going to be the thing everyone wants to talk about, but I'm a firm believer that you look at track records," said slugger J.D. Martinez. "Look at guys' track records and what they're doing. That speaks for itself. Really not concerned about it. Those are the same guys that did it last year. What we kind of just saw was four consecutive bad outings, so to me I'm expecting there are going to be four consecutive great outings."

Porcello lasted just 2 2/3 innings, giving up nine runs, but only four earned, thanks to a Martinez error to open a seven-run third inning by the Mariners. Martinez tried to offset the miscue with a three-run homer to left in the fourth for the 1,000th hit of his career. Mookie Betts roped his first homer of the season in the sixth to keep the Sox in it. But the early damage was too much to overcome.

More than anything, Porcello wanted to be the guy to right the ship after the collective woes of Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez in the first three games. Surprisingly, the dependable veteran only added to them.

"Not good," Porcello said. "I've got to be a lot better. Only covered 2 2/3 innings or whatever it was. Not good enough. Absolutely. No excuses. Gotta pick it up, turn the page and get ready for the next one."

This opening was a far cry from a year ago, when the Sox bolted out of the gate with a 17-2 start.

"Not good baseball," said manager Alex Cora. "We didn't get any innings from the starters, and that's hard to do. The only thing positive about the weekend is the bullpen. They did an outstanding job. Although offensively we scored runs, we left a lot of people out there. Defensively, we didn't play well. We have to move on."

An accomplished group like this one isn't going to read too much into four games.

“I think we’ve got a good group of guys,” said Martinez. “Nobody is really panicking or anything like that. Everyone is not laughing at it, but in a sense, brushing it off, like, ‘What are you going to do?’ You have to give credit to those guys. They were really driving the baseball.”

What were Boston’s starters doing to allow that to keep happening?

“I think we left a lot of pitches over the plate, and they did a good job,” said Cora. “It’s not going to be easy. I think it starts with the rotation. If they can go six [innings], we can go from there. The bullpen did an outstanding job. They threw the ball well, struck people out. If you told me coming into the series it was going to be this way, I would say, ‘No chance.’ It’s baseball. Those guys are going to be OK throughout the season. We know that.”

J.D.’s milestone goes a long way

Martinez unloaded for a three-run homer in the top of the fourth that got his team right back into the game at 9-6. It was also hit No. 1,000 in the slugger’s career.

After the game, Martinez exchanged some personal items with a fan for the baseball.

“I didn’t even know until I came back in and the guys were telling me congrats and stuff,” Martinez said. “I asked them to get the ball, and I was able to get the ball, which was pretty cool.”

### **Bogaerts, Red Sox nearing extension (source)**

Ian Browne

SEATTLE -- Though it wasn’t the best weekend on the field for the Red Sox, it was a productive one off of it.

A source confirmed to MLB.com’s Mark Feinsand that star shortstop Xander Bogaerts is close to finalizing a six-year contract worth \$120 million that will keep him in Boston through 2025.

Including the \$12 million Bogaerts is making this season, he will earn \$132 million over the next seven years.

The club has not confirmed the deal. WEEI’s Evan Drellich was first to report that Boston and Bogaerts were nearing an extension.

Once official, this is big news, coming on the heels of the Red Sox signing Chris Sale to a five-year, \$145 million deal at the end of spring Training. The team now has two cornerstone pieces from last year’s World Series-winning club secured for the long-term.

Mookie Betts, the team’s best all-around player, will be eligible for free agency at the end of the 2020 season. The right fielder indicated recently that it is likely he will get to free agency before signing an extension.

Bogaerts would have been a free agent at the end of this season. The right-handed hitter from Aruba has been with the Red Sox since Aug. 23, 2009, when he was signed as an international free agent.

After bursting onto the scene late in the 2013 pennant race and helping guide the Sox to a World Series championship that year, Bogaerts has emerged into one of the best two-way shortstops in the game. He was also key to the Red Sox’s World Series-winning campaign in ’18, notching career bests with 103 RBIs and an .883 OPS while hitting behind star slugger J.D. Martinez.

The 26-year-old has posted a .283/.342/.429 slash line with 75 home runs and 387 RBIs across parts of seven MLB seasons. Bogaerts was an All-Star in 2016 and a two-time Silver Slugger Award winner.

## **Pedroia to begin rehab assignment in Class A**

Ian Browne

SEATTLE -- Dustin Pedroia didn't get back in time to play Opening Day for the Red Sox. But he will play Opening Day for Class A Greenville on Thursday when he officially starts a Minor League rehab assignment.

In the meantime, the second baseman continues to ramp up to his return from left knee woes by playing games at extended spring training in Fort Myers, Fla.

"Pedey just played eight innings today," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "He's going to have a re-gen day tomorrow, and he's going to play nine on Tuesday and then he's going to go to Greenville for Opening Day."

The Greenville Drive plays a four-game series from Thursday through Sunday. If Pedroia plays in all or most of those games, would that be enough for him to be cleared for the Red Sox's home opener at Fenway Park on April 9?

"I don't want to get ahead of myself," said Cora.

The one thing Pedroia hasn't done yet is play on back-to-back days.

"He played eight [innings] today at 9:30 in the morning, so that's a good sign. He'll play nine [Tuesday] and go from there," Cora said. "See how he bounces back."

Pedroia had extensive surgery on his left knee following the 2017 season and was able to play just three games last season.

Signs have been encouraging that he can have a healthier '19.

"I think whenever he gets here, he'll step it up a notch," Cora said. "So far, so good. There's no setbacks. We actually expect that from him the rest of the time, but let's see how he goes with nine and see how he goes whenever he plays back to back, see the workload, and hopefully he can [withstand it]. He's saying he's swinging the bat well and getting on base a lot so hopefully he can keep doing that, not for his benefit, but for our benefit so we can get more information."

Other bumps and bruises

- World Series MVP Steve Pearce, who started the season on the injured list with a left calf strain, is making good progress.

"He'll play tomorrow [in Fort Myers]," Cora said. "He had a re-gen day today. He played yesterday, so he's moving well. I think he's getting closer."

There's at least a chance Pearce could be activated by next weekend, when the Red Sox finish this three-city, 11-game road trip in Phoenix against the D-backs.

- Leadoff man Andrew Benintendi, who fouled a ball off his right kneecap in Saturday's 6-5 loss to the Mariners, was given the day off on Sunday.

"He's doing OK," Cora said. "He told me he wanted to play today. Obviously he wasn't going to play. Give him one day, he should be ready for tomorrow. He was going to play, but after what happened yesterday, [taking a day off] makes sense. [The Mariners have a] lefty on the mound anyways. [We were

going to] try to find a day for him during the week, so it worked out perfectly for me to give him an off-day.”

## \* **WEEI.com**

### **Rick Porcello makes it 4 straight horrible starts by Red Sox pitchers**

John Tomase

And now it's up to David Price to stop the bleeding.

The Red Sox rotation was rightly hailed as a strength entering the season. With the top four starters in the midst of contracts guaranteeing them more than half a billion dollars combined, the team had every right to expect elite performance from the arms that delivered a World Series title in 2018.

Instead we've been treated to as brutal a turn through the rotation as anything produced by the "He's the Ace" Red Sox of 2015.

On Sunday, Rick Porcello became the fourth car in the pileup. He failed to complete the third inning in a 10-8 loss to the Mariners that dropped the Red Sox to 1-3 on the young season.

Like Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, and Eduard Rodriguez before him, Porcello had nothing. He allowed six hits and nine runs in just 2.2 innings, walking four and serving up a homer. An error in left by J.D. Martinez leading off Seattle's seven-run third led to five unearned runs, or Porcello's final numbers would be even worse.

They still fit right in with his rotation-mates. Sale allowed seven runs and three homers in three innings of a 12-4 loss on opening day. Eovaldi followed with the "best" outing of the four, allowing eight hits and six runs in five innings. The nibbling Rodriguez continued to frustrate by allowing six runs in just 4.1 innings on Saturday.

And then came Porcello. So what's going on?

"Not good baseball," manager Alex Cora told reporters in Seattle. "We didn't get any from the starters and that's hard to do."

Making matters worse, this time the Red Sox jumped on the opposing starter, putting up three runs on Seattle's Wade LeBlanc in the first. Porcello couldn't make it stand, however, spotting Seattle two in the second and seven in the disastrous third, the lowlight a three-run homer by Omar Narvaez.

"We're all different types of pitchers," Porcello said. "The bottom line is you've got to make pitches and be aggressive. I walked four guys in two-plus innings. I think three of those guys came around to score. You can't give out four free passes in two innings. That was a big part of it for me. Just turn the page and get better."

The Red Sox tried to make a game of it on a three-run homer by Martinez in the fourth and a solo shot by Mookie Betts in the sixth.

They loaded the bases with one out in the ninth on four walks to force in a run, but Christian Vazquez (strikeout) and Jackie Bradley Jr. (groundout) left them loaded and that was the ballgame.

"Great that we tried to come back yesterday, great that we tried to come back today, but that can't happen," Cora said. "It's going to be hard. We were already in a tough spot this week because of the bullpen and obviously the starters not going deep, but we'll find a way, tomorrow we've got DP, hopefully he gets us rolling and then everybody starts throwing the ball well."



Until they get a good start from a starter, it'll be hard to feel good about them.

"Those are the same guys that did it last year, so I don't put anything bad on them," Martinez said. "It's just we kind of saw four consecutive bad outings. So, to me, I'm expecting there is going to be a time where there is four consecutive great outings. It's going to be like, whoa, that's the law of averages."

### **Rick Porcello gives up 9 runs, gets just 8 outs**

Rob Bradford

SEATTLE -- The Red Sox have gotten off to a historic start to begin the 2019 season, and not in a good way.

Rick Porcello became the latest Sox starter to be bludgeoned by the Mariners bats with the righty surrendering nine runs (4 earned) over just 2 2/3 innings Sunday afternoon.

In the four games at T-Mobile Park the Red Sox starting pitchers allowed 22 earned runs over 15 innings (13.20 ERA).

Porcello's outing began with a perfect first inning in which he fanned a pair, heading into the second with his team holding a 3-0 lead. But after giving two back in the second, Porcello was driven from the game after getting just two outs in the third. He would be charged with seven runs in an inning which began with J.D. Martinez dropping a routine fly ball in left field.

Not helping matters were the four walks issued by Porcello, equaling the most he had ever given up as a member of the Red Sox.

### **Plan for Dustin Pedroia includes stop in Greenville**

Rob Bradford

SEATTLE -- Dustin Pedroia is inching toward rejoining the Red Sox. But first, he's going to be making a stop in the minor leagues.

Pedroia played another successful eight innings in Fort Myers, Fla. Sunday morning, continuing to pave the way for his minor-league rehab assignment. According to Red Sox manager Alex Cora that is scheduled to take place with Single-A Greenville, starting April 4.

Before joining the Drive for Thursday's game Pedroia will play one more nine-inning game at JetBlue Park Tuesday.

The second baseman -- who hasn't had any setbacks with his right knee throughout spring training -- had targeted the Red Sox' home opener April 9 for his return to the majors if all went well. Cora wasn't quite ready to make that sort of commitment.

"I don't want to get ahead of myself," Cora said.

Greenville ended up becoming Pedroia's destination due to weather concerns. It is projected to be in the low 70's Thursday, compared to the potentially ominous temperatures in Portland, Maine or Syracuse, N.Y. (where the Triple-A Pawtucket Red Sox are starting up).

### **Andrew Benintendi not in lineup for Red Sox' series finale**

Rob Bradford

SEATTLE -- Andrew Benintendi was optimistic that the foul ball he rifled off his right knee cap Saturday night would not be a problem. For a day anyway, it has sidelined the outfielder.

Benintendi remained in the Red Sox' 6-5 loss to the Mariners despite initially crumpling to the ground after striking his leg, ultimately going 1-for-4 with a run. But he is not in Sunday's starting lineup, with J.D. Martinez getting his first start of the season in the outfield.

"He's doing OK," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora of Benintendi. "He told me he wanted to play today. Obviously he wasn't going to play. Give him one day, he should be ready for tomorrow.

"He was going to play but after what happened yesterday it makes sense. Lefty on the mound, anyway. Try to find a day for him during the week, so it worked out perfectly for me to give him an off-day."

The move pushes Mookie Betts back up to the leadoff spot.

Here is the Red Sox' batting order against Seattle lefty Wade LeBlanc with Rick Porcello on the mound for the visitors:

Mookie Betts RF

Rafael Devers 3B

J.D. Martinez LF

Xander Bogaerts SS

Sam Travis DH

Mitch Moreland 1B

Eduardo Nunez 2B

Christian Vazquez C

Jackie Bradley Jr. CF

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Poor pitching results from starters means second-guessing of spring approach**

Sean McAdam

SEATTLE — Like a hitter sitting on a fastball in a fastball count, Alex Cora seemed to know the question was coming. He was ready to swing.

The question was a natural one: Had the Red Sox' starters' abysmal (13.20 ERA) work in the first four games of the regular season cause the manager to re-think how the team handled them in spring training?

The answer was locked and loaded.

"I didn't rethink about it last year," Cora said quickly. "You saw what happened. It was the same plan. So, whoever is doubting us, what we did this year. ... Check what happened last year. We did the same thing."

When it was pointed out that the starters actually threw one fewer start this spring last year, Cora was ready for that, too.

“Yeah, but when I got here, I remember people were saying Chris (Sale) was throwing 100 mph in the first game of 2017,” said Cora. “It’s easy to second-guess now, what we did. But nobody second-guessed us last year. It’s a program. You have to be disciplined.

”That’s the way I see it, you know. If people think that they didn’t start 20 games or they had too many innings, they should get back to what we did last year in spring training. We played until Oct. 28 and the previous year, when I got here, everybody was talking about how they were out of bullets in (the ALDS) 2017 against the Houston Astros.

“We did the same thing last year and Chris went seven (innings) in Tampa (in his first start) and five (innings) in Miami (in his second outing). It worked last year. Everybody was cool when the starters were pitching in October and going to the bullpen and being rovers. It’s easy to second-guess now because we didn’t pitch well here.”

Clearly, Cora is on the defensive. And just as clearly, he has a salient point: if the Sox adhered to essentially the same program last year and got a World Series win out of it, then it’s reasonable to give it some time this year.

The season can’t be judged on the first four games — or less than one-quarter of one percent of the schedule — no matter how poor the performance was. And make no mistake: it was horrendous. You have to go back to 2000 to find a four-game series in which the Sox allowed 34 runs. And they’re now the first defending champs to allow 11 homers in the first four games of the next season.

Anytime your starters’ ERA is in double digits, it’s not a good sign.

But some perspective is in order. It’s not as if Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi, Eduardo Rodriguez and Rick Porcello all forgot how to pitch, or how to get major league hitters out.

“It’s the first part of the season here,” said Mitch Moreland. “I’ll run those guys out there every time. Our starters are some of the best in the league. Just because it didn’t go their way a couple of games doesn’t mean that’s the way the season is going to go. They’re going to find their groove and get us rolling.”

Some of this is timing, too. As Cora noted, a middle-of-the-season series like this wouldn’t get much attention, and certainly wouldn’t engender nearly as much panic. But because they’re the first four games out of the starting block, the results are bound to be magnified.

It’s what happens.

It’s Cora’s larger point that bears repeating: if the plan to bring along starters gradually worked well last season, then shouldn’t it be given the benefit of the doubt this time around?

At some point, execution comes into play here. Sale, Eovaldi, Rodriguez and Porcello didn’t leave pitches over the middle of the plate because they didn’t face the Minnesota Twins enough in March. They didn’t throw the ball to spots – period.

Individually, there’s a myriad of reasons why each of the first four starters stumbled and fell. Sale couldn’t command his fastball, or his slider, arguably his best pitch. Eovaldi needed to make some mechanical adjustments and couldn’t command his splitter, his most important pitch to keep hitters off his fastball. In Rodriguez’s case, he didn’t follow the game plan to throw changeups to lefties. And Porcello was uncharacteristically poor with his control, walking three hitters in an inning and four in 2.2 innings.

Might they have been sharper with a bit more work in the spring? Perhaps.

But the takeaway from a year ago was that they were plenty sharp — and strong — in October, when it mattered most.

If that happens again this fall, this first week will be forgotten for the aberration it likely was.

And if it doesn't happen, it likely means there were other, bigger issues along the way.

Starting pitching is still this team's strength. Four games in March — no matter how atypical — shouldn't change that perception.

### **Red Sox, Xander Bogaerts nearing six-year contract extension**

Sean McAdam

SEATTLE — Fresh off a newly-minted contract extension for Chris Sale, the Red Sox Sunday were putting the finishing touches on a new deal with shortstop Xander Bogaerts, an industry source confirmed.

The contract would be worth \$120 million over six seasons, beginning in 2020. Bogaerts, who, like Sale, would have been eligible for free agency after the 2019 season, stands to make \$12 million in 2019, the result of an agreement reached in January before salary arbitration.

Evan Drellich was the first to report the sides were close to an agreement.

That brings the total value of the deal to \$132 million over the next seven seasons.

Bogaerts declined comment as the Red Sox left T-Mobile Park Sunday evening.

"I'll see you guys tomorrow," said Bogaerts as he walked to the team bus.

Dave Dombrowski, president of baseball operations, also declined comment.

### **BSJ Analysis**

The deal would successfully lock up another core member of the Red Sox' roster long-term. Bogaerts would remain under team control through 2025, though there were indications that the deal would involve an opt-out for the shortstop.

Bogaerts, 26, who made his debut in the second half of the 2013 season, has emerged as one of the game's better offensive shortstops while also developing the reputation as a dependable defender with just 10 errors committed last season.

If Bogaerts is not in the same class as, say, Houston's Carlos Correa or Cleveland's Francisco Lindor, then he certainly is part of the next-best class at the position. Last season, he established career bests in homers (23), RBI (103), doubles (45) and OPS (.883).

Equally as important is that the Red Sox have no one in their system they could turn to as a replacement for Bogaerts had he left for free agency. C.J. Chatham, a second-round pick in 2016, will begin the year at Double-A Portland and will likely need more than this season to further develop.

The imminent signing for Bogaerts — which could become official and be announced Monday — means the Sox have successfully signed up two of their three big-name free-agents-to-be for next winter, with only Rick Porcello without a contract past 2019.

(More complementary players such as Mitch Moreland, Steve Pearce and Brock Holt are also headed toward free agency, but can't be considered core players for the organization).

Only last week, when the Sox announced Sale's extension, Dombrowski said the Sox would prefer to get any such extensions done before the start of the season so as to avoid potential distractions for the player or

the team. But in cases where a deal has been negotiated and an agreement is close, the Sox have been willing, in the past, to extend that unofficial deadline in the hopes that a deal can be finalized.

## **BSJ Game Report: Mariners 10, Red Sox 8 – Porcello digs a hole for slumping Sox**

Sean McAdam

Another far-from-quality start: Rick Porcello followed in the footsteps of the three starters who preceded him the mound — which meant another poor outing from a member of the Red Sox rotation. Porcello was sharp in the first inning, recording two strikeouts but gave up two runs in the second. The third inning, he came completely unglued, issuing three walks and allowing seven more runs while not finishing the inning. It was one of the worst starts of Porcello's career and it couldn't have come at a worse time for the Sox, whose bullpen has been overworked in the first series of the season. "Not good," sighed Porcello. "I've got to do a lot better. I only covered two and two-thirds innings. Not good enough, absolutely. No excuses." Porcello left some pitches over the middle of the plate and couldn't get the patient Mariners' lineup to expand the zone. And the uncharacteristically poor control came back to hurt: of the four walks he issued, three of the hitters came around the score.

Defense has been suspect, too: The pitching has obviously commanded much of the attention, but the team's defensive play has been shoddy at times, too. They've committed at least one error in each of the first four games. On Sunday, a misplay in left field by J.D. Martinez opened the door for the seven-run third inning. Martinez was getting the start in left to give Andrew Benintendi a day off after he fouled a pitch off his right knee. Battling a tough sun in the outfield, Martinez seemed to lose track of the ball and had it bounce off the heel of his glove. That meant, of the seven runs that followed that inning, five of them were unearned. Along with the disappointing starting pitching, the Red Sox were expecting sloppy play in the early going, but that's what they've experienced. And it hasn't helped.

Martinez already hot: At the plate, however, Martinez is already in mid-season form. He drove in first run of the game in the first inning, giving him an RBI in each of the first four games of the season. After a walk to lead off the third, Martinez drilled a three-run homer to left in the fourth, giving him his second homer of the young season to go along with a .412 batting average and seven RBI. That's quite a contrast to the start of last season, when Martinez didn't homer until his seventh game with the Sox and didn't hit his second until his 10th game of the season. Martinez also collected his 1,000th career hit with his homer. A trio of fans who caught the ball in the left field stands met with Martinez after the game and got a bat signed from him and a picture taken with him in exchange for the souvenir ball.

### **TURNING POINT**

As poorly as the Red Sox played and pitched, they had a chance to overtake the Mariners in the ninth after the Seattle bullpen experienced another late-game meltdown. The Sox trailed by four entering the ninth but three walks by Cory Gearran forced in one run and Chasen Bradford issued another bases-loaded pass to produce a second run. With one out and trailing by two, the Sox had the bases loaded and just one out. But Bradford fanned Christian Vazquez for the second out, then got Jackie Bradley Jr. to roll out to second for the final out.

### **TWO UP**

Colten Brewer: There were some command issues, resulting in a wild pitch on a third strike and a walk, but Brewer flashed some impressive stuff, racking up three strikeouts while pitching the seventh.

Rafael Devers: Devers continues to sting the ball, doubling in the first inning and adding a single in the fourth. Devers is hitting .353 for the season.

### **ONE DOWN**

Sam Travis: Travis got another start against a lefty, but this one didn't work out as well the other night, when he collected two hits. Travis was hitless in four at-bats and didn't make much hard contact.

#### QUOTE OF NOTE

"We didn't play well. We're actually lucky we won one." Alex Cora on the weekend series.

#### STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Red Sox have allowed 11 homers through the first four games, the most ever for a defending World Series championship team at the start of the next season.

Ryan Brasier made his first appearance of the season meaning that every member of the 25-man roster has gotten into a game except for David Price, who pitches Monday.

J.D. Martinez has knocked in runs in every one of the first four games, becoming the first Red Sox player since Shea Hillenbrand (2003) to do so.

Mookie Betts has a 10-game hitting streak dating back to last season.

The Sox allowed at least 34 runs in a four-game series for the first time in 19 years, having last done so against the Yankees in June of 2000.

#### UP NEXT

The Red Sox leave Seattle and travel to Oakland, for another four-game set. On Monday, it will be LHP David Price (16-7, 3.58 in 2018) vs. RHP Aaron Brooks (0-0, 0.00).

## \* *The Athletic*

### **Red Sox continue to secure their core with Xander Bogaerts extension**

Jen McCaffrey

SEATTLE – For the second time in less than two weeks, the Red Sox have reportedly locked up another of their key players to a long-term deal, solidifying the key pieces of last season's World Series run.

Shortly after dropping three of four games in their season-opening series against the Seattle Mariners, reports surfaced that shortstop Xander Bogaerts had agreed to a contract extension with the Red Sox.

The Boston Globe's Alex Speier reported a six-year, \$120 million deal with an opt-out after 2022. The news comes eight days after the Red Sox held a press conference to announce a five-year, \$145 million extension for starter Chris Sale.

Bogaerts, who is represented by powerhouse agent Scott Boras, earned \$12 million this season through arbitration and was scheduled to hit free agency for the first time in his career this winter.

The uncertainty of the market with Bryce Harper and Manny Machado not signing deals until February seems to have weighed heavily on several impending free agents like Sale, who stressed the importance of security over money in his press conference. Meanwhile, extensions are suddenly in vogue throughout the league; two-time American League MVP Mike Trout, who was set to become a free agent after the 2020 season, agreed to a 12-year, \$430 million extension with the Los Angeles Angels during spring training as well.

The question remains how these commitments will impact the chances of signing Boston's most important player, Mookie Betts — a free agent after next season — and its dominant slugger, J.D. Martinez, who has an opt-out in his contract. But with Sale and now Bogaerts on board, the Red Sox have a degree of certainty about the future that did not exist a few weeks ago.

At the start of camp, Bogaerts was asked about the possibility of staying in Boston long term.

“The Red Sox have obviously treated me well throughout my whole career, me and my family,” he said in February when he arrived in spring training. “I see how they treat all the guys that come in. And being here for a while, I think it’s a place anyone and everyone might want to play or stay.”

At the time, Bogaerts expressed concern for the state of free agency with Harper and Machado still on the market and how it might affect his future decisions.

“You obviously have to think about that,” Bogaerts said. “We’re all baseball players and want to do well and take care of our family in the future.”

The 26-year-old, now entering his sixth full season in Boston after signing as an amateur free agent in 2009, has hit .283 with a .772 OPS in 763 career games.

Last season, Bogaerts hit .288 and posted career highs in OPS (.883), RBIs (103), homers (23) and doubles (45). With Bogaerts in the Opening Day lineup on Thursday, it marked his sixth straight Opening Day; Only Everett Scott (eight) and Joe Cronin (seven) logged more Opening Day starts at shortstop for Boston. Rick Burleson, Nomar Garciaparra, Rico Petrocelli and Heinie Wagner each had six as well, putting Bogaerts’ tenure with the organization in perspective.

Though president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said at the press conference for Sale’s contract extension that he didn’t plan to negotiate any new deals in season, there clearly had already been some groundwork laid out with Boras and Bogaerts.

“As far as negotiations are concerned I think it’s usually wise to stop on Opening Day because you don’t want to be a distraction,” Dombrowski said last week. “You want them focused and putting up the best numbers they can and win a championship.”

At winter meetings in December, Dombrowski said part of the reason the team wouldn’t be signing a reliever to a long-term deal was because they wanted to use that money toward signing their slew of impending free agents to extensions. Now they have two of those players secured.

“It’s just that you’re in a position where again there’s so many dollars to go around as you proceed in the long term and we still have other things that we’re looking at for the long term that aren’t concluded,” Dombrowski said in December.

At that same time, Dombrowski made note of the club’s window of opportunity to win with the young core they currently possess. With Sale locked up through age 35 and Bogaerts now signed through his age-32 season (if the deal is indeed for six years as reported), the Red Sox may have expanded that window a bit. They’ll have Nathan Eovaldi and David Price under contract through 2022. On the position player side, Andrew Benintendi won’t reach free agency until after the 2022 season, while Rafael Devers would hit the market after 2023.

Betts remains the biggest question mark, and though the team has reportedly approached him in the past about extensions, he has turned down the offers. This winter, in his second arbitration-eligible year, he earned a record \$20 million. Following the Trout contract extension he offered a little more insight on his thoughts about signing an extension.

“I love it here in Boston. It’s a great spot,” he said. “I’ve definitely grown to love going up north in the cold, and all those types of things. But it doesn’t mean I want to sell myself short of my value.”

“I didn’t expect anything to happen until I’m a free agent,” he added. “It’s just one of those things where you’ve just got to go out and play. You can’t worry about the economics of the game right now. They have to take care of what they have to take care of and I have to take care of what I have to take care of. The common thing is to win a World Series and I think it’s something we definitely both want to do.”

While Bogaerts' deal gives the club further long-term stability, there are still questions for the end of the season. Boras also represents Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr. Martinez has an opt-out in his contract after this season allowing him to return to free agency. Martinez slogged through an arduous free-agent process last winter, signing late, and witnessed similar situations befall Harper and Machado (though not without long-term benefits). It remains to be seen how any of that will affect Martinez's decision this winter. Bradley, on the other hand, becomes a free agent after 2020. So will Boras try to work an extension for the outfielder now that Bogaerts has signed his deal?

And while Bogaerts' and Sale's deals are now in place, it's not as if the team hasn't been discerning in doling out their extensions.

A report from WEEI.com earlier in the week noted Rick Porcello and his agent offered to take less money to sign an extension with the Red Sox, but were turned down by the team. Porcello becomes a free agent at the end of the season. Perhaps it was a matter of timing with Bogaerts' extension pending. Maybe Dombrowski will revisit a deal with Porcello after the season, but there's a clear priority list as to which players the team wants to lock up first and Bogaerts just made the cut.

"Boston is an amazing city man," Bogaerts said in February. "All the sports here, all they do is win. Winning is one of the main keys for any player and for me. I enjoy winning in everything I do, on and off the field. If winning is (the) priority, then why not?"

## **\* *The New York Post***

### **Red Sox nearing a contract extension with Xander Bogaerts**

Joseph Staszewski

Xander Bogaerts and the Red Sox are close to a contract extension, according to WEEI Radio in Boston. It is a seven-year, \$132 million deal that would begin this season and has an opt-out, according to ESPN.

The agreement is not finalized, but there is a "strong likelihood" it will be announced Monday, WEEI reported. Bogaerts is making \$12 million this season and would have become a free agent in 2020.

The 26-year-old shortstop is a one-time All-Star and two-time Silver Slugger winner. Bogaerts batted .288 last season with a .360 on-base percentage and a .883 OPS while hitting 23 homers and collecting 103 RBIs.

## **\* *The USA Today***

### **Xander Bogaerts getting six-year, \$120 million extension from Boston Red Sox**

Steve Gardner

The class of impending free agents at the end of this baseball season is about to lose another marquee player.

The Boston Red Sox are locking up All-Star shortstop Xander Bogaerts on a six-year, \$120 million contract extension, a person with direct knowledge of the agreement told USA TODAY Sports' Bob Nightengale. The person spoke only on the condition of anonymity because the deal has not been announced.

Bogaerts, 26, hit .288 with a career-high 23 home runs and 103 RBI last season as the Red Sox won the World Series. He finished 13th in the voting for American League MVP.



Bogaerts already is earning \$12 million for this year. The new contract will begin with the 2020 season and run through 2025.

Already this offseason, potential free agent Nolan Arenado has signed an eight-year, \$260 million extension to remain with the Colorado Rockies, Paul Goldschmidt has signed a five-year, \$130 million extension with the St. Louis Cardinals, Justin Verlander has signed a two-year, \$66 million extension with the Houston Astros and the Red Sox locked up Chris Sale on a five-year, \$145 million extension.

## **\* *The Seattle Times***

### **Offensive explosion continues as Mariners take three of four from defending champion Red Sox**

Mike Vorel

Omar Narvaez stood and watched.

Can you blame him? The first-year Mariners catcher's arms were extended, hips flipped open, bat hanging triumphantly behind his head. For a second or two, the 27-year-old Venezuelan was a 5-foot-11, 220-pound statue, gazing up into the seats as a blistered baseball bolted out of the ballpark. He watched, and so did everybody else, admiring a Mariners offense that has consistently, mercilessly clobbered the defending champs.

"I was thinking about putting a good swing on it," Narvaez said, "and I got the pitch I was looking for and I finally got the barrel."

The ball met the barrel, then the bleachers. Narvaez's three-run homer was the most emphatic moment — and the loudest crack of the bat — in a seven-run third inning for the Mariners on Sunday. Seattle (5-1) ultimately posted 12 hits and two homers at T-Mobile Park, topping the Boston Red Sox 10-8 to take three out of four games in the series.

"Our guys were ready to hit, right from the beginning of the ballgame," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "That's really what stood out for me."

Besides Narvaez, four other Mariners posted multiple hits in the victory. Ryon Healy finished 2 for 4 with a double, his eighth extra-base hit in six games this season. Dee Gordon piled up three RBI via a single and a sacrifice fly. Mitch Haniger finished 2 for 5 with a bouncing double down the third base line that scored two, and Jay Bruce belted his second dinger of the season. For the slow-starting 1-3 Red Sox, this was death by a hundred hits.

In that explosive seven-run third inning, the Mariners brought 10 batters to the plate. They piled up four hits, three walks and a sacrifice fly ... but it all started with an error. Haniger led off the inning by sailing a fly ball into left field and advancing to second base when Boston's J.D. Martinez lost it in the sun. Red Sox starter Rick Porcello failed to escape the frame, lasting 2 2/3 innings and allowing six hits and nine runs (just four earned) with four walks.

"You don't even know how many you're scoring (in the seven-run inning)," Gordon said. "You're just getting up to hit, to be honest. I'm pretty sure everybody else in here didn't look up at the scoreboard to see how many we scored that inning. You're just trying to get up there to hit and do your job."

That offensive output helped secure a victory for 34-year-old lefty Wade LeBlanc, who went 5 1/3 innings in his first start of the season and surrendered seven hits, six runs (four earned), three walks and a Martinez three-run homer. Nick Rumbelow served up an immediate solo homer to reigning American League MVP Mookie Betts after replacing LeBlanc in the sixth inning.

The Seattle bullpen momentarily stiffened as Matt Festa and Roenis Elias combined for a pair of scoreless frames. But Cory Gearrin walked three while securing a single out before being pulled with the bases loaded in the ninth inning. Chasen Bradford promptly walked home a run, but he bounced back by striking out Christian Vazquez and forcing a Jackie Bradley Jr. ground out to end another uncomfortable ninth.

"I couldn't breathe there for a minute, but it was awesome," said Bradford, who earned his first career save.

Mariners fans can breathe easier now. On this day — and five others in March — their offense was enough. In six games this season, Servais' squad has averaged 8.2 runs. That included 34 runs in the four-game series with the Red Sox. If you hit enough, it seems, inconsistent pitching can be overcome. Same with Seattle's defense, which unfortunately leads the major leagues with nine errors (and counting).

At the end of that highlight-heavy third inning, Mariners center fielder Mallex Smith scored from first base on the aforementioned Haniger double. In fact, the speedy Smith didn't even stop at home, sprinting helmet-less through the plate and into the dugout, happily high-fiving teammates along the way.

In that moment, Smith mirrored the Mariners' offense in March. Just when you think they're going to stop, these Mariners keep right on going.

"Really an unbelievable series by our offense," Servais said. "Our guys really swung the bats well. More than anything else, we really controlled the strike zone. We didn't chase a lot. We got big hits. We got homers. It was really fun to watch."

Especially for the catcher.

## **\* *Associated Press***

### **Narvaez, Bruce homer as Mariners beat Red Sox 10-8**

SEATTLE -- The rebuilding Seattle Mariners are off to a surprising start.

The lineup is leading the way.

Omar Narvaez hit a three-run homer off Rick Porcello in Seattle's seven-run third inning, sending the Mariners to a 10-8 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Sunday.

Dee Gordon had two hits and three RBI as Seattle put together another impressive performance at the plate. The Mariners scored 34 times while taking three of four from the defending World Series champions in their first series at home.

"Right now we've got really good confidence, and we know what we can do," Narvaez said. "Everybody's basically enjoying the game. Laughing, putting a smile on our face."

Jay Bruce also connected for Seattle, and Mitch Haniger had two hits and two RBI. The Mariners have 15 homers, hitting at least one in every game in their 5-1 start.

"I knew we'd hit some homers," Seattle manager Scott Servais said. "It seems like the ball is carrying here, but those balls are hit. Not too many cheap ones getting out of here."

Porcello (0-1) allowed nine runs, four earned, and six hits in 2 2/3 innings. The 2016 AL Cy Young Award winner struck out three and walked four.

Starters Porcello, Chris Sale, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez combined to give up 22 earned runs on 27 hits in the four games against Seattle.

"If you told me coming into the series that it was going to be this way I'd say, `No chance," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "But it's baseball. Those guys are going to be OK throughout the season. We know that."

The Red Sox almost came back in the ninth. Cory Gearrin came in to pitch for Seattle and walked the bases loaded with one out. Gearrin was then replaced by Chasen Bradford, who walked pinch hitter Blake Swihart to force in a run before retiring Christian Vazquez and Jackie Bradley Jr. to end the game.

Narvaez's drive to right put Seattle ahead to stay. Haniger capped the big inning with a two-run double.

Mariners starter Wade LeBlanc (1-0) allowed six runs, four earned, and seven hits in 5 1/3 innings.

J.D. Martinez hit an RBI single in Boston's three-run first, and then belted a three-run drive in the fourth for his 1,000th career hit.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: 2B Dustin Pedroia (left knee) played in an extended spring training game. Cora said Pedroia would play in another on Tuesday before beginning a rehab assignment at Single-A Greenville. ... OF Andrew Benintendi was out of the starting lineup after fouling a ball off his right knee on Saturday. He walked as a pinch hitter in the ninth.

Mariners: Closer Hunter Strickland, who was placed on the 10-day injured list Saturday with a right lat strain, will likely be out a couple of months, Servais said.

#### CLOSING COMMITTEE

With Strickland out, the Mariners are expecting to use different pitchers at the end of games depending on the situation. Bradford picked up his first career save. The right-hander became the third pitcher to record a save for the Mariners this season.

#### UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP David Price will make his first start of the season as Boston opens a four-game series at Oakland on Monday.

Mariners: RHP Felix Hernandez opens his season in the first of a two-game series at home against the Angels on Monday. This is the first season since 2008 that Hernandez did not start on opening day for Seattle.