

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, April 10, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox open Fenway with fanfare, but Blue Jays steal a win

Peter Abraham

Their new World Series rings in hand, the Red Sox players joined manager Alex Cora in center field before Tuesday afternoon's game against the Toronto Blue Jays to raise the 2018 World Series banner.

The first few tugs on the rope were fruitless, the tangled flag refusing to budge. The Sox tried again and it finally went up the flagpole.

Will they be able to say the same about their season?

The Sox continued what is inarguably shoddy play with a 7-5 loss against the Blue Jays.

Fenway Park was half full by the seventh inning, a joyous sellout crowd of 36,179 worn down by both a wintry day and watching the home team toss away an early lead with a series of mistakes.

Reigning American League Most Valuable Player Mookie Betts represented one last hope, arriving at the plate with two runners on and two outs in the ninth. But he struck out flailing at a low slider from Ken Giles to end the game.

At 3-9, the Red Sox are already six games out of first place.

Since 1994, the start of baseball's wild-card era, only three of the 57 teams that started 3-9 or worse went on to make the playoffs. The last were the 2007 Philadelphia Phillies, who went from 3-10 to winning the National League East on the final day of the season.

These Red Sox, who return the bulk of a 108-win team, look incapable of that right now.

"We have to play better. I've been saying it all along," Cora said. "Just play better — better defense, better offense, pitch better."

The rebuilding Blue Jays arrived having scored six runs in a four-game losing streak. But they bounced back from a 2-0 deficit against Chris Sale.

Sale retired the first seven batters he faced, then allowed five runs on seven hits. He is 0-3 with a 9.00 earned run average in three starts since being signed to a five-year, \$145 million contract extension.

"I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life," Sale said.

Singles by Alen Hanson, Billy McKinney, and Freddy Galvis produced a run in the third inning. McKinney then scored on a sacrifice fly by Teoscar Hernandez.

Randal Grichuk, Danny Jansen, and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. led off with singles to give Toronto a 3-2 lead in the fourth inning.

With two outs, Sale could not limit the damage. Jansen scored on a passed ball, then Gurriel stole home, Sale firing the ball past catcher Christian Vazquez as the runner raced home.

That drew the first boos of the season.

“If he throws a strike, [Gurriel] is out by a lot,” Cora said. “The kid took a gamble and [Sale] rushed the pitch and yanked it.”

Sale averaged 91.8 miles per hour with his four-seam fastball, with a peak of 94.7 on a raw day. But six of eight Toronto batters had hits at one point.

That only one of those hits was particularly well struck is incidental to the fact that Sale averaged 13.5 strikeouts per nine innings last season and is at 5.5 this season.

As Cora noted, he can't put hitters away.

“We've got to win that game,” Sale said. “This is very easy to just throw on top of the pile and say we're not playing good. This wasn't us not playing good; this was me sucking today.

“That's frustrating because today was the day we were going to turn it around. We're back home, ceremony, in front of our home fans, playing our first home game. Everyone did what they had to do except for me.”

Not entirely. The Red Sox bullpen, which had been an unexpected bright spot, also faltered.

Heath Hembree walked Hernandez with two outs in the seventh. Brandon Workman then walked Brandon Drury before Grichuk had an RBI single.

Matt Barnes, who retired 13 of the 14 batters he faced in three prior appearances, hit McKinney with a pitch to start the ninth, then threw a wild pitch before Galvis drove in a run with a double.

The Sox were responsible for three stolen bases, two passed balls, a wild pitch, and a hit batter over the course of the game.

“They took advantage of us,” Cora said.

Matt Shoemaker (3-0) went 5²/₃ innings for the victory. He allowed home runs by Mitch Moreland and Betts. Two other runs were unearned.

Two-out doubles by J.D. Martinez and Xander Bogaerts drew the Sox within a run in the eighth inning before Rafael Devers grounded out.

Dustin Pedroia was 1 for 4 in his return from the injured list. His single off Giles in the ninth put the tying run at the plate. Jackie Bradley Jr. then drew a walk.

With the remaining fans standing, pinch hitter Blake Swihart popped out to center field, as did Andrew Benintendi. Betts had a chance and missed it.

The same players, manager, and coaching staff were 10-2 at this point last season.

“It's somewhat surprising. But then again, it's baseball,” Betts said. “They're professionals, too. We can't expect them to roll over and play dead. They're coming to play and we haven't.”

Should we now be worried about the Red Sox?

Dan Shaughnessy

At what point, precisely, are we allowed to wonder whether these Red Sox are OK?

We have made the excuses. The Sox have a World Series hangover. They had a rugged schedule the first 11 days. They were due for some reality, and Tuesday the Sox told us that Chris Sale had no fastball in Oakland because he was sick. The struggling Sox cannot possibly fall out of contention because everybody in the American League (besides the Astros and Yankees) stinks.

Pay no attention to this early slump, the Sox are going to be OK.

Swell.

But Tuesday's home opener reopened the vault of suspicion and has us seriously wondering what is going on with the Local Nine. The Red Sox got their 2018 championship rings, celebrated amid an amazing/gaudy assemblage of hardware (10 championship trophies) and star power (Pedro Martinez, David Ortiz, Manny Ramirez, and Rob Gronkowski in the same space?), then took the field and produced yet another stinkbomb, this one a 7-5 loss to the tanking Toronto Blue Jays.

The defending world champs are 3-9, in last place, six games behind the Tampa Bay Rays.

And the annoying Sox are still clinging to 2018 like a flock of Springsteen wannabes reciting boring stories of Glory Days.

"Now we got our rings and now we got to get back to playing good baseball," acknowledged Sox manager Alex Cora.

Tuesday was not about good baseball. It was a slopfest, replete with another Sale stinker (four innings, seven hits, five earned runs) and a couple of passed balls. The sleepy Sox allowed a runner to steal home in a three-run fourth and were booed with gusto when they came off the field, trailing, 5-2.

The Sox are still in Kevin Bacon/Animal House "All is well!" mode as Sale sinks in the East. Since signing a five-year, \$145 million contract extension, Sale is 0-3 with a 9.00 ERA. He induces almost zero swings and misses with his four-seam fastball. And yet the Sox insist that he is not hurt and that this is all part of a plan to save bullets for October.

"He wasn't able to put away hitters," Cora conceded. "He didn't have too many swings and misses. He paid the price."

"Today wasn't a team funk," confessed Sale. "Today was on me."

That's the truth.

Cora chose Tuesday's pregame news conference to reveal that Sale was under the weather when he had the slowest fastball of his career in the 1-0 loss at Oakland last week. It was interesting timing. Also, weak.

After that game in Oakland, Cora and Sale were both asked if the pitcher was physically OK, and both answered in the affirmative. Did two days of listening to Boston sports talk radio inspire the Sox to cough up new/old information?

This is going to be an issue until Sale shows us a semblance of his old self.

Otherwise, it was a beautiful day at Fenway. Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra triggered pregame festivities at 1:10 p.m. when World Series banners from past seasons were unfurled on the Green Monster.

Then came a parade of past heroes carrying old World Series trophies and 2018 championship rings. Coming out from the cornfield behind the wall, Martinez, Mike Lowell, and Ortiz carried trophies from 2004, 2007, and 2013. Ramirez, Curt Schilling, and Tim Wakefield were among the ring bearers. John Henry and Tom Werner greeted the old-time heroes at second base.

Cora was first to come out of the first base dugout for his ring, and the manager moved down a handshake line that included Henry, Werner, Linda Henry, Sam Kennedy, Dave Dombrowski, and baseball commissioner Rob Manfred.

Oddly, the ring recipients were not announced to the crowd. Fans had to figure it out. David Price got a rousing ovation when he came out of the dugout, and Price doffed his cap to the crowd. J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts were the final two players to emerge, and both were cheered madly.

After the last of the rings had been gifted, the Sox legends retreated to the dugout and 2018 team members walked toward center field for the raising of the banner. Cora did the rope-tugging honors (there were some problems with the strings — a metaphor for the 2019 season perhaps) and the crowd roared when a small breeze extended the championship banner and revealed its historic message.

Then came the introductions of the starting lineups; Dustin Pedroia (back on the roster, batting seventh) and Sale got the biggest ovations.

Finally, we had more than 20 of the Super Bowl champion Patriots walking in from left field, led by Gronkowski. They brought all six Lombardis. Gronk, Julian Edelman, and Stephon Gilmore tossed the ceremonial first pitches. There were high-powered hugs and hardware peppering the space in front of the first-base dugout.

After the ceremony, in a gesture of infinite grace, John Henry came to the press box and met with ESPN baseball communications strategist Ben Cafardo, son of longtime Globe scribe Nick Cafardo, who died suddenly in February at spring training.

Then it was time for baseball. And it was not good baseball, as 36,179 shivered in low 40s temperatures.

Sale hit 94 on the gun in the second inning, but was sloppy in the third and fourth.

Pedroia's comeback day (1 for 4) was not good. He grounded into a double play in the second, stranded runners on first and third in the fourth, and left two more aboard when he flied out in the sixth. He was stranded after his leadoff single in the ninth.

In the losers' clubhouse, a reporter asked Sale if he has ever felt this lost on the mound.

"Never in my life," said the erstwhile ace.

Yuck.

Dustin Pedroia's mere presence is a home opener victory

Christopher L. Gasper

In a pregame preamble of pomp and players from the past, the Red Sox received their 2018 World Series rings, the last hurrah of a historic 119-win season. It represented the final clinking of champagne glasses to toast 2018 before putting it behind them once and for all with the first game of 2019 at Fenway Park.

No one in a Red Sox uniform was more eager to move on from 2018 than Dustin Pedroia.

The home opener on Tuesday represents a time of renewal, both a fresh start and a return to the familiar. Tuesday was both for Pedroia, who played in just three games last year, limited by the aftermath of the cartilage restoration surgery he had on his left knee following the 2017 season. The chronic ailment threatened to end the Laser Show for good. But the gritty second baseman was back where he belonged on Fenway's emerald lawn, a triumph of fortitude and determination over age and debilitating injury.

The Red Sox longest-tenured player seemed both grateful and humbled by his long, multi-surgery, anguished recovery road back.

“I was nervous. I’ve been working for 16 months just to get ready to do this,” said Pedroia, who finished 1 for 4 with a ninth-inning single. “Last year, I played three games. I don’t feel like I did last year. I’m going to be fine. I’m going to be able to play. I was excited. I didn’t sleep much. I enjoy playing, and I enjoy being a Red Sox. So, it was fun.”

Pedroia’s return to the lineup was the feel-good story of an otherwise gloomy home opener, as the scuffling Sox and their concerning ace, Chris Sale, dropped a 7-5 decision to the tanking Toronto Blue Jays. After going 3-8 on their hardball road trip from Hades to start the season, the Sox didn’t look any better on home turf, as the Jays ran circles around them on the basepaths, including a daring steal of home by Lourdes Gurriel Jr. If you had any doubt, 2018 is history, as relevant as a yellowed old issue of TV Guide.

This Sox team is going to need all the help it can get to turn things around, so having Pedroia — a four-time All-Star and Gold Glover, and former AL MVP — in the lineup often is appealing. It just may not be realistic. We’ll see how long Pedroia can last. The Sox set the target for Pedroia at 120 games. That feels optimistic. The heart roots for Pedroia, but the head says that at age 35 with a creaky left knee, the Sox need to handle him with care.

Manager Alex Cora was extremely coy when asked what the plan was for managing Pedroia. Still, Pedroia has made a career of making doubters eat their words. He stated his goal wasn’t to make it to this home opener. It was to make it through the final three years of the eight-year contract extension he signed in 2013, which still has \$40 million left.

“I’ve seen him at his best. I’ve seen him whenever he is hurt just trying to play through stuff, trying to come back from stuff,” said shortstop Xander Bogaerts. “I’ve pretty much seen it all with him. One thing I can say is that anything he says is possible. Whatever he puts his mind towards, he can do.”

It was a momentous occasion for the Red Sox and Pedroia.

At 1:30 p.m., Pedroia — activated by the Sox on Tuesday — received his World Series ring. Batting seventh, Pedroia came to the plate in the second inning at 2:37 p.m., greeted by a standing ovation from the Fenway Faithful, the first time in 315 days he stepped into the Fenway batter’s box for game action (May 29, 2018, against Toronto). He had runners on the corners and nobody out. He grounded the second pitch he saw from Matt Shoemaker into a 6-4-3 double play that scored Bogaerts from third to give the Sox a 2-0 lead.

This was a theme for the profligate Sox. They were 1 for 8 with runners in scoring position and left six men on base. Pedroia led the way, 0 for 3 on RISP.

Pedroia stepped to the plate in the fourth inning with the Sox down, 5-2, and runners on the corners with two outs. The whole ballpark wanted to will that Hollywood moment for a guy who has always led the Sox in heart and hustle. He got down, 0-2, and grounded to shortstop. Pedroia came up in a one-run game in the sixth with the tying run in scoring position and two outs. He lined out to right field.

Pedroia admitted his emotions and the warm welcome back got the best of him in his first couple of at-bats.

“My first couple of at-bats, I was trying too hard, and I was kind of in a big spot,” he said. “I appreciate it so much. I think everyone knows what I’ve been going through and trying to come back from, so it means a lot.”

We got a taste of what the new normal is going to be with Pedroia in the top of the seventh, when he went down awkwardly after Teoscar Hernandez stole second base and clipped him. What was left of the 36,179 fans held its collective breath, waiting for Pedroia to get up.

Mitch Moreland came over looking concerned. Bogaerts asked him if he was hurt. It was the worst-case scenario. It was . . . a false alarm.

Hernandez's cleat got caught on Pedroia's shoelace, he said after the game. Pedroia has lost a step, but he hasn't lost his trademark wit. When asked if his mind went to a dark place during the Teoscar Tangle:

"My knee can't get any worse, so it's going to be all right."

We'll know Pedroia is back when his at-bats are as sharp as his bon mots. That might take some more time. The Sox felt he needed more seasoning and they needed more proof that his knee could hold up after just 15 spring training plate appearances, so they sent him to Single A Greenville to continue his prep. Pedroia played in three games, logging 23 innings and batting .333 in 11 plate appearances.

Tuesday's tableau in the Fens was fitting. A layer of fog descended on the Boston backdrop of the Old Green Lady, obscuring the skyline. A layer of fog has enveloped the Red Sox right now. But the return of Pedroia was a ray of sunshine on an otherwise gray and disappointing day. It was a start for a guy who wants to finish on his own terms.

"That's the goal. But to be able to play at home in the home opener it meant a lot to me. I feel like I accomplished something," Pedroia said. "During the whole thing, I haven't really had any good news or anything. Go see a doctor, and he gives you bad news. At some point, you want something good. This meant a lot."

You play to win the game, as Herm Edwards once famously uttered. But sometimes simply by playing the game, you're a winner. We all need to be reminded of that.

Red Sox need more than candor from Chris Sale

Chad Finn

Chris Sale is not right. Three starts into his season, that much is clear. Most alarming of all, even he is perplexed about what is wrong.

"I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life," he said after allowing five earned runs in four innings during the malaise-addled Red Sox' 7-5 loss to the Blue Jays in their home opener Tuesday. "I've got to keep fighting. No giving up. [I'm] trying to find something. This wasn't us not playing good today. This was me sucking."

Tuesday was supposed to be an afternoon of celebrations, comebacks and happy returns for the Red Sox, who raised their 2018 championship banner in their 2019 Fenway premiere after beginning the season with 11 games on a bumpy journey through Seattle, Oakland, and Arizona.

It supposed to be was a fresh start on their lousy start.

Dustin Pedroia made his season debut at second base after missing all but three games last season, the recently retired Rob Gronkowski was among the Patriots who joined the pregame fiesta, and even the relatively reclusive Manny Ramirez returned for the festivities.

Good times and good vibes abounded, and they continued into the game, when Mitch Moreland's solo homer gave the Red Sox their first Fenway run of the season in the bottom of the first.

But the happiest return would have come had Sale returned to his All-Star form. For a brief while, it went according to plan. He retired the first seven Blue Jays, recording his first swing-and-miss on a fastball of the season in that span. After which, he coughed up a 2-0 lead, failed to pitch into the fifth despite throwing 76 pitches, and dropped to 0-3 with a 9.00 earned run average on the season.

The Jays did their damage methodically, scoring a run on three straight one-out singles in the third. Teoscar Hernandez's sacrifice fly tied it at 2-2.

The first three hitters in the fourth inning also singled, with Lourdes Gurriel Jr. driving in the go-ahead run. Ignominiously, Sale was the victim of a steal of home by Gurriel Jr. later in the inning, giving Toronto a 5-2 lead.

"Today was on me," he said afterward. "We were supposed to win today's game. We score five runs on a day that I start, we've got to win that one. I wouldn't exactly say today was a team funk day, today was just me not being who I needed to be."

Sale's candor is unsurprising, but the Red Sox — six games behind the Rays in the AL East — need solutions more than my-bad accountability right now.

Sale said there isn't anything wrong with him physically. "I feel good," he said. "It's nothing like that."

Should his struggles continue, it might become more difficult to hear that answer without skepticism. But he deserves that benefit of the doubt now — he did touch 94 miles per hour in the first inning after laboring in the upper 80s in his last start against Oakland.

Fenway opener was the first MLB matchup between two Puerto Rican managers

Jaclyn Reiss

The Red Sox' home opener on Tuesday marked a milestone in Major League Baseball: It was the first matchup in history between two Puerto Rican managers.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora grew up in Caguas — a city of about 150,000 16 miles south of San Juan — and from 2014-16 managed the town's winter league team. And Toronto Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo became MLB's fourth Puerto Rican manager when he was offered the job in the fall of 2018.

Montoyo addressed the historic matchup on Tuesday: "I don't want to take that for granted. It's a big deal in Puerto Rico," he said.

(Montoyo also told ESPN earlier that the first thing he thought after accepting the Blue Jays manager job was: "When do we play against Boston, against the other Puerto Rican?")

"I'm very proud of Charlie," Cora told reporters. "His path to the big leagues was a lot different than mine. He paid his due in the minor leagues."

Cora, who was the first Puerto Rican manager to win the World Series, has been vocal in his support for his native country.

In January 2018, shortly after Hurricane Maria devastated the country, Cora flew back to Puerto Rico with a delegation of Sox players to bring food, water, and a check from the Red Sox Foundation for \$200,000 to help hurricane relief efforts.

And after the Sox won the World Series, Cora made a triumphant return to Caguas, greeted by thousands who had lined the town's main street in Red Sox hats and jerseys.

Manny Ramirez on taking part in the Red Sox' celebration: 'I wanted to come and say hi to the fans'

Chad Finn

Manny Ramirez still knows how to pull off the unexpected. The former Red Sox slugger and 2004 World Series Most Valuable Player has turned down invitations in the past to participate in championship

celebrations. But the 46-year-old former slugger, who also starred for the '07 champs, decided Tuesday's celebration was a good time to swing by Fenway again.

"They've invited me a couple of years, but I've been so busy with the family," said Ramirez, who is married with three children. "I wanted to come and say hi to the fans, and I'm here.

"When I came to Boston [as a free-agent in December 2000], I knew it was going to be tough. But it also made me a better player," he said. "I know sometimes a lot of people saw that maybe I was not working that hard. But I was working hard. I was doing my thing and putting my numbers up."

Photos: The scene at Fenway Park for Red Sox Opening Day

Ramirez put up massive numbers for the Red Sox from his arrival in 2001 until he was traded to the Dodgers at the trading deadline in July 2008, batting .312 with a .999 OPS and 274 home runs. Overall in his 19-year career, he batted .312 with a .996 OPS and 555 home runs, numbers worthy of Hall of Fame induction.

But suspensions in 2009 and '11 for violating Major League Baseball's performance-enhancing drug policy have severely hindered his chances. Ramirez has never received more than 23.8 percent of the vote in his three years on the ballot. Seventy-five percent is required for induction.

"I hope to, I hope to," said Ramirez when asked if he expects to make it someday. "But in life, everybody makes mistakes. Nobody is perfect. I think with time and God's will we're going to be there. But if not, we're just happy that we got the opportunity to play the game that we love."

Here are the Red Sox' 2018 World Series rings

Peter Abraham

The World Series rings, made by Jostens, have 21 rubies making up the team's "B" logo on top. The team said that represents the four championship won over 17 years under the Fenway Sports Group.

There are 14 diamonds on each side of the top of the ring and 22 blue sapphires surrounding the logo.

Two rows consisting of 128 diamonds recognize the 119 victories last season and nine championships by the franchise.

The left side displays eight pennants featuring the years of previous championships with a larger 2018 pennant.

The right side of the ring has the recipient's name and number along with a Fenway Park logo.

The inside of the ring is customized with an image of the commissioner's trophy signifying the number of rings the player, coach or staff member has won with the organization.

Also on the interior is 10-28-18, the date of the final game of the World Series, and the words "Damage Done" along with the recipient's signature.

The bottom of the ring has "Team For The Ages."

Among those receiving rings on Tuesday were Steven Wright, who is serving an 80-game suspension for using performance-enhancing drugs, and Carson Smith, who was signed to a minor league contract and is recovering from shoulder surgery. Brandon Phillips, who appeared in nine games, also returned to Fenway.

Sandy Leon, Tony Renda, Sam Travis, and Bobby Poyner will receive their rings before Triple A Pawtucket plays on Thursday.

Jalen Beeks (Rays), Joe Kelly (Dodgers), Ian Kinsler (Padres), Drew Pomeranz (Giants), and Hanley Ramirez (Indians) will receive theirs before games later this season.

Other rings will be presented in person when possible.

Red Sox raised a banner, welcomed old friends, and celebrated their championship

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox, who have had plenty of practice, delivered another rousing championship celebration before Tuesday's game against the Toronto Blue Jays.

With the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra playing in right field, banners for the franchise's nine championships were unfurled on the Green Monster, with the 2018 banner capping it off.

Then a selection of players from the 2004, '07, and '13 teams took the field. That group — Orlando Cabrera, Manny Delcarmen, Keith Foulke, Mike Lowell, Pedro Martinez, Will Middlebrooks, Mike Napoli, David Ortiz, Manny Ramirez, Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Curt Schilling, Mike Timlin, and Tim Wakefield — received loud applause.

Led by manager Alex Cora, the members of the 2018 team then received their rings and were congratulated by principal owner John Henry, team chairman Tom Werner, Fenway Sports Group partner Linda Henry, team president Sam Kennedy, and president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

World Series heroes Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce received particularly loud cheers from the crowd, as did David Price, who was the first player introduced.

"Today was a special day and I told them to enjoy it," Cora said.

After the Canadian and American national anthems by the Pops and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, 23 Patriots emerged from left field along with the team's six Super Bowl trophies.

Those on hand included Joe Cardona, Patrick Chung, Julian Edelman, Stephon Gilmore, Rob Gronkowski, Duron Harmon, Jason McCourty, Matthew Slater, Joe Thuney, and Deatrich Wise.

Edelman, Gilmore, and Gronkowski threw out first pitches to, respectively, Pearce, Jackie Bradley Jr., and Mookie Betts.

Bradley and Gilmore attended the University of South Carolina at the same time and are good friends.

The ceremony lasted approximately 50 minutes.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox, Chris Sale and Alex Cora can't stop plunge in rotation's performance

Michael Silverman

Nobody saw this Red Sox start coming, that's for sure.

And now that the Red Sox are up to their obliques in a 3-9 funk of their own making, it's becoming clearer that the end is not in sight.

They know what the biggest problem is – a stunning absence of quality starts from their on-paper strength in starting pitching – but as Chris Sale’s dismal start (five runs, seven hits allowed in just four innings) screamed, they haven’t found an answer to the world of hurt the rotation keeps applying to the rest of the team.

After each of the nine losses, manager Alex Cora keeps getting asked what went wrong this time, and while plate discipline, baserunning, pitch selection and overall defense each have had their time under the klieg lights, the explanations always return to the starting pitching.

When the Red Sox do return to their expected equilibrium of being an elite team, it will be when the starting pitching returns to form and that will be when the wins start to pile up rather than feel like a Sasquatch sighting.

But a dozen games into the season, Cora and the Red Sox are just as unsure as you and I are about when the badness will stop with the starters.

“We have to play better, I’ve been saying it all along – better defense, better offense, pitch better,” Cora said Tuesday, before turning directly to the truth after the Red Sox’ 7-5 loss to Toronto. “Everybody knows we go with the starters. The starters are our strongest point and so far it hasn’t been good. They scored two, we scored two in the third inning, then they got that three-run inning. We scored. They scored again. We haven’t had a shutdown inning for two weeks. That’s very important. We haven’t had a chance to add on, which is very important to our offense, or any offense at the big league level. We just have to get better.”

Remember, the Red Sox’ rotation was so good last season that Cora used most of them in relief in October to shore up a bullpen that was looking leaky. The putty and caulk job worked for the ultimate purpose of winning a championship, but for lack of a better explanation from anyone associated with the Red Sox, the 2019 staff is paying the price now.

Last season the Red Sox starters collectively pitched 871 1/3 innings, which rounds up to 60 percent of the total innings pitched by the hurlers. Quick math shows that meant the relievers were relied upon for 40 percent of the workload. That’s a healthy balance, plus the combined ERA of the starters – 3.77 – was right where the relievers were at 3.72.

This year, with the exception of David Price’s 12 innings after two appearances, the starters haven’t gone deep into games. Sale is averaging 4 1/3 innings per start, Nathan Eovaldi is at 5, Eduardo Rodriguez is at 4 and Rick Porcello is at 3-plus.

Of the 100 2/3 innings pitched by the Red Sox this season, the starters’ workload has dipped to only 53 percent with an 8.78 ERA – it’s a 9.30 ERA if one takes away Hector Velazquez’ three-inning “opening” start and only counts the five regular starters, but let’s work with the lower number to keep this analysis in positive territory.

That means the relievers have been asked to carry 47 percent of the work. They’ve responded very well, with a 3.61 ERA, and so far have eliminated the burning question we all asked with feverish frequency all spring about the bullpen’s quality.

So perhaps because it was phrased in such a way that Cora could not provide a credible answer, the question about how much longer he can keep relying upon his bullpen at this rate prompted a short response from the manager.

“Hopefully not long, hopefully not much because that means our starters aren’t going deep in games – don’t you think?” he asked. “Bad answer?”

Nope, not a bad answer at all.

But it's the same, and only, answer he's been able to give since this season began. He doesn't know when the starters are going to turn themselves around and that's mainly because he never thought he would be in a position where he had to worry.

It's a big bad mystery in which the Red Sox are the victim of their own crimes, and their very own culprits can't even explain their motives.

"You guys are watching, I'm struggling – I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life," Sale said Tuesday. "I'm trying to find something. I'm working. That only goes so far. This isn't the hard-work league. This is the do-good league. Got to start going out there and performing."

Sale took personal responsibility, which is admirable, but it's also supposed to be rare for an ace. And this year he's had to take responsibility too often.

"This wasn't us not playing good, this was me sucking today," Sale said. "That's frustrating. Today was the day we were going to turn it around. We were back home, ceremony, playing in front of our home fans, playing our first home game. Everyone did what they had to do except for me and that's a frustrating spot to be in.

"If I knew what it was, I'd fix it, that's kind of where I'm at, is spinning my tires. Looking at this, looking at that. See if I'm tipping pitches, seeing if my mechanics, if it's this, if it's angles, still searching. But I'll find it. I know who I am, I know what I can do. I've been there before. I'll keep grinding."

For too many of the first dozen Red Sox games, the rotation's been grinding.

And that's become a grind.

Red Sox ace Chris Sale not buying loss was on anybody but himself

Tom Keegan

His timing sufficiently messed up by the two previous Chris Sale offerings, an 80-mph slider and an 84-mph changeup, Blue Jays designated hitter Lourdes Gurriel Jr. left his bat on his shoulder and listened to a 94-mph fastball pop Christian Vazquez' mitt for Strike 3, the end of a six-pitch at bat and final out of a six-up, six-down start to Sale's home opener.

The two-inning tease just made the next two innings more difficult to watch for the well-layered Fenway Park crowd of 36,179 who pined for the good old days of 2018 and endured 41-degree air under dark clouds Tuesday afternoon.

One of the clouds of doubt about the direction of the defending world champions was created by Red Sox management's decision to sign Sale to a five-year, \$145 million contract extension without taking a free look at him to ensure that he had put shoulder woes of last season behind.

There's no crying in baseball. Otherwise, management might be wiping away tears of regret by now. There are no mulligans either. What's done is done and if this merely is a temporary funk, the Red Sox will be happy to pay their ace \$29 million a year. But at this moment, there's no way the Sox can't regret not having the discipline to wait to see how much life was in his left shoulder before giving him an extension.

Sale pointed the finger of blame for the 7-5 loss to the lowly Blue Jays only at his mirror.

"They score five runs on me, six guys come out of our bullpen, they only give up two runs. We've got to win that game," Sale said. "This is very easy to throw on top of the pile and say we're not playing good. This was not us not playing good. This was me sucking today. That's frustrating. Today was the day we were going to turn it around. We're back home, ceremony, in front of our home fans, playing our first home game, everyone did what they had to do except me, and that's a frustrating spot to be in."

Sale said “never in my life” has he been this lost.

“If I knew what it was I’d fix it,” Sale said. “I’m still searching, but I’ll find it. I know who I am. ... I’ve got to find something. I better find something.”

Sale’s rocky effort started the third turn of the winless rotation for the Red Sox with an outing that was as brief as it was troubling. By the time Sale took the mound for the third inning, teammates had given him a 2-0 lead. By the time he walked off the hill at the end of his fourth inning, serenaded by foggy-breath boos, the Blue Jays led, 5-2.

In those final two innings, Sale (0-3, 9.00) allowed seven hits, all singles, some of the dribbler variety another a bloop, but those count too. A pitcher who doesn’t blow cheese past hitters is going to give up his share of cheap hits.

Sale has become a dominant pitcher by dialing up whatever pitch he needs for the situation and making the hitter try to beat him on a good pitch. Not happening yet.

When Blue Jays left fielder Teoscar Hernandez, far better at hitting flyballs than catching them, came to the plate with one out in the third, one run in, and runners on the corners, it was time for a strikeout or inning-ending double play. Instead, he drove in the tying run with a sacrifice fly.

In his first two innings, Sale threw six pitches clocked at higher than 91 mph, just one in his final two innings.

If these were the results anticipated with the slow-build plan put in place for Sale, then he should have been left behind at extended spring training to continue building arm strength, instead of being sent to the mound to lose games that count in the standings just as much now as during a pennant race.

Chris Sale booed, Red Sox sloppy in 7-5 loss in home opener

Jason Mastrodonato

Shortly after the banners were dropped, the rings distributed, the flag raised and the lineups announced, the Red Sox got back to playing their brand of baseball.

The 2019 Red Sox’ brand, that is.

The Opening Day buzz at Fenway Park lasted about an hour, then quickly faded after Chris Sale gave up five runs and finally walked off the mound in the fourth inning to the sound of boos.

The Blue Jays beat the Red Sox, 7-5, while scoring one run on a passed ball and another on a clean steal of home.

“They’re taking advantage of us,” Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Slow to the plate with Brandon Workman in the seventh... We have to do a better job of slowing down the running game. Teams are running against us. We need to mix it up.”

Tuesday began with optimism. There was music blasting in the clubhouse and a note on the markerboard that suggested the 1:10 p.m. time the players were supposed to be on the field would be a reminder of how good they are. At 2:05 p.m., the schedule read, it was time to “bust that (expletive).”

The ceremony went fine, with Red Sox legends like Pedro Martinez, Curt Schilling, Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz carrying out the World Series trophies. Banners for each championship since 2004 dropped over the Green Monster. Former players handed out 2018 World Series rings alongside Red Sox ownership and commissioner Rob Manfred. A number of Patriots joined the field for a celebratory first pitch.

All the while, the sound of the Boston Pops Orchestra dazzled, their instruments so carefully synced together as they played from the outfield grass.

On the field afterward, the Red Sox played with no such synergy.

Sale began the day with a 92-mph fastball, giving some relief to those wondering if his 89 mph average, the lowest of his career, in his previous outing was something to be concerned about. Cora said before the game that Sale had been sick prior to pitching in Oakland and was feeling better this time.

Sale retired the first seven batters, then slowly bled out runs to a team that entered the game ranked 29th in the majors scoring just 2.6 runs per game.

The Jays' 111 strikeouts were second-most in the majors, but Sale — normally a strikeout machine — fanned just three batters in four innings.

“There isn't enough separation,” Cora said of the velocity difference between Sale's slower than usual fastball and his off-speed stuff. “They did a good job just staying back. They saw what happened in Oakland the way we pitched (with all off-speed). With two strikes they kept fouling pitches off and put it in play. I mean, it wasn't a home run today. It was a lot of singles, putting the ball in play. There weren't too many swings and misses.”

The Red Sox held a 2-0 lead entering the third inning, thanks to a homer by Mitch Moreland and an error by Blue Jays starter Matt Shoemaker, who missed the bag while covering first on a routine grounder.

Sale gave both runs back on three singles and a sacrifice fly in the third, then the wheels came off in a disastrous fourth inning that was symbolic of the Red Sox season to date.

Sale opened the fourth with two singles, a passed ball to put a runner on third, then another single as the Jays grabbed a 4-3 lead. They played small ball to keep the rally going. A bunt moved runners to second and third, a passed ball allowed one to score and then Lourdes Gurriel Jr. stole home and caught everyone napping.

With just a runner on third base, Sale decided to work out of the windup, but Rafael Devers wasn't holding Gurriel anywhere close to the bag. Before Sale started his delivery, Gurriel took off for home, timing it perfectly as Sale chucked one to the backstop and let the run score with ease.

“Yeah that was a little different,” Sale said. “I was geared up to throw a slider, saw that he took off, tried to regrip it and pushed it the other way. Part of it, you know? Got to be prepared for that.”

A few boos from the crowd could be heard as Christian Vazquez scrambled to gather the loose ball, and the boos grew much louder as Sale walked off the mound after his fourth and final inning of work.

“Just didn't pitch good,” he said. “Feels fine, just right now just trying to find it. Grinding. You guys have watched me I'm struggling. I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life. Tough spot to be in, but I got guys up here fighting and we got to keep fighting. No giving up. Something is not working, you go to something else, when that's not working you go to something. Trying to find something. I'm working. That only goes so far. I have to start performing.”

Though his fastball velocity averaged over 91 mph, still well-below normal for him, and there was no loud contact with an exit velocity of 100 mph or harder, Sale still allowed five runs on seven hits as his ERA ballooned to 9.00 on the year.

“I feel fine,” Sale said. “I'll never sit here and make excuses. I should be able to wake up on Christmas Day and throw strikes. Doesn't matter the circumstances. I have to find a way to get it done. I have to be better.”

Another stolen base led to a sixth run for the Jays in the seventh, then a hit-by-pitch and wild pitch set up their seventh and final run off Matt Barnes in the ninth.

The sloppy style of baseball the Sox played on their 11-game road trip to start the year carried right into the home opener. Overall on the day, they allowed one wild pitch, two passed balls, one hit-by-pitch and three stolen bases, including the clean steal of home.

“We have to play better, I’ve been saying it all along,” Cora said. “Better defense, better offense, pitch better. Everybody knows we go with the starters. The starters are our strongest point and so far it hasn’t been good. ... We haven’t had a shutdown inning for two weeks. That’s very important.”

And in his first game since 2018, Dustin Pedroia left four men on base, finishing 1-for-4 with a single off Ken Giles in the ninth.

The Red Sox fall to 3-9 on the year.

Manny Ramirez returns to Fenway, hopeful about Hall chances

Steve Hewitt

When Manny Ramirez arrived in Boston in 2000, he knew exactly what he was getting into. He understood the decades of misery that preceded him, and the massive expectations that awaited him and his \$160 million contract.

One of the best right-handed hitters of his generation, Ramirez shattered those expectations as he helped break the Red Sox’ World Series curse in 2004 on his way to becoming a two-time champion. His eight-year run in Boston made him beloved, and more than a decade after it, he’s still adored at Fenway Park.

Ramirez was back in his one of his favorite places Tuesday, walking out of left field as he joined some of his former Red Sox teammates — David Ortiz and Pedro Martinez included — in something of a surprise appearance as the team celebrated its 2018 championship with a ring ceremony prior to the home opener against the Blue Jays.

“Every time I went to left field, all the fans cheering and cheering my name, it’s a great feeling,” Ramirez said of his time at Fenway. “Especially when you come back and see Alex (Cora) and you see David and you see Pedro.”

It was Ramirez’ first time back at Fenway since 2017, when Ortiz’ No. 34 was retired. And he has nothing but fond memories for a place he says brought the best out of him.

“When I came to Boston, to be honest, I knew it was going to be tough, but it also made me a better player, just to be always on top of my game and always give all I got,” Ramirez said. “I know sometimes, a lot of people saw that I was maybe not working that hard, but I was working hard. I was doing my thing. I was putting my numbers in. Like I said, this is an awesome place to play. It was God’s purpose for me to be here and play here.”

Despite all his success, there’s still a piece of Ramirez’ career that’s still missing: an induction to Cooperstown.

Ramirez certainly has Hall-of-Fame numbers, but PED suspensions put a stain on his career. In 2017, his first year as a Hall-of-Fame candidate, Ramirez was named on 23.8 percent of ballots, and that number dropped to 22 percent in 2018. A candidate must be named on 75 percent of ballots in order to be elected.

Still, Ramirez remained positive and optimistic about it when asked Tuesday if he thinks he’ll one day get into Cooperstown.

“I hope so, I hope so,” Ramirez said. “We’re praying. But you know, I think in life, everybody makes mistakes. Nobody’s perfect, but I think with time, if it’s God’s will, we’re going to be there. If not, hey, we’re just happy that we got the opportunity to play the game that we love.”

The 46-year-old Ramirez is retired from baseball now as he spends more time with his family, which includes three kids. He joked, “I thought playing against the Yankees was going to be tough, but raising boys is something different.”

When he’s not busy with that, Ramirez has enjoyed watching the Red Sox, particularly Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez.

“They’re awesome,” Ramirez said. “Betts, J.D., the way they use both parts of the field and average, it’s unbelievable. It reminds me of myself when I used to do that.”

They at least have winning championships in common. Ramirez smiled as he thinks about how far Boston, which he called “the best city to play,” has come since he signed.

“I remember my first time when I came here in 2000, everybody was talking about the curse,” Ramirez said. “And we never thought about the curse. But we came, we won two, then they won two more, and it’s awesome. When you see those trophies, I think then you realize it was worth coming here.”

Dustin Pedroia has eventful day for Red Sox in return from injured list

Jason Mastrodonato

Just in time for the Red Sox’ festivities at Fenway Park, Dustin Pedroia was activated from the injured list Tuesday morning.

The franchise icon batted seventh and played second base in his first game since last May.

He had an eventful afternoon, going 1-for-4 while leaving four runners on base in the Red Sox’ 7-5 loss to the Blue Jays.

“I mean, I was nervous,” Pedroia said. “I was working for 16 months just to get ready to do this. Last year I played three games and I don’t feel like I did last year. I’m going to be fine. I’m going to be able to play. I was excited. I didn’t sleep much. I enjoy playing and I enjoy being a Red Sox. So it was fun.”

Pedroia’s first at-bat of the season came in a big spot, with runners on the corners and nobody out in the second inning. He got a 1-0 fastball down the middle from Jays starter Matt Shoemaker and drove it straight into the ground for a routine double play, though one run did score.

He again had runners on the corners with two outs in the fourth, but he grounded out to end the inning.

And in the sixth, with the Sox down just one and Rafael Devers on second base with two outs, Pedroia hit a line drive out to right field.

“It was awesome but I mean, it kind of messed me up,” he said. “My first couple at-bats I was trying too hard and I was kind of in a big spot.

“I was just trying to get on base. After my second at-bat I kind of calmed down and was able to try to have good at-bats and see the ball. I was amped my first couple and I hit a line drive to right and that kind of settled me down a little.”

In the ninth inning, with the Sox down two against Jays closer Ken Giles, Pedroia smoked a 99 mph fastball to right field for a leadoff single, his best at-bat of the day.

The Red Sox were hoping Pedroia could provide that kind of spark after their slow start to the season.

“He brings that energy that not a lot people have,” Mitch Moreland said.

Said Xander Bogaerts, “It puts a smile on your face with all he means to the team, the city, the community, and I think just the baseball world in general.”

During the offseason, manager Alex Cora said Pedroia would bat leadoff if he was ready for Opening Day in Seattle, but it took Pedroia two extra weeks to prepare as the Red Sox look to keep him healthy for the long haul.

“We know the type of player he is and when healthy he can contribute,” Cora said. “He’s going to hit seventh for us and the reason he’s hitting down there, he’s going to have a lot of traffic in front of him. He can put the ball in play, he can go the other way, we can run with him. Defensively he’s a plus.

“Nothing against the other two guys, because they’ve done a good job, in (Eduardo Nunez) and Brock (Holt). But Pedey is elite. Elite at second base. He turns he double play, he makes the play to his left. He’s a leader in the infield. He can slow down things for the kids out there. So for the plus he brings offensively, I think defensively he’s going to be a game-changer for us.”

Tzu-Wei Lin was optioned back to Triple-A Pawtucket to make room for Pedroia, who had been continuing his progress in regaining strength in his injured left knee while rehabbing with High-A Greenville.

He had a nervous moment late in the game, when he fielded a throw on a stolen base attempt and kept his left foot in front of the bag. Teoscar Hernandez slid right into it, popping Pedroia’s left knee into the air as he fell to the ground. Pedroia stayed still for a minute, but stayed in the game.

“It’s never happened to me,” Pedroia said. “His spike went through my shoelace and he pulled my leg and it just kept going and I was kind of stuck to him. So that was it. Bogey thought I hurt my knee again and I was like, ‘Nah, I’ve just gotta tie my shoes again.’ Like six knots. I tie ’em a lot so it took me forever but I was OK.

“My knee can’t get any worse so it’s going to be all right. It is what it is. I’m just excited to be out here and be able to help the team and play and be around the guys. It’s going to be fun.”

PUERTO RICO PRIDE

Cora and Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo made history as the first two Puerto Rican natives to manage against each other in a big league game.

“At one point before I got hired here we had no Puerto Rican managers and all of a sudden we have three out of 30,” Cora said. “That is a pretty good rate. Looking forward to competing against him. I know it is a special day for him, too. His mother’s birthday is today.”

Asked if he’d give Montoyo a free win as a gift, Cora joked, “Not in this town. Not in this town.”

CLOSE CALL FOR JOHNSON

The Red Sox originally feared lefty Brian Johnson would miss the rest of the season with an elbow injury he suffered in Arizona over the weekend, but test results were encouraging.

“It’s not as bad as we thought it would be,” Cora said. “Now it is just a matter of a plan and go from there. At one point we thought that it was the end of the season and that is not the case.”

ODDS AND ENDS

Cora moved Devers from the three-hole to No. 6 and Moreland hit third.

“So when they bring that lefty in for the third spot, we’ve got Steve Pearce,” Cora said.

Moreland connected on his fourth homer of the season. The last Red Sox hitter with four homers through 12 team games was Hanley Ramirez in 2015.

Mookie Betts hit a solo homer, his third of the year, over the Green Monster in the sixth. It was his hardest-hit ball of the season at 105.2 mph exit velocity.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Blue Jays 7, Red Sox 5: Toronto spoils Boston’s home opener

Bill Koch

BOSTON — It apparently is going to take a lot more than the comforts of Fenway Park and the return of Dustin Pedroia for these Red Sox to right the ship.

Boston continued to take on water Tuesday in its maiden home voyage of the season. Chris Sale suffered through another abbreviated outing and more sloppiness in the field gave the Blue Jays all they needed to spoil the afternoon in a 7-5 victory.

Sale didn’t reach the fifth inning, Lourdes Gurriel Jr. recorded a straight steal of home plate and Pedroia celebrated his first start in nearly 11 months by stranding a pair in scoring position. The Red Sox didn’t absorb their ninth loss until May 3 last season, one in which they earned the World Series rings handed out during pregame ceremonies. Those October days — both past and future — seemed far off indeed, as most of the chilled 36,179 fans on hand filed out well before the finish.

“We have to play better,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “I’ve been saying it all along. Just play better — better defense, better offense, pitch better.”

Sale labored through 34 pitches to finish the fourth and Tyler Thornburg took over from there. The left-hander was charged with five earned runs and struck out just three, requiring 76 pitches to record 12 outs. Sale’s top fastball at 94.7 mph marked a considerable improvement from his last start at Oakland, but he’s yet to put together anything approaching his best.

“Like I said, I’m just not getting it done,” Sale said. “That’s the bottom line in this game and that’s the bottom line in sports.”

Sale retired the first seven men he faced before the wheels fell off. Three consecutive one-out singles in the third put the Blue Jays on the board, with Freddy Galvis bouncing one through the right side to make it 2-1. Teoscar Hernandez lined a sacrifice fly to center field to tie the game.

“They did a good job,” Cora said. “For a team that’s been striking out a lot, they did a good job with two strikes putting the ball in play.”

Toronto notched three straight singles again in the fourth, this time to lead off the frame. Gurriel plated the go-ahead run with a liner into right and Danny Jansen eventually scored on a passed ball. The real lowlight for Boston came when Gurriel took off from third base with two outs, diving head-first into the plate to make it 5-2.

“Today was on me,” Sale said. “We were supposed to win today’s game. We score five runs on a day that I start, we’ve got to win that one.”

Boston started brightly, taking a quick lead on a Mitch Moreland solo homer in the first and threatening for more in the second. Xander Bogaerts reached on an error and Rafael Devers singled to right before Pedroia bounced into a 6-4-3 double play. It was a 2-0 advantage but could have been more against Toronto starter Matt Shoemaker.

“After my second at-bat, I kind of calmed down and was able to try to have good at-bats and see the ball,” Pedroia said. “I was amped up my first couple.”

The Red Sox hit for another pair in the sixth, but again Pedroia left a man in scoring position by lining to right. Mookie Betts drilled a leadoff homer beyond the Green Monster and Bogaerts scored when a Devers liner to left was dropped, making it 5-4. Boston’s bullpen allowed single runs in the seventh and ninth to widen the deficit again and Betts struck out swinging as the potential winning run against Blue Jays’ closer Ken Giles.

“We can’t come out of it in one game,” Pedroia said. “We’ve got to play consistent, good baseball, and that will do it. And we have the right people to do that.”

Road woes follow Red Sox home

Kevin McNamara

BOSTON — Home Sweet Home?

Not quite yet for the Boston Red Sox and their faithful fans who flocked to Fenway Park to open a baseball season for the 108th time on Tuesday afternoon. Despite the presence of David Ortiz, Pedro Martinez and even Manny Ramirez, plus a World Series ring ceremony before the game, the champion Red Sox continued their woeful start and fell to the equally woeful Toronto Blue Jays, 7-5.

Before the game, we were promised a fresh start for a Red Sox team that began 3-8 after opening the season with stops in Seattle, Oakland and Arizona. After a long, cold, mistake-filled outing, manager Alex Cora didn’t flinch when asked what has infected his team out of the gate in 2019.

“I’ve been saying it all along, just play better,” Cora said. “Better defense, better offense, pitch better. As everybody knows, we go with the starters. Our starters are our strongest point and so far it hasn’t been good.”

Not good at all. The biggest red flag so far has clearly been those starters, and particularly Chris Sale. Instead of risking his exit to free agency next fall, the Sox awarded their tall lefty a five-year, \$145-million contract extension last month. There were loads of hugs and kisses at the press conference but the signing has raised eyebrows after his first three starts.

After getting rocked for seven earned runs in three innings in the season opener but throwing much better in his next try, Sale let go a stink bomb in front of the home fans. He was staked a 2-0 lead after two innings but the weak-hitting Jays stayed alive late in counts and poked and jabbed at the team’s supposed ace, scratching out five earned runs in four innings. Included was a rare steal of home in the fourth inning by Lourdes Gurriel that left everyone in the crowd of 36,179 shaking their heads.

Boston’s bullpen — which rolled six strong — held the Jays to two runs over the final five innings but when MVP Mookie Betts struck out with the tying runs on base in the ninth inning, the Sox trudged back to the warmth of their clubhouse wondering when the sunshine will replace the black cloud that’s followed them since leaving Fort Myers.

“It’s one in that category that we had a chance to win,” Betts said, “but we’re on the wrong side of those right now.”

To his credit, Sale didn't shrink from the spotlight. He's now 0-3 and has allowed 13 earned runs in 13 innings. There's nowhere to go but up but you have to wonder if a pitcher who was limited by arm woes last August, September and October and has just one postseason victory in four starts with Boston is the same guy the Sox decided to shower so much cash over.

"Obviously some balls found some holes today but at the end of the day if you're giving up hits, you're giving up runs, you're going to lose games," Sale said. "We have to win that game. It's very easy to just throw that one on top of the pile and say we're not playing good, but this wasn't us not playing good. This was me sucking today and that's frustrating because today was the day that we were going to turn it around. We're back home, the ceremony, in front of our home fans. Everyone did what they had to do except for me and that's a frustrating spot to be in."

While Sale is a definite red flag and his partners in the starting rotation are now a collective 0-8 and have allowed 16 homers in 12 games, it's far from panic time. The truth is the team's starters were babied in Fort Myers and not fully prepared to perform out of the gate. This scuffling won't linger, or at least it better not. Starters Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez are set to pocket \$87 million in 2019. That's more than the entire Blue Jays active roster, not to mention the Orioles and Rays. That financial disparity alone should remind everyone just how bad some teams in the American League are.

A year ago the Red Sox beat up on teams that lost 86 or more games (53-15). Mark it down, the Jays will lose that many once again.

The six games to open the Fenway schedule against the Jays and Orioles need to be the Sox' panacea. Same goes for tests against the lowly Royals, White Sox, Tigers and Twins.

These are the Red Sox, after all, the World Series champs. But the truth is right now they're in last place in the American League East and looking for a starter to stand up and earn his millions.

On Thursday night it will be Nathan Eovaldi's chance to turn around a Red Sox season that hasn't really started yet.

Red Sox Journal: It's Manny being Manny again during Opening Day

Bill Koch and Kevin McNamara

BOSTON — The self-proclaimed Red Sox idiots returned in force for Tuesday's Opening Day and no one seemed to enjoy himself more than Manny Ramirez.

Appearing at Fenway Park for the first time in many years, the now 46-year-old former slugger reveled in posing for pictures with Pedro Martinez and David Ortiz, chatting up former Patriots star Rob Gronkowski and taking in some hearty cheers from Boston fans.

Ramirez said the Sox had invited him back "a couple of years ago," but he resisted as he helped his wife raise three boys. Asked what he felt walking across the Fenway outfield again, Ramirez said, "This is an awesome place to play. It was God's purpose for me to be here and play here."

Ramirez was twice suspended for violating baseball's drug policy, including in 2009 while playing with the Dodgers when he tested positive for a female fertility drug commonly used to stimulate testosterone. That earned him a 50-game suspension and tainted what was certainly a Hall of Fame hitting career. Ramirez, who slugged 555 home runs, said he hasn't given up on one day earning a spot in Cooperstown.

"I hope so; we're praying," he said. "I think life, everybody makes mistakes, nobody's perfect. With time, God willing, we're going to be there. If not, we just have to know that we got the opportunity to play the game that we love."

Ramirez didn't seem to know much about the Sox but certainly appreciates the talent of the team's stars and that he helped lay the groundwork of a mini-dynasty in Boston. Ramirez played on the 2004 and 2007 championship teams.

"They're awesome," Ramirez said of the reigning champs. "(Mookie) Betts, J.D. (Martinez), the way they use the whole part of the field, and average, it's unbelievable. They remind me of myself when I used to do that."

Asked how he felt seeing four World Series trophies on the field in the pre-game ceremonies, Ramirez could only smile.

"I remember when I first came here in 2000, everybody was talking about The Curse," he said. "We never thought about The Curse. We came, we won two and now they won two more. When you see those trophies then you realize it was worth it coming here."

Pedey returns

Dustin Pedroia (left knee) was activated off the injured list ahead of the 108th Red Sox home opener at Fenway Park. He played second base and batted seventh, making his return 315 days after his last appearance against this same Blue Jays team. Pedroia started three games during his rehab assignment at Class-A Greenville, going 3-for-9 with a pair of walks and a run scored. Pedroia went 1-for-4 on Tuesday.

"He brings that energy that not many people have," first baseman Mitch Moreland said. "Having him back and running around and picking everybody up, it's nice."

"You know all he's been through," shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. "You know all he means to the team, the city, the community and I think just the baseball world in general. To have him back on our team is huge."

Pedroia underwent cartilage restoration surgery following the 2017 season and has been limited ever since. When healthy, he represents a defensive upgrade over Eduardo Nunez or Brock Holt at the position. Offensively, Pedroia is a career .300 hitter over 1,506 games.

Possible explanation

Chris Sale's lowest average fastball velocity of his career came with a bit of an asterisk.

Cora said the left-hander was sick before and during his last start against the Athletics, a 1-0 defeat. Sale's 29 heaters checked in at just 89.3 mph and were lost in the shuffle with his 28 sliders and 30 changeups. He said nothing after the game about his physical condition, leaving Cora to elaborate on Tuesday.

"He doesn't like making excuses, but he only threw 50 (pitches) between starts," Cora said. "I hate making excuses for my players, but there's a reason for certain things. The fact that he went out there and pitched, that tells me a lot about Chris."

Sale certainly looked stronger in the early stages on Tuesday. His final pitch of the second inning was a fastball clocked at 94.7 mph, one that got Lourdes Gurriel Jr. looking.

Taking note

Cora and Toronto manager Charlie Montoyo carried out a historic exchange of lineup cards and hugs prior to Tuesday's first pitch.

It marked the first time two native Puerto Rican managers squared off in a Major League Baseball game. Montoyo served as the bench coach in Tampa Bay last season before being hired by the Blue Jays.

“At one point, before I got hired here, we had no Puerto Rican managers, and all of a sudden we’ve got three out of 30,” Cora said.

Dave Martinez completes the trio, a New York native and first generation immigrant born to Puerto Rican parents. Martinez is early in his second season with the Nationals.

Injury update

Holt (right eye) and Brian Johnson (left elbow) both took part in pregame ceremonies after receiving favorable injury news.

Holt visited an optometrist on Tuesday morning, and no further damage was found beyond his scratched cornea. Test results on Johnson came back negative for anything other than inflammation. Both were placed on the injured list during the four-game series with the Diamondbacks.

“It’s not as bad as we thought it would be,” Cora said of Johnson. “Now it’s just a matter to make a plan and go from there. At one point we thought it was the end of the season, and that’s not the case.”

Holt was off to a 1-for-16 start at the plate through six games, striking out seven times. Johnson allowed 10 hits and eight earned runs in his last two outings, covering just 3 2/3 innings.

Manny Ramirez still holds hope for the Hall

Kevin McNamara

BOSTON — Boston’s self-proclaimed idiots returned in force for Tuesday’s Opening Day and no one seemed to enjoy himself more than Manny Ramirez.

Appearing at Fenway Park for the first time in many years, the now 46-year old slugger reveled in posing for pictures with Pedro Martinez and David Ortiz, chatting up Patriots star Rob Gronkowski and taking in some hearty cheers from Red Sox fans.

Ramirez said the Sox had invited him back “a couple of years also,” but he resisted as he helped his wife raise three boys. Asked what he felt walking across the Fenway outfield again, Ramirez said “this is an awesome place to play. It was God’s purpose for me to be here and play here.”

Ramirez was twice suspended for violating baseball’s drug policy, including in 2009 while playing with the Dodgers when he tested positive for a female fertility drug commonly used to stimulate testosterone. That earned him a 50-game suspension and tainted what was certainly a Hall of Fame hitting career. Ramirez, who slugged 555 home runs, says he hasn’t given up on one day earning a spot in Cooperstown.

“I hope so, we’re praying,” he said. “I think life, everybody makes mistakes, nobody’s perfect. With time, God willing, we’re going to be there. If not, we just have to know that we got the opportunity to play the game that we love.”

Ramirez didn’t seem to know much about today’s Sox but certainly appreciates the talent of the team’s stars and that he helped lay the groundwork of a mini-dynasty in Boston. Ramirez played on the Sox 2004 and `07 World Championship teams.

“They’re awesome,” Ramirez said of the reigning champs. “(Mookie) Betts, J.D. (Martinez), the way they use the whole part of the field, and average, it’s unbelievable. They remind me of myself when I used to do that.”

Asked how he felt seeing four World Series trophies on the field in the pre-game ceremonies, Ramirez could only smile.

“I remember when I first came here in 2000, everybody was talking about The Curse,” he said. “We never thought about The Curse. We came, we won two and now they won two more. When you see those trophies then you realize it was worth it coming here.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Sale lasts just 4 innings, Red Sox lose on Opening Day at Fenway after receiving World Series rings

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Three starts into Chris Sale’s five-year, \$145-million extension, he has a 9.00 ERA.

Sale struggled again Tuesday in the home opener. He allowed five runs, all earned, seven hits and three walks while striking out three. The Red Sox ace even allowed a straight steal of home.

The Red Sox lost 7-5 to the Blue Jays at Fenway Park in their home opener after receiving their 2018 World Series rings. Boston dropped to 3-9.

The offense gave its ace a two-run lead after two innings. But Sale couldn’t hold it.

His four-seam fastball velocity averaged 91.8 mph and topped out at 94.7 mph, per Baseball Savant. His average four-seam fastball velocity increased from his previous start last Tuesday in Oakland (89.1 mph). Manager Alex Cora said before Tuesday’s game Sale was sick in between his first and second start.

The Blue Jays, who entered with just two hitters batting over .200, hit only four balls over 90 mph and two balls over 95 mph against Sale. Still, he gave up hits and struggled to get swing-and-misses in high-leverage spots.

He induced 10 swings-and-misses: five with his slider, three changeups and two with his four-seam fastball.

He is averaging 5.5 strikeouts per nine innings through his first three starts. He averaged 13.5 strikeouts per nine innings last year.

Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, Nathan Eovaldi and Eduardo Rodriguez have combined for a 9.30 ERA (50.1 innings, 52 earned runs).

Eovaldi will try to turn around the starting pitching woes on Thursday when he starts here vs. Toronto.

Red Sox’s ninth inning

Dustin Pedroia, who was activated from the injured list before the game, led off the ninth inning with his first hit of the 2019 season.

Jackie Bradley Jr. followed with a walk.

But Blake Swihart and Andrew Benintendi both flied out to center field. Mookie Betts struck out swinging to end it.

Betts homers

Betts blasted a 105.8-mph, 403-foot home run into the Green Monster seats to cut the Red Sox’s deficit to 5-3 in the sixth.

Mitch Moreland gave Boston a 1-0 lead in the first inning when he belted a 107.8-mph, 390-mph home run to right field.

Moreland already has four homers and 10 RBIs.

Red Sox-Opening Day: Struggling at Fenway bringing increased attention to early season woes

Matt Vautour

BOSTON - The disappointing start to the Boston Red Sox 2019 season has landed close to home.

As bad as their season opening road trip was, some of the edge was taken off it because most of the games came when many New Englanders were asleep. Teams can commit all manner of sins when the first pitch is at 10:10 p.m. and not have people remember them. Reading about a car accident after the fact isn't nearly as disconcerting as seeing unfold.

But back at Fenway Park, the spotlight is a lot brighter. Many more Red Sox fans saw Tuesday's 7-5 loss to Toronto - in person, on TV, or sneaking a look online at work - than the 11 that preceded it and they saw many of the same things the night owls watched on the west coast.

Many of the 36,179 were gone before Neil Diamond's eighth-inning crooning. The combination of lousy weather and a game that didn't feel as close as it was sent many people to early exits.

It didn't start out that way. The pregame banner raising and ring ceremony was standard high-quality Red Sox theater. Soaring Boston Pops music mixed with appearances of recent World Series heroes is a pretty foolproof formula to rouse a Fenway crowd and the Red Sox delivered as usual.

David Ortiz, Mike Lowell, Pedro Martinez and even Curt Schilling headlined a list of former stars on the field representing the four championship teams in the the last 15 years.

The presence of the Patriots, including recently-retired Rob Gronkowski, for the ceremonial first pitch only added to the festive mood.

The Red Sox even took a 2-0 lead sparking hope that home cooking had healed things. But Chris Sale's control, location and guile act only worked through two innings. But after that, the Jays looked comfortable in the box against him, which was something that could never be said before about facing Sale.

They boxed him around for two in the third and three in the fourth ballooning his ERA to 9.00 - 13 runs in 13 innings this season. His good fastball is quickly passing Craig Kimbrel as the most noticeable absence from 2018. Sale says he's healthy, but he only topped 90 miles per hour, four times in the game.

It all came against a lineup filled mostly with players that nobody bothered drafting in your fantasy league. The Jays arrived with the same 3-8 mark that the Red Sox did. They're not good.

It's obviously still too soon to panic. This collection of good players can't all have gotten bad overnight. Eventually and presumably soon, this team is going to find a groove. But until it does, the noise is going to start to get loud. On talk radio, on Twitter and on the nighttime sports shows people are talking in growing numbers. The perception of trouble can crack chemistry as much as real trouble can.

Boston is going to learn something about Alex Cora too. He was brilliant in handling everything last season threw at him. But this is a different set of challenges. Fair or not, he'll be second-guessed and questioned.

People are watching now.

Red Sox rushed to give Chris Sale extension, should feel some concern as ace has never felt this lost

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Chris Sale will be a Red Sox pitcher for six more years. His five-year, \$145-million contract extension doesn't begin until 2020. Are you worried yet that the Red Sox rushed to extend him?

You should be.

Sale pitched poorly again in the home opener Tuesday. He gave up five runs, all earned, seven hits and three walks while striking out three. He even allowed a straight steal of home. The Red Sox lost 7-5 to the Blue Jays at Fenway Park.

"This is very easy to just throw on top of the pile and say 'We're not playing good,'" Sale said. "This wasn't us not playing good. This is me sucking today."

Considering Sale's history, president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski should have waited to see how healthy/durable he stayed and how effective he pitched for the full 2019 season before offering him an extension. I wrote in January that 2019 could be Sale's final year in Boston and it might be best to move on from him if he continues to show a lack of durability.

They can't move on now if this continues.

He threw only 29 innings during the second half of the 2018 regular season because of shoulder inflammation. He dealt with durability issues in 2017 when his ERA inflated to 4.09 in his final 11 starts after he recorded a 2.37 ERA in his first 21 starts.

He has a career 3.78 ERA in September, a much higher mark than any other month.

He has started 2019 right where he left on in 2018: Both his velocity and command are lacking.

Sale has allowed 13 runs in 13 innings so far. He has a 5.87 ERA (38.1 innings, 25 earned runs) in 10 starts, including three postseason starts, since his return from injured list Sept. 11, 2018.

He has no explanation for why he's struggling right now.

"If I knew what it was I'd fix it," Sale said. "That's kind of where I'm at. I'm spinning my tires looking at this, looking at that. See if I'm tipping pitches. See my mechanics. See if it's this, if it's angles. I'm still searching. I'll find it. I know who I am, what I can do. I've been there before. I'll keep grinding."

Although he said he's "been there before," Sale admitted he has never felt this lost on the mound.

"Never in my life," Sale said. "But that's not going to stop me. I don't have an inch of back-down in me. I never will. Never give up. Just gotta keep fighting."

He understands results, not effort, is what matters most.

"Putting zeros up and winning games," Sale said. "That's what I'm prepared to do."

Sale likely will turn around his 2019 woes and post strong stats this year. But this stretch has to be concerning in the big picture of things. How will he stay healthy longterm?

His velocity likely will return by mid-May. His four-seam fastball might average 97 mph in 2020. But velocity often disappears with age. We've seen many power pitchers, including Bartolo Colon, CC Sabathia and even Pedro Martinez, become finesse pitchers later in their careers. David Price has used his two-seamer and cutter more as he has aged. His velocity isn't the same as it was three years ago.

Will Sale still be a power pitch in three, four years?

Sale's four-seam fastball velocity averaged 91.8 mph and topped out at 94.7 mph Tuesday, per Baseball Savant. His average four-seam fastball velocity increased from his previous start last Tuesday in Oakland (89.1 mph).

Sale's three strikeouts came against a Blue Jays team that has struck out the second most (120) in the majors so far this season. Only two Toronto batters entered hitting over .200.

Sale induced only 10 swings-and-misses: five with his slider, three with his changeup and two with his four-seam fastball.

He has gotten just 28 swings-and-misses in his three starts: 14 with his slider, 12 with his changeup and two with his four-seam fastball.

Manager Alex Cora pointed out how Sale has been unable to put away hitters.

"For a team (Toronto) that has been striking out a lot, they did a good job with two strikes, putting the ball in play," Cora said.

Cora said Sale's lack of swing-and-miss has to do with both velocity and location. The separation in velocity between his fastball, changeup and slider makes pitches look the same and easier to hit.

"Still the slider, the separation is still there but obviously there's not enough separation," Cora said. "I think they (the Blue Jays) did a job just staying back. ... With two strikes they kept fouling pitches off or putting them in play. It wasn't the home run today. It was a lot of singles, putting the ball in play. But yeah, there weren't too many swings-and-misses."

Sale added, "Just not putting away hitters when I have the opportunity to. Obviously some balls found some holes today. At the end of the day, if you give up hits, if you give up runs, you're going to lose games."

We saw the same issues last September when Sale returned from the injured list. When will it end? When will he be dominant Chris Sale again?

Sale certainly will put in the work.

"I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life," Sale said. "Tough spot to be in. But I've got guys in here fighting. I've gotta keep fighting. There's no giving up. When something's not working, you go to something else. ... I'm working. That only goes so far. This is not the hard-work league. This is the do-good league."

Right now, he's not doing too good.

Dustin Pedroia on first game back with Red Sox: 'I feel like I accomplished something out of this'

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia had trouble sleeping Monday night as he thought about returning to the Red Sox lineup for the first time in nearly 11 months Tuesday. Once he got back on the field, he was overwhelmed by the fan reaction to a milestone in his long comeback attempt.

"I was trying too hard. I was kind of in a big spot," Pedroia said of his first at-bat. "I appreciate it so much. I think everyone knows what I've been going through and trying to come back from."

Pedroia had one slightly scary moment in the seventh inning, when he got tangled up with Jays outfielder Teoscar Hernandez on a stolen base attempt. Hernandez's spike got caught in Pedroia's shoelace but didn't cause any pain for the 35-year-old.

"My knee can't get any worse so it's going to be alright," Pedroia joked.

Thanks to that knee, Pedroia appeared in only three games last year as he worked his way back from a cartilage restoration procedure in Nov. 2017. He experienced multiple setbacks, spending most of the summer working out at home in Arizona before shutting things down and refocusing his efforts on 2019.

Pedroia wasn't himself offensively in his first three at-bats, squandering three chances with men in scoring position by grounding into a double play and flying out twice.. He finally broke through in the ninth, hitting a leadoff single against Toronto closer Ken Giles.

"After my second at-bat, I kind of calmed down and was able to try to have good at-bats and see the ball," Pedroia said. "I was amped up my first couple and hit a line drive to right. That kind of settled me down a little bit. The ninth inning, you're obviously facing their closer (Ken Giles) so you're trying to get on base. I was fortunate enough to get a ball and find the hole."

Pedroia's single wasn't enough for the Sox, who fell to 3-9 with a 7-5 loss to Toronto in the home opener. Even though the team lost, the day represented a victory for Pedroia, who admitted he was nervous leading up to first pitch.

"I've been working for 16 months just to get ready to do this," Pedroia said. "Last year, I played three games. I don't feel like I did last year. I'm going to be fine."

Pedroia said just getting back on the field doesn't mean he's fully satisfied with his comeback effort, adding that his goal is to play for three full seasons until his contract expires. Though Tuesday was just one step toward reaching those lofty expectations, the significance of the day wasn't lost on Pedroia.

"To be able to play in the home opener, it meant a lot to me," Pedroia said. "I feel like I accomplished something out of this. During the whole thing, I really haven't had any good news or anything. I'd see a doctor and (he'd give me) bad news. At some point you want something good."

Manny Ramirez-Baseball Hall of Fame: Red Sox slugger hoping to someday get Cooperstown call

Matt Vautour

BOSTON - Manny Ramirez is still hoping to someday get the call from Cooperstown.

The former Boston Red Sox left fielder took part in Tuesday's opening day ceremonies at Fenway and delivered some memorable lines speaking to the media afterward.

Ramirez, whose Hall of Fame case is tainted by two failed PED tests and suspensions, said he hoped someday voters might warm to the idea of including him.

"I hope so. We're praying. In life, everybody makes mistakes. Nobody's perfect. With time, if it's God's will, we're going to be there," said Ramirez still wearing a Red Sox jersey and cap. "If not we're just happy we got the opportunity to play the game we love."

Ramirez hit .312/.411/.585 for his career with 555 home runs, 1,831 ERA and a career WAR of 69.4. But his voting numbers are going the wrong way. He received 23.8 percent of the vote in 2017 and dropped to 22.0 percent last year.

Ramirez said he's focused on his family now and has no immediate plans to get back involved in baseball.

"I thought playing against the Yankees was going to be tough," he said. "But raising boys? It's something different."

Ramirez, who visited inside the Fenway's left field wall before coming onto the field for the ceremony, said Boston remained special to him.

"It's awesome. This is the best city to play in and I was here," he said. "When I came to play here, I knew it was going to be tough, but it also made me a better player, just to be always on top of my game and always give all that I got."

Without prompting, Ramirez said while it didn't always look like it, he insisted he was giving his all.

"I know some people saw that maybe I was not working that hard," he said. "I was working hard. I was doing my thing and putting my numbers in."

He's enjoyed watching Boston's run a year ago.

"They're awesome. Betts, JD. the way they use the whole part of the field," he said. "It reminds me of myself when I used to do that."

Mookie Betts extension: Boston Red Sox's Tom Werner 'hopeful' deal can get done; 'We'll get another shot at it next year'

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Red Sox chairman Tom Werner doesn't expect the Red Sox to sign Mookie Betts to an extension this season. But he's hopeful Betts will re-sign before becoming a free agent after the 2020 season.

"We're hopeful," Werner said on WEEI's Dale & Keefe show. "Of course, he has two years left with the Red Sox. So it's probably not going to happen at all now that the season has started. But we'll get another shot at it next year. Our hope is he'll also play out his career as a Red Sox."

Betts has made it clear several times that he's not interested in signing an extension and that he wants to test free agency after the 2020 season.

"I don't expect anything to happen till I'm a free agent," Betts said during spring training

Werner thinks Betts is willing to remain in Boston, but he understands why he might want to explore other contract offers in free agency.

"But when you read the paper when you wake up in the morning and Mike Trout made \$400 million," Werner said. "I think it's perfectly appropriate for him to look for the money that he deserves. He was an MVP in the league last year and hopefully we'll come to some sort of understanding."

Johnson elbow injury: Red Sox lefty has inflammation, avoids season-ending diagnosis team feared

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox left-hander Brian Johnson's elbow injury is not as serious as the team originally feared.

Johnson, who was placed on the injured list Saturday, is dealing with elbow inflammation. He underwent tests Monday that revealed no structural damage in the arm.

"At one point, we thought it was the end of his season," Cora said. "That's not the case."

Johnson felt pain in his elbow throwing a curveball during his relief outing Friday night in Arizona. He stayed in the game and allowed seven earned runs over 1 1/3 innings before being placed on the IL Saturday morning

Cora said there is no timetable for Johnson's return. The team is meeting with the lefty Tuesday to discuss a plan moving forward.

"Now it's just a matter of (mapping a plan) and going from there," Cora said.

Johnson was expected to again be a swiss-army knife of sorts for the Red Sox with the ability to pitch both as a starter and reliever. He made four relief appearances on the opening road trip, posting a 12.71 ERA and striking out seven in 5.2 innings.

Johnson was 4-5 with a 4.17 ERA in 99.1 innings for the Sox last year. He made 13 starts and 25 relief appearances.

Boston Red Sox's Dustin Pedroia activated from injured list for home opener

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox activated second baseman Dustin Pedroia for the home opener Tuesday afternoon, according to a team announcement. Tzu-Wei Lin was optioned to Pawtucket to make room.

Pedroia will start at second base and hit seventh in his first big-league game since May 29. He appeared in only three games last season after having his left knee surgically repaired in Nov. 2017 and has spent the better part of the last year getting back into game shape.

Pedroia appeared in seven spring training games, going 5-for-15 with an RBI and three runs before staying back in Fort Myers when the Red Sox embarked on their season-opening, 11-game road trip. He played three rehab games at High-A Greenville over the weekend, going 3-for-9 with a double and two walks.

The Red Sox have used a combination of Eduardo Nunez and Brock Holt at second base over the season's first 11 games. Holt was placed on the 10-day disabled list with a scratched cornea in his right eye Saturday, so Boston will alternate between Nunez and Pedroia until Holt returns to form a three-man rotation at the position.

Pedroia, the 2008 American League MVP and a three-time World Series champion, will begin his 14th major-league season Tuesday. First pitch against the Blue Jays is set for 2:05 p.m.

*** *The Lowell Sun***

Red Sox fall to Blue Jays in home opener

Matt Langone

BOSTON - This was the chance for the Boston Red Sox to right the ship.

This was supposed to be the pick-me-up they desperately needed, a shot of adrenaline to the team to wake them up and let their fans know that 2018 was no fluke and there will indeed be a baseball season in Boston this year.

Instead, an apathetic ballclub, still basking in what happened over five months ago, failed to show signs of an imminent turnaround on Tuesday in its 2019 home opener at Fenway Park.

The Red Sox received their 2018 World Series championship rings and raised a banner as the heroes of past championship teams took part in the festivities. Pedro Martinez, David Ortiz, and even Manny Ramirez and Curt Schilling were there, among others, as well as the trophies from 2004, '07, '13 and '18. Members of the Super Bowl-winning New England Patriots showed up as well, with Julian Edelman, Rob Gronkowski and Stephon Gilmore throwing out first pitches. The Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra played for about 25 minutes straight on the field. It was all quite a sight, extraordinarily planned as usual by the Boston brass.

And then came the buzzkill as the Red Sox lost to the Toronto Blue Jays and their no-name roster, 7-5, and fell to 3-9 on the season. Only three teams in MLB history started that poorly and won the World Series, the last being the 1991 Minnesota Twins. The Sox, meanwhile, have never made the postseason after a 3-9 start.

Ace starting pitcher Chris Sale dipped to 0-3 and somehow managed to raise his ERA from 8.00 to 9.

Things are about as ugly as the 40-degree, cloudy weather that was unfortunately provided for Tuesday's afternoon contest.

"We gotta win that game," said Sale. "It's very easy to just throw on top of the pile and say, 'We're not playing good.' But it's less about playing good, it's just me (stinking) today. That's frustrating because today was the day we were going to turn it around. We had the ceremony, in front of our home fans, and our first home game. Everyone did what they had to do except for me, and that's a frustrating spot to be in."

Sale lasted just four innings and was touched up for five earned runs on seven hits. He struck out three. After being handed an early 2-0 lead and retiring his first seven hitters, six of the next eight singled. And that was the ballgame.

This coming from a Blue Jays team that is just 4-8 and has a lineup that'll never be confused with the 1927 New York Yankees. Freddy Galvis, Randal Grichuk, Lourdes Gurriel Jr., and Billy McKinney each had two hits. It's a perfectly normal reaction to read those names and say to yourself, "Who?" Blue Jays starter Matt Shoemaker (5 2-3 innings pitched, 5 hits, 4 runs, 2 earned runs, 2 walks, 4 strikeouts) improved his record to 3-0.

Rock bottom came when Gurriel Jr. stole home on Sale to cap a three-run Toronto fourth. It wasn't clear whether anyone wearing a Red Sox uniform even noticed Gurriel Jr. break for home.

"Just grinding, you guys are watching, just struggling," said Sale. "I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life. It's a tough spot to be in, but I got guys in here fighting and I've got to keep fighting."

Sale was asked if he ever felt this lost on the mound?

"Never in my life," he said.

Sale is hardly the only problem. Boston's team ERA is now 6.35 and the team batting average is .237. Manager Alex Cora said he's noticed teams are taking advantage of the Red Sox by running on them. Toronto swiped three bags on Tuesday.

It's an all-around mess for the defending champs.

"Just got to keep grinding, it's what I've done my whole career," said Red Sox center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. "You've got to put your head down and continue to work. Things will get better as long as you keep putting the work in. I'm not giving up on anybody, we're going to play some good ball."

During the World Series run in 2018, everything seemed to work out for Boston. Cora's decisions always seemed to be the right ones. It was the utopian baseball season.

The opposite of that would be what we've seen in 2019.

Cora gave Dustin Pedroia the start at second base on Tuesday after he was activated from the 10-day disabled list (left knee inflammation). It was Pedroia's first major league game in 315 days (since May 29, 2018.). He went 1 for 4, but hit into a double play in the second inning with two on and nobody out and stranded men in scoring position in the fourth and sixth.

Mookie Betts and Mitch Moreland each had a solo home run to give Boston its only real highlights.

"We have to play better to turn it around. Just play better," said Cora. "Better defense, better offense, pitch better. As everybody knows, we go with the starters. The starters are our strongest point and so far it hasn't been good."

The Red Sox sleepwalked through an 11-game road trip to start the season. They traveled 6,606 miles over a 15-day span. Some people gave them the benefit of the doubt that once they returned home and got their rings in front of their fans, they'd be able to turn the page and move on.

Tuesday was the first opportunity to show that. Instead, it was another step backward.

Living in the past is never productive.

Sox had better wake up before hole is too big

Matt Langone

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Ramirez happy to hear cheers again

Matt Langone

BOSTON -- Manny Ramirez was happy to finally be back.

The former superstar left fielder for the Boston Red Sox was at Fenway Park in his familiar No. 24 jersey as part of the pregame festivities for Boston's 2019 home opener on Tuesday.

Members of past Red Sox championship teams were there to help honor the 2018 World Series championship club, including Pedro Martinez, David Ortiz and Curt Schilling. Last year's champs received their rings and raised a banner, while four World Series trophies (2004, 2007, 2013, 2018) were in the ballpark.

"Oh man, it's awesome," said Ramirez to a large media scrum in the press box during the fourth inning. "Every time I went into left field, all the fans were cheering and cheering my name. It's a great feeling, especially when you come back and see (Red Sox manager) Alex (Cora) and you see David and you see Pedro.

"When you see the rest of the guys and think about what we did. We did it in '04, '07 and now these guys are doing it. It's awesome."

The 46-year-old Ramirez made eight straight All-Star games for the Red Sox from 2001-08. He won the American League batting crown in 2002 (.349) and led the league in home runs in 2004 (43). He was also the World Series MVP in '04. However, his relationship with the franchise grew very contentious and he was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers in the summer of 2008.

Ramirez said he had been invited back to Fenway in previous years for celebrations, but opted not to attend.

"I've been so busy with family, so this time I wanted to come and say 'hi' to the fans, and I'm here," Ramirez said. "When I came to Boston, you know to be honest, I knew it was going to be tough. But it also made me a better player, just to be always on top of my game and always give all I got. I know sometimes a lot of people saw that I was maybe not working that hard, but I was working hard, I was doing my thing, I was putting my numbers in. And, like I said, this is an awesome place to play. It was God's purpose for me to be here and play here.

"Right now, I got a family, I got three kids, I got a wife, and that's the most important thing in my life. That's what I enjoy right now. ... I thought playing against the Yankees was going to be tough, but, you know, raising boys is something different."

Ramirez said he marvels at the abilities of Red Sox sluggers Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez to hit the ball to all fields. He said they remind him of himself, back when he was wreaking havoc on opposing pitchers.

Ramirez finished his 19-year career with 555 home runs, a .312 batting average, two World Series titles, and he was one of the most-feared right-handed hitters of his era. Those credentials would typically result in a first-ballot spot in the Hall of Fame.

However, he was also hit with multiple suspensions for performance-enhancing drug use. He got nailed with a 50-game suspension in 2009 and a 100-game ban in 2011, his final year in the majors. Thus far, Cooperstown hasn't come calling. He earned just 22.8 percent of the vote this year, his third year on the ballot, putting him well short of the needed 75 percent.

"I think, in life, everybody makes mistakes, nobody's perfect," Ramirez said. "I think, in time, if it's God's will, we're going to be there. If not, hey, we just have to know that we got the opportunity to play the game that we loved."

*** *The Worcester Telegram & Gazette***

Fenway ceremony rings in Red Sox home schedule

Bill Doyle

BOSTON — Season-ticket holder Steven Cariglio of Auburn, Mass., attended his 26th consecutive Red Sox home opener and his fourth World Series ring ceremony on Tuesday at Fenway Park.

He's also had season tickets to the Patriots for the last 26 years and he's been on hand for their last four Super Bowls, three of them victories, including two with his wife, Cindy, and one with his son, Steven Jr.

Cariglio admits he's spoiled.

"It's not like it was in '04," Cariglio, 53, said. "Obviously, it's special, but when you've won four in the last 15 years ... But it's not like it was in '05 when after they won in '04 for the first time in however long it was."

The 2004 title was the Sox' first in 86 years. The 2018 championship was the first in five years.

"From what I can remember," Cariglio said of Tuesday's ring ceremony, "this one seemed a little tamer than the others."

Tamer or not, it was still a lot of fun and it appeared to be the perfect antidote for Sox fans fretting over the team's 3-8 start to the season.

"It's a long season," Cariglio said before the game. "If they get back to .500, I'll feel a little bit better."

That's going to take a little while. The Sox fell to 3-9 and dropped into sole possession of last place in the A.L. East with a 7-5 loss on Tuesday to Toronto, which improved to 4-8.

Wearing a Red Sox cap and a 2017 Super Bowl sweatshirt over a Red Sox T-shirt, Cariglio attended the opener with his son Steven Jr., 23; his mother, Cheryl Cariglio, 74; and his nephew, Lorenzo Cariglio, 13. The home opener is the only game that Cheryl attends each year and she's accompanied her son to nearly every home opener since he's owned season tickets.

"It's the ambience and the people that love the Red Sox," said Cheryl Cariglio, who wore a Red Sox 2004 World Series fleece jacket. "We're all one big happy family."

Steve Jr. flew up from Fort Myers, Florida, where he attends Florida Gulf Coast University.

"I'm supposed to have class all day today," Steve Jr. said, "but I skipped them for this."

Steve Jr. was quick to point out that Chris Sale, who started the home opener on Tuesday, used to pitch for Florida Gulf Coast.

It was raw and only 41 degrees for the first pitch. A sellout crowd of 36,179 showed up, but many fans left early. The Cariglios lasted until the sixth. The pregame ring ceremony, however, made Sox fans forget about the cold and the team's poor start to its season, at least for a while.

The Sox certainly know how to stage ring ceremonies because they've had plenty of practice. Prior to their 119th home opener and their 108th at Fenway Park, the Sox honored the members of their fourth World Series championship team in the last 15 years.

"Today is a special day," Sox manager Alex Cora said before the game. "Like I told the guys down there, enjoy it. Not everybody can win a World Series. There are a lot of people who play this game who had great careers who are Hall of Famers that don't even have a ring. So enjoy it."

Smaller banners from the 1903, 1912, 1915, 1916 and 1918 World Series teams were draped over the Green Monster in left field before larger ones from the four more recent title teams of 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2018, covered the entire Green Monster one by one.

“It’s pretty cool,” Cariglio said. “It gives you goose bumps for a few minutes.”

Wearing a Red Sox jersey, Keith Lockhart conducted the Boston Pops and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus in a rendition of “We Are The Champions,” while several members of the 2004, 2007 and 2013 World Series championship teams, including Curt Schilling and Manny Ramirez, walked from behind the Green Monster to the infield. Pedro Martinez carried the 2004 World Series trophy, Mike Lowell the 2007 trophy and David Ortiz carried the 2013 trophy.

Finally, the 2018 World Series champions walked out of the dugout onto a red carpet leading the field where they received their championship rings. Cariglio wondered why the players’ names weren’t announced over public address as they received their rings. Then they all raised the 2018 championship flag up the flag pole in center field.

When the 2019 Sox were introduced, there were no boos about the team’s slow start, just cheers. Veteran second baseman Dustin Pedroia, making his first appearance of the season, drew the loudest.

The American flag was draped over the Green Monster while the Boston Pops played “O Canada” and the “Star Spangled Banner.”

But the celebration didn’t end there. Several members of the Patriots appeared from behind the Green Monster carrying all six of their Super Bowl trophies. Recently retired Rob Gronkowski received an ovation that rivaled Pedroia’s before the Patriots tight end joined fellow Patriots Stephon Gilmore and Julian Edelman in throwing out the ceremonial first pitches to Steve Pearce, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts, respectively. Tom Brady, Bill Belichick and Robert Kraft weren’t on hand, but lots of Patriots were.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Red Sox notebook: Patriots join in the celebration

Kevin Thomas

BOSTON — When the New England Patriots won the Super Bowl, it guaranteed a double celebration at Fenway Park.

After the Red Sox were finished honoring past world championships and handing out 2018 World Series rings, it was time for the Patriots.

About two dozen Patriots emerged from behind the banners draping the Green Monster, carrying their six Vince Lombardi trophies. Neither head coach Bill Belichick nor quarterback Tom Brady were among them.

After lining the trophies behind the mound, cornerback Stephon Gilmore, receiver Julian Edelman and retired tight end Rob Gronkowski stepped up to throw out ceremonial first pitches.

Gilmore threw his pitch to Jackie Bradley Jr. The two attended the University of South Carolina at the same time.

ACCEPTING THE AWARD FOR ...: Not every player due a World Series ring was at Fenway Park. Among the absent were four guys who were in Buffalo playing for the Triple-A Pawtucket Red Sox – Sandy Leon, Bobby Poyner, Sam Travis and Tony Renda.

Renda is an example of fortunate timing. Cut by Arizona last spring, he signed with Boston as a minor league free agent last April 30 and was assigned to Portland. Eventually promoted to Triple-A, Renda got a major league call-up Aug. 4 and was a pinch-runner on Aug. 5, scoring the winning run in extra innings. He did not get into another game and was sent down to Pawtucket on Aug. 8.

Infielder Tzu-Wei Lin was optioned to Pawtucket on Tuesday to make room for Dustin Pedroia but got to hang around to collect his ring.

Six absent players are with different organizations – Joe Kelly (Dodgers), Ian Kinsler (Angels), Drew Pomeranz (Giants), Hanley Ramirez (Indians), Jalen Beeks (Rays) and Robby Scott (Diamondbacks, in Triple-A). Dan Butler retired and is Arizona's bullpen coach. Justin Haley and William Cuevas are pitching in Korea.

Craig Kimbrel is still a free agent. Kimbrel, according to the Red Sox, was invited to the ring ceremony but declined (free agent Brandon Phillips did attend).

PRIDE OF PUERTO RICO: Tuesday marked the first time two major league managers from Puerto Rico opposed each other. Alex Cora is in his second year with the Red Sox. Charlie Montoyo took over the Blue Jays this season.

"I'm very proud of Charlie. His path to the majors was a lot different than mine," Cora said.

Montoya played 10 years in the minors (with four major league at-bats) and managed in the minors for two more decades. Cora had a 14-year major league career and never coached in the minors.

Cora appreciated the historic meeting.

"At one point, before I got hired, we had no Puerto Rican managers," he said. "All of a sudden we have three out of 30."

Nationals Manager Dave Martinez, a native of New York, was born to Puerto Rican parents.

BRIAN JOHNSON received good news when his sore left elbow was examined: He will not need surgery. He went on the injured list Sunday because of inflammation, and the Red Sox braced for the worst.

"At one point, we thought it was the end of his season, and that's not the case," said Cora, who added that the medical staff will devise a plan to deal with the inflammation "and we'll go from there."

FORMER SEA DOGS and Red Sox right-hander Clay Buchholz is coming to Fenway, but not to pitch yet. Buchholz, 34, is joining the Blue Jays rotation and is scheduled to start Saturday against the Rays. Buchholz signed as a free agent with the Jays before the season. He has been on the injured list because of a strained elbow. ... The strangest play on Tuesday came when Marcus Walden struck out Alen Hanson on a ball in the dirt. The ball bounced off the catcher's shin guard to Walden, who tagged Hanson out.

These Red Sox ring ceremonies don't get old

Kevin Thomas

BOSTON — The kettle drums were carried in. The Boston Pops set up in right field at Fenway Park, distinctive in their white jackets. The pageantry would soon begin, preceding a baseball game.

Boston Manager Alex Cora's message to his players: "Enjoy this."

"It's going to be a special day. We earned it," said Cora, before the first home game of the 2019 season.

“We’re the only team that can actually celebrate this today. We will celebrate it. We will enjoy it. At the same time, we’re going to go out and play good baseball.”

Well, one out of two ...

The 2018 World Series champions were a group worthy of celebration – even if this 2019 collection is off to a stumbling start.

The Red Sox have stumbled before, but the franchise also reminded their faithful of recent journeys to the apex. Tuesday’s celebration began with the titles from long ago, displayed on the Green Monster with modest banners for the championship years of 1903, 1912, 1915, 1916 and 1918.

Then the monster-sized banners for 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2018.

When the Pops broke into “We are the Champions,” out walked stars of the past. Pedro Martinez, Mike Lowell and David Ortiz carried World Series trophies; Ortiz gripping the 2013 trophy with one hand – like he was carrying a jug of milk – and holding his phone in the other. Manny Ramirez strolled onto the field, as did Curt Schilling.

“I didn’t expect (them),” Cora said. “The ceremony was beautiful. That’s how we do it here ... It was tremendous.

“We obviously accomplished something that was great.”

A fourth world championship in 15 seasons. There have been valleys, for sure, but four titles say something – as does Boston’s manner of winning them. This organization has evolved. Fans in Portland have witnessed it.

In 2003, when the Portland Sea Dogs became a Boston minor league affiliate, the farm system was barren.

I remember the 2005 ring ceremony at Fenway. Two players from the Sea Dogs/Red Sox affiliation received rings – Kevin Youkilis, who made the 2004 postseason roster, and pitcher Abe Alvarez, who made one spot start in the regular season. Trot Nixon was the only other homegrown player on the playoff roster.

Then came the 2007 title team with Youkilis, Dustin Pedroia, Jacoby Ellsbury, Jonathan Papelbon, Jon Lester and Manny Delcarmen among the former Portland players – Ellsbury jumping from Double-A to World Series standout in the same year.

In 2013, Xander Bogaerts and Brandon Workman made the Portland-to-World Series leap. Jackie Bradley Jr. also got a ring.

Pedroia, despite an injury-filled 2018, picked up his third ring on Tuesday (matching Ortiz). Other former Sea Dogs got their first rings – Mookie Betts, Andrew Benintendi, Rafael Devers, Christian Vazquez, Blake Swihart, Matt Barnes, Brian Johnson and Tzu-Wei Lin (all but Lin and Johnson were on the postseason roster). Third-base coach Carlos Febles (Sea Dogs manager, 2016-17) also got his jewelry.

It’s quite a treat to see kids from Hadlock Field enjoy their view from atop the baseball world.

“Not everyone can win a World Series,” said Cora, who was also on the 2007 Red Sox team. “There’s a lot of people that played this game and had great careers, Hall of Famers who don’t have a ring.”

Now ... it’s time to be greedy. When can we expect the next ring ceremony?

Is 2020 too optimistic, especially since this team has started 3-9?

“We’ve got a great team,” first baseman Mitch Moreland said. “We know what we’re capable of.”

Moreland was thrilled to see Pedroia back, reinstated Tuesday from the injured list. “He brings that energy that not many people have,” Moreland said. “Having him back and running around here, picking everybody up, is nice.”

Cora said, “Energy is great, but we have to play good baseball ...

“We haven’t pitched. We’ve been inconsistent offensively. We’ve been inconsistent defensively. We’ve been inconsistent running the bases.”

Not to put a damper on a lovely ring ceremony, but three wins in 12 games?

“We got our rings,” Cora said. “Now we have to get back to playing good baseball.

*** *The Lynn Daily Item***

Red Sox, It’s Time to Turn the Page on 2018

Harold Rivera

BOSTON — The rain in Tuesday’s forecast held off long enough for the Red Sox to celebrate last year’s World Series championship during their home opener at Fenway Park. But the Toronto Blue Jays rained down on Boston’s party and handed the Red Sox their ninth loss in 12 games.

For whatever reason, the Red Sox are still hung up on what happened last year. They don’t want to turn the page on 2018, they want to keep riding that wave in hopes that last season’s success carries over. That’s not how it works.

The Red Sox had their parade in October. They had their time to look down on everyone from the top of baseball’s mountain during the offseason. They got their rings Tuesday. Now it’s time to turn the page and get back to winning.

There seems to be no sense of urgency. They’re 3-9 and now have sole possession of last place in the American League East. They’re six games behind the Tampa Bay Rays (9-3 after Tuesday’s win over the White Sox). And while I don’t expect Tampa to run away with the division, nor to sustain its rapid start, it’s going to take the Red Sox time to close that six-game gap. It won’t happen in the blink of an eye and it won’t happen if they continue to play subpar baseball.

Maybe it’ll take them a while to come back down to Earth and realize it’s a new season. The “championship hangover” in professional sports is more feared reality than myth.

But when can we start holding this team accountable? Xander Bogaerts was thrown out trying to stretch a double into a triple in a 1-0 loss at Oakland. Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. have twice failed to communicate with one another on balls hit between them. The starting pitchers all have an ERA of 6.00 higher. They haven’t been able to save Alex Cora from turning to his bullpen earlier than he’d like. And Tuesday, the difference in a two-run loss was a passed ball followed by Blue Jays designated hitter Lourdes Gurriel Jr. stealing home. Chris Sale and Christian Vazquez weren’t on the same page, and it cost them.

Uncharacteristic mistakes have dipped the Red Sox to the bottom of the barrel in the division two weeks into the season. These are mistakes they should be held accountable for, regardless of how many games are left.

I’m not saying it’s time to throw in the towel on a promising season. With 150 games remaining, chances are the Red Sox won’t have much recollection of their slow start when all is said and done. But it isn’t too

much to ask that these guys be held accountable for the slow start they're off to. And it isn't too much to ask them to move on from 2018.

Often when a team makes mental errors on a nightly basis it's because players aren't focused on the game at hand. In putting two and two together, it's not a stretch to say the Red Sox aren't focused on 2019 because they're still living in 2018.

Let's hope Tuesday's ceremony at Fenway put the final bow on what was a great 2018 season. After the loss, Cora said, "It was tremendous. Obviously we accomplished something. It was great coming home. We got our rings and now we have to get back to playing good baseball."

The Red Sox have had their time to celebrate the past. Now it's time to shake the early-season blues and play ball.

—

Tuesday's game was the first in Major League Baseball history that featured two Puerto Rican-born managers. Cora was born in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Blue Jays first-year skipper Charlie Montoyo was born in Florida, Puerto Rico. When Cora was hired in 2017 his first request was that the Red Sox send a plane full of supplies to the island shortly after it was devastated by Hurricane Maria. Despite the loss, Cora couldn't help but appreciate the history he and Montoyo made Tuesday.

"Charlie's doing a tremendous job," Cora said. "You can see the difference (Tuesday) compared with seasons past. They're an aggressive team. They're running more than they did last year with (John Gibbons). You can tell he has control of the Blue Jays."

As a fellow Puerto Rican (my parents were born in the city of Villalba), the progress we've made in professional baseball gives me plenty to be proud about. Cora and Montoyo are great representatives of how passionate we are about baseball.

Blue Jays Hand Red Sox a 7-5 Loss in Fenway Opener

Harold Rivera

BOSTON — After a lackluster West Coast trip, the Red Sox were more than ready to celebrate last season's World Series championship at Tuesday's home opener. But when the dust settled on a pregame ceremony that featured Boston's champions, it was the Toronto Blue Jays who were ready to play ball.

A three-run Blue Jays rally in the top of the fourth and another tough outing for Chris Sale doomed the Red Sox to a 7-5 loss at Fenway Park.

"We have to play better," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "I've been saying it all along. We just have to play better. Better defense, better offense, pitch better."

Mitch Moreland's (1-for-4, RBI) solo home run in the bottom of the first gave the Red Sox a 1-0 lead. Dustin Pedroia (1-for-4), reactivated from the 10-day disabled list prior to Tuesday's game, plated Xander Bogaerts (1-for-2, RBI) on a fielder's choice in the second inning.

Sale cruised through the first two innings but ran into trouble in the third. He surrendered an RBI single to Freddy Galvis and sacrifice fly to Teoscar Hernandez, knotting the score at 2. Lourdes Gurriel Jr.'s RBI single in the fourth gave the Blue Jays a 3-2 lead. After Danny Jansen scored on a passed ball, Gurriel Jr. stole home and lifted Toronto's lead to 5-2.

"They're aggressive," Cora said. "They're going to try to do that, we knew that. They haven't had much traffic (on the bases) in the season but (Tuesday) they put pressure on us and we weren't good at it."

“We scored two, they scored two in the third inning. Then they had that three-run inning. We scored, they scored again. We haven’t shutdown innings in I think two weeks. That’s very important. We haven’t had a chance to add on. That’s very important to our offense or any offense at the big league level. We just have to get better.”

That was all she wrote for Sale, who lasted just four innings and allowed five earned runs on seven hits.

“He wasn’t getting guys out,” Cora said. “Velocity was at 91, 92. He showed some flashes of 94, 95 at the end. As far as the offspeed, his slider, really inconsistent. He made some good ones against righties and he left a few in the zone. They did a good job for a team that’s been striking out a lot. They did a good job with two strikes, putting the ball in play.

“I think they did a good job staying back (on Sale’s slider),” Cora said. “They saw what happened in Oakland, the way we pitched. With two strikes they kept fouling pitches and putting them in play. It wasn’t a home run day. It was a lot of singles and putting balls in play. There weren’t too many swings and misses.”

Boston cut its deficit to 5-4 in the sixth when Mookie Betts (1-for-5, RBI) homered and Bogaerts scored on a Hernandez error in right field.

Toronto added an insurance run on Ronald Girchuk’s RBI single in the seventh. Bogaerts’ RBI double brought J.D. Martinez (1-for-4) home in the eighth but Toronto put it away in the ninth on Galvis’ RBI double to right field.

With two outs and two runners on base in the bottom of the ninth, Blue Jays closer Ken Giles fanned Betts to seal Toronto’s 7-5 win.

Before Tuesday’s game, the Red Sox received their championship rings and raised their 2018 World Series banner. On hand to celebrate were past catalysts of Red Sox championship teams, including World Series MVPs Mike Lowell, David Ortiz, and Manny Ramirez, and members of this past season’s Patriots Super Bowl champion team.

“To be back home, (Monday’s) off day was tremendous,” Cora said. “I spent it with the family and settled down. The ceremony was beautiful. That’s how we do it here. They do an outstanding job.”

*** *The Pawtucket Times***

Promotion gives Walden chance to celebrate with Sox

Brendan McGair

BOSTON — Eventually, Marcus Walden knew he would be presented with his 2018 World Series ring.

Thanks to getting called up over the weekend, the righthanded reliever received his shiny keepsake as part of Tuesday’s pregame extravaganza at Fenway Park, one that became a distant memory by the time Toronto nailed down the final out in a 7-5 win over Boston.

A week ago, Walden was at McCoy Stadium in conjunction with PawSox media day. He was part of Pawtucket’s travel party for its season-opening series at Syracuse, then received a pleasant surprise upon receiving word that his fresh arm was needed by a Boston ballclub that was soundly beaten in Arizona last Friday night.

For Walden, the summons to the majors meant one thing. He wouldn’t be part of this Thursday’s pregame on-field World Series ceremony at McCoy Stadium. The list of current PawSox players with ties to last

year's champs includes catcher Sandy Leon, first baseman/outfielder Sam Travis, infielder Tony Renda, and reliever Bobby Poyner.

"I definitely didn't think I would be up for opening day here in Boston," said Walden after tossing one scoreless inning with two strikeouts against Toronto. "Being able to get the call this early in the season, which is something I didn't foresee, it's amazing."

It's always interesting to learn the miles a Triple-A player ends up logging upon learning he's bound for the majors. Walden had to get from Syracuse to Phoenix, a trek that was confirmed upon being relayed word by PawSox manager Billy McMillon shortly before the clock struck midnight and Friday became Saturday. For someone who grew up in Fresno, Calif., Walden is used to taking cross-country flights at ungodly hours.

"My flight was at 5:45 in the morning out Syracuse. Then I went to JFK Airport and from there I went to Phoenix," Walden said. "I got out there 10:30 (Arizona time) and was ready to get going."

Walden was part of the Red Sox' 2018 Opening Day roster but didn't pitch again for the Sox after May 3. He was plagued by right forearm inflammation that largely stemmed from a limited workload that didn't jive with a pitcher who prefers to take the mound on a regular basis. Last year, Boston viewed Walden as a long-relief option and felt the best way to keep him stretched out was to have him start games for the PawSox and pitch in the neighborhood of three to four innings per outing.

Instead, Walden was forced to contend with periods of inactivity. He made five starts for Pawtucket in 2018 before landing on the disabled list, where he remained for nearly two months. Between Boston and Pawtucket, he appeared in 26 games and totaled 47.1 innings.

"Not getting back to the majors last year was the toughest part," Walden said. "The team dynamic was so unbelievable. We've mainly got the same group of guys back. We've just got to put it together and hopefully win some ballgames."

When Walden reported for spring training this year, the Sox made sure to spell out what his role would entail.

"We had a meeting when I walked into camp. Whether I'm in the majors or in Triple-A, I'm going to be throwing out of the bullpen," Walden said. "The biggest thing was knowing it could be one inning, it could be four innings or five innings ... depending on what the team needs at that time. They'll let know when I'm done."

With Brian Johnson currently on the injured list, the Red Sox are in the market for a long reliever to compliment Hector Velazquez. Walden's ability to eat innings makes him a prime candidate to stick around the Sox for the time being. He's now totaled three scoreless innings in two games for Boston.

As for what he plans to do with his World Series ring, Walden said "I'm sure my dad will have a safe spot for it."

*** *RedSox.com***

Sale's struggles continue in home opener

Ian Browne

BOSTON — The glow of watching the Red Sox collect their championship rings didn't last long for the Fenway faithful, as Chris Sale once again lacked dominant stuff in Tuesday's 7-5 loss to the Blue Jays in the home opener.

Though Sale's fastball velocity (91.7 mph) improved from his last outing -- when he finished at a career-worst average of 89.3 mph -- the overall results worsened.

So, too, did Sale's mood. The ultimate competitor, Sale is at a loss for why he isn't pitching up to his lofty standards, or even anywhere close to them.

"I'm trying to find something," said Sale. "I'm working. That only goes so far. This isn't the hard-work league. This is the do-good league. Got to start going out there and performing."

Boston's ace lasted just four innings, giving up seven hits and five runs while walking none and striking out three. He threw 76 pitches and generated 10 swings and misses as the defending World Series champions fell to 3-9.

"It's very easy to just throw [this one] on top of the pile and say we're not playing good," said Sale. "This wasn't us not playing good. This was me sucking today. That's frustrating. Today was the day we were going to turn it around. We were back home, ceremony, playing in front of our home fans for the first time. Everyone did what they had to do except for me, and that's a frustrating spot to be in."

There were some bright spots for Sale, even if they were hard to see. All seven hits he allowed were singles. Of the 15 balls put in play against Sale, only two were at an exit velocity of 95 mph or more. In addition, four of the seven hits Sale gave up had an expected batting average of .250 or lower.

However, the cold truth is this: Sale (0-3, 9.00 ERA) hasn't looked himself in any of his three starts this season. Of the 88 fastballs Sale has thrown in 2019, there have been just two swings and misses, both of which were on Tuesday.

"You guys are watching," said Sale. "I'm struggling. I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life. Tough spot to be in, but I've got guys in here fighting and I've got to keep fighting."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora revealed for the first time in the hours leading up to Tuesday's game that Sale was impacted by a stomach bug in the days that led up to the start vs. the A's last week. Cora said Sale made only 50 throws on the side in between his first and second starts of the season.

But Sale was healthy for the home opener, and he looked it when he breezed through the first two innings as his team staked him to a 2-0 lead with one run in each of the first two frames. When he struck out Lourdes Gurriel Jr. to end the second, he did so with his fastest pitch of the season at 94.7 mph.

In those first two innings, Sale needed just 25 pitches to get six outs. Sale needed 51 pitches to get his next six outs.

"Yeah, he wasn't able to put hitters away," Cora said. "Velocity was what, 91-92 [mph]? Showed some flashes of 94-95 [mph] at the end. As far as the offspeed, slider, really inconsistent. He made some good ones down and in toward righties and then he left it in the zone. The changeup wasn't great."

Sale's unraveling began in the third, when the Jays produced a game-tying two-run rally on three singles and a sacrifice fly.

It all fell apart in the fourth when the Jays scored three more, including a straight steal of home by Gurriel. Sale, who obviously lost track of the runner at third, was so thrown by Gurriel's mad dash that he threw the ball to the backstop in his hurried attempt to get the pitch to catcher Christian Vázquez. Sale departed with Boston in a 5-2 deficit.

"I mean, he's always going to be good," said Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo. "Right now, he's not throwing 95 [mph]. He's throwing 90, 91 [mph]. So that should be a little bit easier to hit than 95 [mph]."

Maybe the next start will be the one Sale turns it around.

"If I knew what it was, I'd fix it," Sale said. "That's kind of where I'm at, is spinning my tires. Looking at this, looking at that. See if I'm tipping pitches, seeing if my mechanics, if it's this, if it's angles, still searching. But I'll find it. I know who I am, I know what I can do."

The fact that Sale's team nearly staged a comeback -- Toronto led, 6-5, in the bottom of the eighth -- made Sale feel better and worse at the same time.

"We score five runs and six guys coming out of our bullpen, they only gave up two runs. We've got to win that game," said Sale.

Has Sale ever felt this lost?

"Never in my life. That's not going to stop me. I don't have an inch of back down in me," Sale said. "Like I said, I'm just not getting it done. That's the bottom line in this game and that's the bottom line in sports. I've never seen an ugly win and I've never seen a good loss. At the end of the day, just have to find a way to win, no matter what."

The Red Sox, to a man, think Sale will find his groove soon.

"He's going to be fine," said Dustin Pedroia, who played in his first Major League game since May 29, 2018. "I mean, it's Chris Sale. Everybody hits tough patches throughout the year. Everyone does. He's going to be our horse. He is who he is. What does he have, three starts? He's going to be fine."

Ring it in: Sox receive championship bling

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- The Red Sox got their shiny new rings on Tuesday afternoon in front of an enthralled audience at Fenway Park.

It was, as the author of the bulletin-board reminders in the clubhouse put it, a "reminder of how good we are."

After the bump in the road that was the season-opening 3-8 road trip, perhaps the reminder couldn't have come at a better time.

The 2018 season, one in which the Red Sox notched a franchise-record 108 wins and then rampaged through three quality postseason opponents (Yankees, Astros and Dodgers) at an 11-3 clip, will be forever remembered.

And on Tuesday, prior to the home opener against the Blue Jays, the players who created those memories had a chance to savor them before getting back to the business of the 2019 season. Considering that Boston took a 7-5 loss to Toronto that dropped its record to 3-9, the pregame festivities were a welcome diversion from the club's current reality.

"The ceremony was beautiful," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "That's how we do it here. They do an outstanding job on those days and it was very special."

As musicians from the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus churned out a stirring rendition of "We Are the Champions," banners of all the team's early championships (1903, '12, '15, '16 and '18) were unveiled on the Green Monster.

Then, in dramatic fashion, a giant World Series 2004 champions flag was hung over the entire Monster. Then came '07 and '13. With a pause for dramatic effect, the flag everyone came to see ('18) was draped proudly over the wall, covering all the others.

Former fixtures including David Ortiz, Pedro Martinez, Manny Ramirez, Curt Schilling, Mike Lowell and Mike Napoli walked in from the outfield to represent the recent champions.

Wait, Ramirez? The enigmatic former slugger doesn't come around very often, but when he does, it's a treat.

What does Manny being Manny consist of these days?

"Right now, I've got a family. I've got three kids and I've got a wife, and that's the most important thing in my life," Ramirez said. "That's what I enjoy right now. Being with my family, being with my mom. I thought playing against the Yankees was going to be tough, but raising boys is something different."

"Very surprising when I saw Manny," said Cora. "I didn't expect that one, and [I'm] glad that he was here. Mikey [Lowell], usually he texts me or calls me and he hasn't called me in two weeks, so I should have seen that coming. Schilling was also a surprise. It was tremendous. Obviously we accomplished something that was great. We got our rings and now we need to get back to playing good baseball."

Cora and his coaching staff came out first to get their rings. David Price was the first player to get one. American League MVP Award winner Mookie Betts went last.

"Great celebration," said Betts.

The rings made by Jostens were crafted in 14-karat white gold. The "B" logo included 21 custom-cut genuine rubies, representing the four titles the Red Sox have won since 2004.

Seven princess-cut diamonds accented each side of the ring top.

"They've done a pretty good job the last whatever 15, 16 or 20 years. It's only the fourth one, so they have a pretty good idea how to do it," quipped Cora.

At the table where the rings were stationed was a welcoming committee that included Commissioner Rob Manfred, Red Sox owner John Henry and president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski.

Of course, seeing how Boston has become titletown in the 21st century, it was not surprising that the celebration was extended beyond the Red Sox.

The Patriots, fresh off winning their sixth Super Bowl title in the last 18 seasons, gathered around the mound to participate in the ceremonial first pitch. All six Super Bowl trophies were there with them.

Rob Gronkowski, the monster tight end who is freshly retired, threw his pitch to World Series MVP Steve Pearce. Stephon Gilmore fired one to Jackie Bradley Jr., which was fitting because they are both renowned defenders. Super Bowl MVP Julian Edelman fired a strike to Betts.

"First thought is [that] it's cold," said Bradley. "Then enjoying the moment, not thinking too much in the past, not in the future and just focusing on the accomplishment."

The Boston sports landscape has changed quite a bit since Ramirez came to town at the turn of the century.

"I remember my first time when I came here in 2000, everyone was talking about the curse and we never thought about the curse," Ramirez said. "We came, we won two and now they've won two more. And it's awesome when you see those trophies, then you realize it was worth it coming here."

Pedroia thrilled to be back on the diamond

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- As if there wasn't enough excitement for Tuesday's ring ceremony and home opener at Fenway Park, the Red Sox added another jolt of energy by activating second baseman Dustin Pedroia from the injured list.

Though a 7-5 loss to the Blue Jays and a 1-for-4 performance at the plate wasn't exactly what Pedroia had in mind, he was thrilled to be back on the field.

For Pedroia, who batted seventh, it was his first Major League game since May 29, 2018. The veteran leader was limited to just three games last season due to ongoing left knee woes.

"I felt good. It was great to be out there," said Pedroia. "Obviously I wish we'd won. But it's been a long time since I've been able to do that and it was fun."

When Pedroia stepped in for his first at-bat, the crowd showered him with a nice ovation.

"It was awesome," Pedroia said. "I mean, it kind of messed me up. My first couple at-bats, I was trying too hard and I was kind of in a big spot. But I appreciate it so much. I think everyone knows what I've been going through and trying to come back from, so it means a lot."

Finally, that injury seems to be behind Pedroia, who had a solid Spring Training and a smooth three-game Minor League rehab assignment for Class A Greenville that concluded on Sunday.

"My knee can't get any worse, so it's going to be all right," said Pedroia. "It is what it is. I'm just excited to be out here and be able to help the team and play and be around the guys. It's going to be fun."

And on defense, Boston finally has its de facto infield captain back. Eduardo Nunez and Brock Holt had been filling in for Pedroia, as they did for much of 2018.

"Defensively, he's a plus," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said of Pedroia. "Nothing against the other two guys, because they've done a good job, in Nunez and Brock. But Pedroia is elite. Elite at second base. He turns the double play, he makes the play to his left, he's a leader in the infield, he can slow down things for the kids out there. So for the plus he brings offensively, I think defensively he's going to be a game-changer for us."

Cora will be careful not to overuse Pedroia, though he chose not to outline his specific plan to the media.

"We'll keep it in the clubhouse," Cora said. "I have a pretty good idea. Obviously we have to see how he reacts or whatever, but I have a pretty good idea."

After almost a full season without him, Boston was glad to have Pedroia back.

"He brings that energy that not many people have," said first baseman Mitch Moreland. "Having him back and running around here, picking everybody up is nice."

The comeback definitely comes at a good time for the Red Sox, who are 3-9.

"After finding out the news and seeing him here, it obviously puts a smile on your face with all he means to the team, the city, the community and I think just the baseball world in general," said Boston shortstop Xander Bogaerts. "To have him back on our team I think is huge."

Pedroia underwent cartilage restoration surgery in his left knee after playing through discomfort and spending time on the IL during the 2017 season.

The 35-year-old last played a full season in 2016, when he appeared in 154 games and hit .318. In '17, he played in 105 games and hit .293, but hit .229 in August and September after IL stints with left knee inflammation.

Pedroia is a four-time All-Star, winner of the 2007 American League Rookie of the Year Award and won the AL MVP Award in '08.

Was the home opener the plan all along once the team decided Pedroia wasn't ready for Opening Day in Seattle?

"They never really put a day or a goal or anything like that. The goal is to finish three years," said Pedroia, referring to the remaining length of his contract. "That's the goal. But to be able to play at home in the home opener, it meant a lot to me. I feel like I accomplished something out of this. During the whole thing, I haven't really had any good news or anything. Go see a doctor and he gives you bad news. At some point, you want something good. So this meant a lot."

*** *ESPNBoston.com***

How worried should the Red Sox be about Chris Sale's 0-3 start?

David Schoenfield

BOSTON -- Opening Day at Fenway Park began with the good vibes of the World Series ring ceremony, a final celebration of perhaps the greatest team in Boston Red Sox history.

Past Red Sox heroes such as David Ortiz, Manny Ramirez, Curt Schilling and Mike Lowell brought out the team's four World Series trophies from 2004 onward Tuesday to the sounds of the Boston Pops orchestra playing "We are the Champions." Giant banners honoring the 2004, 2007, 2013 and 2018 World Series winners were unfurled one at a time over the Green Monster. The players were given their World Series rings featuring 185 total stones -- the sum of 162 regular-season games, 14 postseason games and Boston's ninth title -- that included 14 princess-cut diamonds, 21 custom-cut rubies, 22 blue sapphires and 15 total carats of gems. The championship flag was raised in center field and two dozen members of the Super Bowl champion New England Patriots walked in from left field carrying all their trophies, and Stephen Gilmore, Julian Edelman and Rob Gronkowski threw out the first pitches.

Then Chris Sale took the mound and 76 pitches later, Red Sox fans were reminded that all those 2018 memories are now stored in the medial temporal lobes of their brains and that it's a new season and everyone's anxiety level about Sale's effectiveness increased a little bit more.

Sale pitched four innings against the Blue Jays in a 7-5 loss, giving up five runs and seven hits while recording three strikeouts -- which at least was an improvement over the one strikeout the left-hander had in six innings in his previous start at Oakland (although he allowed just three hits and one run that game).

Fresh off his recent five-year, \$145 million contract extension, Sale is now 0-3 with a 9.00 ERA through three starts. He says he feels fine and blamed this loss on his performance.

"We gotta win that game," the 30-year-old said. "It's very easy to just throw it on top of the pile and say we're not playing good, but this wasn't about us not playing good. Today was a day we were going to turn it around, we're back home, the ceremony, in front of our home fans, playing our first home game."

While there were apparently extenuating circumstances in the Oakland start, when his fastball averaged just 89.1 mph -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora revealed before Tuesday's game that Sale had been pretty sick that outing and "spent a lot of time in the bathroom" -- there was hope a better Sale would show up at Fenway.

Instead, he lasted just those four innings.

His average fastball velocity was back up to 91.8 mph -- still not quite what it was in his first start -- with a peak of 94.7 mph. More troubling than just the velocity is that it took 83 fastballs this season before a batter finally swung and missed one, when Toronto's Billy McKinney waved at a 94 mph heater in the fourth inning. Compare the effectiveness of his fastball in 2018 and 2019:

2018: Swing rate of 52.8 percent, swing-and-miss rate of 28.7 percent

2019: Swing rate of 33.0 percent, swing-and-miss rate of 6.9 percent

Batters aren't swinging as much on the fastball because Sale isn't throwing it in the zone -- down from 53 percent to 38 percent. Of course, all this comes with the caveats that it's just three outings, one in which he was sick and this one in which he had just recently been sick. He also didn't throw many innings in spring training, and it's worth reminding that Sale also started last season with a lower velocity before cranking it up in June and July, when he was routinely hitting the upper 90s (he averaged 98.0 mph in one June start against the Mariners).

Still, Sale was visibly frustrated after the game.

"I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life," he said. "It's a tough spot to be in. I have guys in here fighting and I have to keep fighting. No giving up. If something's not working, you have to go to something else, and if that's not working you have to go to something else."

At the same time, it's not as though the Blue Jays were ripping him with line drives like the Mariners did in his first start. Look at the seven Blue Jays hits (and their exit velocities):

- Alen Hanson: ground ball single, 89.3 mph
- McKinney: ground ball single, 80.0 mph
- Freddy Galvis: ground ball single, 99.2 mph
- Randal Grichuk: ground ball single, 93.8 mph
- Danny Jansen: ground ball single, 97.8 mph
- Lourdes Gurriel Jr., line-drive single, 89.2 mph
- McKinney: fly ball single, 68.7 mph

It's easy to chalk this up as just one of those days, with five ground ball singles and one soft looper. (In comparison, Sale gave up more than three ground ball singles in a game just once in 2018, and that was just four.) Still, as Cora said after the game, "He wasn't able to put batters away. He didn't have too many swing-and-misses and he paid the price."

The state of baseball in 2019

From labor talks and new rules to some different spending habits, it was an unsettling offseason. So where does the game stand as a new campaign begins? Jeff Passan

Sale had just 10 swing-and-misses in this game, a low total for him -- against a Blue Jays team that has the fourth-highest swing-and-miss rate in the majors. He had just six swing-and-misses against the A's his previous time out.

"I feel fine, I'll never make excuses," Sale said. "I'm a starting pitcher. I should wake up on Christmas and be able to throw strikes."

Unfortunately, while the pregame ceremony felt like Christmas, it's April 9 and the Red Sox are 3-9 -- already six games behind the Tampa Bay Rays in the American League East. The rotation ERA is now 8.78, worst in the majors. As Cora said after the game, the Red Sox are built around the rotation and it hasn't done the job.

It's a stark contrast to last year, when the Red Sox stormed out of the gate to a 17-2 record. Sale was on his way to a dominant season until shoulder inflammation sidelined him in August and September.

He did leave us with this, however, something Red Sox fans can hold onto: "I'm still searching. I'll find it. I know who I am."

Why question-filled present for Red Sox mirrors what future could look like

Jeff Passan

For those in Boston panicking about the Red Sox's sequel to a World Series championship starting with a 3-9 record and the worst run differential in the American League, fear not. That thing in the distance -- it's not the sky falling. It's just a smoke signal from luxury-tax hell to warn that it's coming. Or wait. Maybe it's actually the farm sending a message that the system is barren and needs help.

Pardon the gallows humor. The Red Sox's debacle of a beginning to the 2019 season is bad enough as it is. That Boston has backed itself into a corner in other integral facets of building a sustained contender only worsens it -- and explains why the capacity to change their current trajectory won't be easy.

This is not to cast the Red Sox to where they resided in their previous incarnation, with three last-place finishes sandwiched around a most unlikely title. Any team with Boston's resources can purchase an end around most issues, with the caveat that it could perhaps compound them to an even greater degree.

Perhaps it's easiest to start there, with the Red Sox showering their largesse at a curious time. Less than a week after the first pitch of the spring he threw clocked in at 89 mph, Chris Sale agreed to a five-year, \$145 million contract extension with the Red Sox. Sale has been one of the best pitchers in the major leagues for the better part of a decade. His two seasons in Boston have been beyond phenomenal. He is revered in the clubhouse, the organization, the city.

That said: The reaction around baseball was the awkward marriage of puzzlement at why they did it and giddiness that they actually did. Among the mileage on his arm, the shoulder problems that disabled him twice last year and the fastball velocity going AWOL, the warning signs were lit up like the Citgo sign. And the Red Sox had the perfect hedge: Sale was under contract for the 2019 season. If he looked good, rival executives figured, the Red Sox could extend him following the year. If not, he would hit free agency.

Now, on the heels of his third consecutive troublesome start, with radar guns registering UH-OH instead of a number, the Sale contract is, at least in the short term, a red flag, and not the kind that hangs at Fenway Park celebrating a title. Starting next season, they're on the hook for \$29 million a year for Sale -- at least twice what he'd get coming off a substandard 2019 -- plus \$32 million a year for David Price and \$17 million a season for Nathan Eovaldi, both through 2022. That's \$78 million a year for three starting pitchers -- or more than the first-place Tampa Bay Rays, who have only three starting pitchers, are spending on their entire team this season.

Which is not to say the Red Sox shouldn't spend money. They rake it in. Spending it to improve the team is admirable. It also has put the Red Sox in a very interesting position, one that has manifested itself with the continued free agency of their former closer, Craig Kimbrel. The Red Sox could use a good relief pitcher. Kimbrel has been that. Kimbrel could use a job. The Red Sox have one of those. Boston's reticence to sign Kimbrel is for a few reasons -- they don't want to lose a potential draft pick they'd gain if he goes elsewhere, they were concerned with his end-of-the-season performance -- and includes a concern about money.

Currently, the Red Sox are on the cusp of a second consecutive season flipping the bird at the luxury-tax threshold. Last season, Boston blew past the first, second and third levels of the tax (\$197 million, \$217 million and \$237 million). This year, Boston is somewhere above \$240 million, according to sources, and pushing up against that maximum threshold (at \$246 million this year). If they exceed it, they'll once again

be docked 10 picks in the first round -- Boston's No. 33 overall pick this year got dropped to 43rd -- and pay future overages at a higher rate.

The penalty is, in reality, not severe enough to warrant teams acting as though the luxury-tax threshold is some high-voltage barbed-wire fence. Except that draft-pick docking really does hinder an organization like Boston, whose farm system is teetering somewhere between meh and ugh.

Which wouldn't be so much of a problem if it didn't force the Red Sox into some awfully interesting decisions coming up. Between the extensions for Sale and Xander Bogaerts (at a much more reasonable six years, \$120 million for a 26-year-old shortstop) this spring, Boston committed another \$50 million or so a year to its payroll for at least the next half-decade. Today, with only Sale, Price, Eovaldi, Bogaerts, Dustin Pedroia and Christian Vazquez, the Red Sox have a luxury-tax number of \$114 million next season.

Automatically add benefits and that takes it to \$129 million. Plus an estimated \$30 million in 2020 for Mookie Betts, which brings it to the cusp of \$160 million. Then \$10 million for Jackie Bradley Jr., and about half that for Andrew Benintendi going to arbitration for the first time, and it's at \$175 million for nine players. Who don't include J.D. Martinez, because he may well opt out. Boston will need at least one starting pitcher, a first baseman, a DH and some semblance of a bullpen, and all under the \$208 million number that year, so they can avoid staying at the repeat-offender base rate of a 50 percent tax. Maybe their two best prospects, Bobby Dalbec and Michael Chavis, can fill those power-hitting roles and make the potential loss of Martinez an afterthought.

The more reasonable thought, for a team that has money as free agency across the sport has petered out, is: They could afford this. They easily could afford this because they are the Red Sox and they regularly sell out Fenway and NESN ratings are bonkers and their business side is even sharper than their baseball side, which is saying something. They absolutely could afford to give Betts a deal for \$40 million a year, if they wanted to ensure he stayed with the Red Sox for the remainder of his career, and just resign themselves to life above the tax. They wouldn't be the first team -- and with as much money as they've already committed going forward (even in 2022 they've still got more than \$115 million committed), the possibility of Boston tearing down simply can't and won't happen.

The Red Sox's dealings with Kimbrel don't explicitly speak of tax dodging, because there are enough reasons not to sign him. With Betts, and even with Martinez, there aren't any great reasons. As extension season drew to a close, the Red Sox understood what everyone in baseball saw: The paucity of top players on the market would place an added emphasis on locking up those already in your uniform.

Owners John Henry and Tom Werner and president Dave Dombrowski find themselves confronted with these realities now -- and a much more acute one: Building a winner may be hard, but sustaining it is much, much harder. The Chicago Cubs left the 2016 season with a championship, a soon-to-be-ballooning payroll and a farm system on the downswing. Their Jason Heyward megadeal went sour and was joined by Yu Darvish and Tyler Chatwood's free-agent contracts. Now the Cubs are over the threshold and without much, if any, payroll flexibility. As the great philosopher Christopher Wallace once said: "Mo Money Mo Problems."

That is not actually true in baseball, of course. Money washes away many ills, and it's at the heart of the Red Sox's plans going forward. Will this start authorize them to spend this year? Or will it reinforce that this isn't a team worth spending another dime on? It's not even 10 percent of the way through the season, so if the line of thinking here feels unreasonable, that's because it is. But management needs to plan for contingencies, too. And thus the questions above.

They'll all be answered in due time, and those answers will be best viewed through the greater prism that governs baseball economics and particularly those of teams like the Red Sox, who are among the game's royalty. Even when the sky is falling, all it takes is a few properly placed stacks of cash to put it back exactly where it's supposed to be.

Montoyo, Cora excited about historic matchup

Marly Rivera

BOSTON -- Since he was hired as the Toronto Blue Jays' manager this past October, Charlie Montoyo has had a date marked on his calendar: April 9, 2019.

That's because when they announced the starting lineups for the Blue Jays and Alex Cora's Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park on Tuesday, it was the first time two Puerto Rican managers faced each other in a major league game.

"Let me tell you sincerely, when they gave me the job, the first thing I thought was, 'When do we play against Boston, against the other Puerto Rican?'" Montoyo said in an interview with ESPN on Monday. "I'm so proud of [Cora]. I get goose bumps just thinking about the many Puerto Ricans that are going to be in Boston [on Tuesday], waving the Puerto Rican flag.

"This is going to be historic, and I am very happy that this is going to happen. I know that we are representing Puerto Rico proudly. And the best thing about it all, is that Puerto Rico will win any way."

Montoyo, who is 53 and served as a bench coach for the Tampa Bay Rays last season, became the fourth Puerto Rican manager in the major leagues when he was hired by the Blue Jays in October.

Edwin Rodriguez was the first Puerto Rican manager in the majors when he took over the Miami Marlins after the dismissal of Cuban-American Fredi Gonzalez in June 2010. Sandy Alomar Jr. served as interim manager of the Cleveland Indians during the last games of the 2012 campaign, when Dominican Manny Acta, now a coach with the Seattle Mariners, was removed from his post.

But Montoyo and Cora took very different paths to get to this point in their careers.

After 14 years in the majors, and since his retirement from playing after the 2011 season, Cora immediately became part of a short list of Latino prospects to be an MLB manager.

He then became manager and general manager of the Criollos de Caguas of the Puerto Rican winter league, was an ESPN baseball analyst and, later on, was general manager of the Puerto Rican team for the 2017 World Baseball Classic.

Cora also won a World Series championship as bench coach for the Houston Astros before becoming the first minority manager in Boston's 117-year franchise history.

The Red Sox decided to hire Cora without his having any experience as a major league manager primarily because of his demonstrated knowledge of baseball and his potential to communicate with and inspire players of diverse ages and backgrounds. He lived up to those expectations by becoming the second Latino manager, and first Puerto Rican, to win a World Series after Venezuelan Oswaldo "Ozzie" Guillen did it with the Chicago White Sox in 2005.

Montoyo had a short career of just four games in the major leagues with the Montreal Expos, about which the always jovial manager joked, "People better not forget that in those games I hit .400!"

Before becoming Kevin Cash's bench coach, Montoyo had a 22-year managerial career in the Rays' farm system.

He was at the helm of the Tampa Bay Rays' Triple-A affiliate, the Durham Bulls, from 2007 to 2014. During his eight-year tenure, the native of Florida, Puerto Rico, won seven pennants and went to a record six Governors' Cup finals, winning championships in 2009 and 2013. His 633-515 record as manager of the Bulls is the highest number of victories in franchise history, leading him to be inducted into the International League Hall of Fame as a member of the Class of 2016.

"I've been saying it for five or six years," Cora said of Montoyo's hiring. "This is not about minorities. It's not about him being Latino or Puerto Rican. Charlie Montoyo is a great baseball man, and he's been coaching and managing for a lot of years. I'm very happy for him."

Cora and Montoyo will also both be looking to turn things around after a poor start to the 2019 season, with the Sox and Jays sharing last place in the AL East at 3-8. However, unlike Cora's champions, who finished last season with a franchise-record 108 wins, Montoyo will have an uphill climb with the Blue Jays.

Toronto is a young team, deep in a rebuilding process after winning 73 games last season, and a clear underdog in the AL East after finishing fourth in 2018.

"All I am is grateful for this opportunity," Montoyo said. "This is not an easy sport. You have to do it day in and day out. When things are not going well, that's when people show you who they truly are. Everything I do is from experience, I think about what I would like to see from my manager if I was a player. If the players see me relaxed, they will relax."

"And one thing that relaxes me is music. I love salsa music, and when you go to Toronto and go to my office, you will see some congas, you will see bongos, there is a guiro [a Latin American percussion instrument], there are maracas. ... I play some music, and I know they relax. It's not easy, and it's not like it doesn't bother me to lose -- it bothers me to lose more than anyone -- but it's a long season, and we have to stay relaxed."

In addition to the significance of Tuesday's matchup, Montoyo said it's also his mother's birthday.

"So I'm going to tell Alex, 'It's Mom's birthday, so come on, man, you can give me one,'" Montoyo joked. "We'll have 18 more!"

Cora and Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, on Oct. 23, became the first two minority managers to face each other in 114 editions of the World Series. And they did it at Fenway Park, home of the last major league team to break the color barrier, 12 years after Jackie Robinson's debut.

On Tuesday, all eyes were on Cora, with the Red Sox receiving their championship rings during their home opener. But for Puerto Rico, it was a day like no other in baseball history, which made Montoyo think of Puerto Rican idol Roberto Clemente, the first Latin American player to be enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

"My favorite number is 25, but [Tuesday] I feel like I would like to be wearing Roberto Clemente's No. 21," Montoyo said, eyes glistening. "I feel like Roberto Clemente is looking down on us from heaven, saying, 'Look, this actually happened! Two managers, born and raised in Puerto Rico, one in Caguas and the other in Florida, Puerto Rico.'"

"It's going to be very nice. It's going to be very special."

*** *WEEI.com***

Chris Sale gets velocity back, but results aren't there in home opener

Ryan Hannable

The talk going into Tuesday's Red Sox home opener for Chris Sale was his velocity following his last start when he threw 25 four-seam fastballs, averaging 89.1 mph, the lowest velocity for any of his 289 career starts.

It was revealed before the game he was battling a stomach illness during that start, which likely explained the lack of velocity.

Sale backed that up by averaging 91.8 miles per hour on his 26 four-seam fastballs thrown against the Blue Jays Tuesday afternoon with temperatures in the mid-40s, except the results weren't there. It's also worth noting Sale finally got a swing and miss on his fastball -- his 83rd fastball of the season.

After allowing one run on three hits over six innings of work against the A's despite the lack of velocity, Sale allowed five runs on seven hits in just four innings of work against the Jays on Tuesday. Things were going fine until the third inning when he allowed two runs and then things really fell apart in the fourth inning when he allowed three. One of the runs came on a Randal Grichuk steal of home.

That would be Sale's last inning, as for the second time in his three starts this season he failed to make it to the fifth inning. Before getting injured last season, Sale didn't make it to the fifth inning in just one game.

While it was good to see Sale have his velocity back, he and the team are still looking for the results to match.

This Red Sox team hardly resembles the one that earned those rings

Rob Bradford

The reminder didn't take.

The rings. The Patriots. The alumni from past world championship teams. The video board montages. The standing ovations.

The reality was that whatever happened between 1-2 p.m. Tuesday had little to nothing to do with the 2019 Red Sox. What we have watched through the first 12 games has little semblance to that story that was revisited prior to what would be a 7-5 Blue Jays win over the Red Sox. (For a complete recap, [click here](#).)

Mookie Betts did hit a home run. So there was that. Mitch Moreland also continued his march to a potential a second straight All-Star Game appearance with his fourth homer of the season. And Xander Bogaerts' eighth-inning two-out double, scoring J.D. Martinez (who had also doubled with two outs) offered the same kind of resiliency we witnessed a season ago.

Other than those moments, finding the kind of 2018 mirror images many thought would re-emerge upon landing in Boston were really, really hard to find.

The most obvious difference was perhaps the most disconcerting one for the Red Sox -- Chris Sale.

The Sox starter initially offered some optimism, coming out of the gate with a fastball that sat between 92-94 mph, a significant upgrade. But both the velocity and results didn't last. Sale would finish his third start of the season giving up five runs on seven hits over just four innings, throwing 76 pitches.

There were just three strikeouts, with Sale not getting the first swing and miss on a fastball until his 83rd heater of the season. And then there was how the Blue Jays scored their fifth run.

The punctuation to the awkward image regarding the Sox' ace came in the fourth inning when Lourdes Gurriel Jr. swiped home with Sale pitching out the windup with two outs and the hosts clinging to a two-run lead. Sale reacted far too late, sailing a fastball outside the right-handed hitter's batter's box, leaving both the pitcher and his catcher, Christian Vazquez with the kind of defeated looks rarely found in 2018.

This has not been a team oozing with panache, as was evident by the mass of media choosing to hinge on Manny Ramirez's every word in the back of the press box while Sale was struggling. Another example? By the time the Red Sox entered the ninth inning still within striking distance at a run the Fenway Park fans thinned out to early 1960's levels.

Those who did stay got a chance to see the final difference: Betts this time striking out to end the game with the tying run at first on a 3-2 pitch.

Seeing Gronk and the rings, beating traffic and finding warmth ultimately won out over what is now a 3-9 baseball team. At this point, it was probably the right choice.

Pedroia ended up going 1-for-4, collecting a leadoff single in the ninth inning.

Red Sox World Series MVPs on hand for 2018 World Series rings ceremony

Nick Friar

It's been said quite a bit since the turn of the century, but it's hard to believe just how many championships the city of Boston has celebrated since the Patriots won their first one. While the Pats set the standard professional sports teams across the country, never mind Boston, the fact the Red Sox were presented another set of World Series rings on Tuesday — the franchise's fourth set since getting things started in 2004 — is almost harder to believe.

Looking at the cast of misfits that took the field prior to the home opener, there was a list of players who somehow made things work with a team that had previously been snake-bitten for almost a century. From Manny Ramirez to David Ortiz to Mike Lowell, all the way to the players receiving their 2018 World Series rings, like Steve Pearce and Nathan Eovaldi, both of which came off the scrap heap to play major parts in Boston's postseason run, it's an eclectic cast of characters.

No group represents the randomness of Red Sox heroism more than the four World Series MVPs: Ortiz, Pearce, Ramirez, and Lowell. All four were on hand for the ceremony and posed together holding the Commissioner's Trophy from the years they were crowned World Series MVP.

One was a nobody that went to win three titles with the Red Sox. One was a superstar who helped usher in the new era of Red Sox baseball. Another was thrown in as part of a trade that brought Josh Beckett to Boston. And last, but not least, was a mid-season acquisition who'd played on every team in the American League East, except his hometown Boston Red Sox.

There's still one thing we have yet to witness with this franchise: back-to-back titles. This 2019 group has a few things to figure out if they plan to be the first.

And if this team does clean it up, who's going to be the hero this time around?

Why despite loss Tuesday was a good day for Dustin Pedroia

Ryan Hannable

It wasn't exactly the game Dustin Pedroia envisioned, as he went 1-for-4 including hitting into a tough double-play in the Red Sox' 7-5 loss in their home opener, but the Red Sox second baseman was just happy to be on the field.

Pedroia was activated off the injured list before the game as he was still working his way back from left knee inflammation and began the year in Single-A Greenville. It was the same knee that caused him to play just three games last season and miss a good chunk of 2017. The contest marked his first major league game in exactly 315 days.

"I felt good. It was great to be out there," he said. "Obviously I wish we'd won. But it's been a long time since I've been able to do that and it was fun."

Pedroia added: "It was awesome. I mean, it kind of messed me up. My first couple at-bats I was trying too hard and I was kind of in a big spot. But no I appreciate it so much. I think everyone knows what I've been going through and trying to come back from. So it means a lot."

After missing so much time the past few years, he admitted he was a bit nervous.

"I was working for 16 months just to get ready to do this," he said. "Last year I played three games and I don't feel like I did last year. I'm going to be fine. I'm going to be able to play. I was excited. I didn't sleep much. I enjoy playing and I enjoy being a Red Sox. So it was fun."

The Red Sox have a plan for him moving forward, which will be not playing every single day like he's used to, but that will be the only way he will reach his ultimate goal of finishing out his contract with the Red Sox that goes through 2021.

"They never really put a day or a goal or anything like that," he said. "The goal is to finish three years. That's the goal. But to be able to play at home in the home opener, it meant a lot to me. I feel like I accomplished something out of this. During the whole thing I haven't really had any good news or anything. Go see a doctor and he gives you bad news. At some point you want something good. So this meant a lot."

Patriots stole show at Red Sox' home opener, so why were they even there?

Ryan Hannable

Naturally, Tuesday at Fenway Park should have been about the Red Sox.

The team was playing in its home opener where it welcomed back some past greats to participate in the 2018 World Series ring presentation ceremony, but instead the hour-long ceremony will be remembered for the appearance of the Patriots, who were also honored for their Super Bowl LIII win over the Rams.

Over 20 players emerged from the Green Monster following both national anthems to a raucous applause that was the louder than any other point in the ceremony, and it got even louder when it was announced Rob Gronkowski would throw out a ceremonial first pitch along with Julian Edelman and Stephon Gilmore. Edelman capped the thing off by throwing a ball into the roof box seats after chest-bumping with Mookie Betts.

As for the game, it wasn't much better for the Red Sox as Chris Sale struggled and they fell 7-5 to the Blue Jays, falling to 3-9 on the year.

Football is king in New England, and it's been that way for years. The Red Sox know this, which is why they should have held off on honoring the Super Bowl champions for another day.

Back in 2005, the Red Sox and Patriots were both coming off championships and at the home opener Bill Russell, Bobby Orr, Tedy Bruschi and Richard Seymour threw out the ceremonial first pitches. The other Boston sports teams were incorporated, but it wasn't all Patriots, and it was also a different time. Coming off their first World Series win in 86 years, the Red Sox were close to the No. 1 team in town.

Things have changed drastically in the 14 years since, which is why the Red Sox should have had Tuesday be all about them and only them. That is what they did in 2014 when they received their rings for the 2013 World Series. That ceremony was centered around the team and the 2013 Boston Marathon.

It's not like the Patriots would have been upset if they weren't invited for the home opener, and there was perhaps a better opportunity in a few weeks when the vast majority of the team would be in town for the start of voluntary offseason workouts that begin April 15.

So, why exactly were the Patriots invited Tuesday?

“We are part of what is obviously the greatest time to be living in Boston,” Red Sox chairman Tom Werner said on Dale & Keefe Tuesday prior to the game. “The envy of the rest of the country. ... They are going to be part of the ceremony because we share in their success. ... As soon as we won the World Series we sent out the invitation.”

Again, the Red Sox didn't need to do this now.

They could have very easily have waited for a later date to make Tuesday all about the Red Sox and what they accomplished in 2018. But, instead it was Gronkowski's first real public appearance since he announced his retirement a few weeks ago, and this was another reason why the Patriots stole the show.

While it never is a factor because of scheduling, imagine if things were reversed — would the Patriots ever invite the Red Sox to be honored on a night where they were raising a Super Bowl banner at Gillette Stadium?

Not in a million years.

The Red Sox were honored in Foxboro days after their World Series win last November before a Sunday night game against the Packers, which is what the Red Sox could have done for the Patriots. A late April night game against the Tigers or A's would have worked just fine.

Tuesday's ceremony was supposed to be a reminder of what the Red Sox did last year, but instead it was really a reminder of how much more popular the Patriots are than the Red Sox.

Mission not accomplished.

Chris Sale has never felt as lost on the mound as he does now

Nick Friar

Chris Sale first became a full-time Major League starting pitcher at the beginning of 2012. From that point through April 2018, he dominated the months of March and April every season (combined 33 starts), averaging almost seven innings an outing with a 2.67 ERA and 9.6 K/9.

Fairly different from what we've seen to start 2019. Sale has given up 13 runs over 13 innings in his first three starts of the season. If not for the Oakland A's, who he dominated with his slower than normal fastball, his ERA would be in double-digits, as opposed to his already sky-high 9.00.

Until 2019, Sale had only given up four or more runs in an April start twice: eight over 4 1/3 innings in 2013 and nine over three innings in 2015. (He never did it in March through 2018.) He's done that once in March and once in April this year.

He says health isn't a problem. The shoulder isn't an issue, according to Sale. But there is something wrong physically, in terms of his mechanics — unless he's somehow become predictable.

The thing is, Sale can't pinpoint what's wrong, which is why he feels like he's chasing his tail.

“If I knew what it was I'd fix it,” Sale said following Tuesday's 7-5 loss. “That's kind of where I'm at, spinning my tires. I'm looking at this, looking at that, see if I'm tipping pitches, see if (it's) my mechanics, if it's this, if it's angles. You know, I'm still searching, but I'll find it. I know who I am. I know what I can do. I've been there before and I'll keep grinding.”

There's also the danger of this creeping into Sale's mental game. No pitcher is impervious to their mind creating another set of problems; problems that can manifest into an irreversible mess over time.

That being said, Boston's ace is less likely to crumble from adversity than most. Sale has a unique mentality — it's part of what makes him an ace. But even he couldn't use his tough exterior to completely hide his current state when asked, "Have you ever felt this lost on the mound?"

"Never in my life," Sale said. "But it's not going to stop me. I don't have an inch of back-down in me. I never will, I'll never give up. I just got to keep fighting. But it's only going to go so far here. They don't care if you're trying hard. I got to start performing and putting zeroes up and winning games and that's what I'm prepared to do."

To make matters worse for Sale, his teammates did enough to earn a win on Tuesday, especially with him on the mound. The topic of failing his teammates only heightened his frustrations further.

"We scored five runs. We had six guys come out of our bullpen, they only gave up two runs. We (have) got to win that game," Sale said. "This is very easy to throw on top of the pile and say, 'we're not playing good.' This wasn't us not playing good, this was me sucking today. That's frustrating because today was the day we were going to turn it around. You know, we're back home, (World Series ring) ceremony, in front of our home fans, playing our first home game. Everyone did what they had to do except for me and that's a frustrating spot to be in."

The problem with Sale isn't his motivation; no one can make that case for two seconds. (Although, don't put it past Mut to try.) However, the fact he is as persistent as anyone is in its own way concerning. If he's tirelessly trying to get on track, how hasn't he or anyone else in the Red Sox pitching brain trust figured out what's wrong?

Just look at any normal Sale outing: he likes to come in, do his job as quickly and efficiently as possible and go home. He'd notice the slightest thing that's out of place and iron it out as quickly as possible. Instead, Sale is three starts into 2019 and is more lost than he's ever been on the mound — with no sign of light at the end of the tunnel.

Red Sox Farm Report: Rusney Castillo is still hitting home runs

Nick Friar

With all the Red Sox struggles in the young 2019 season, it's a bit surprising there haven't been any Rusney Castillo calls to the postgame show yet. Not that it'll make a difference. Castillo isn't worth the risk with that gaudy contract.

(Castillo's contract does not count against Boston's MLB payroll, thus having no impact on the luxury tax. However, the second Castillo comes up he instantly impacts the luxury tax payroll and would continue to do so even if he was sent back to the minors.)

The 2018 International League All-Star hasn't exactly picked up where he left off last season, hitting only .200 (3 for 15) with an RBI entering Tuesday's game. He added to the RBI tally and hit his first extra-base hit of 2019: a three-run home run off of Buffalo Bisons starting pitcher Jacob Waguespack.

—Sandy Leon hasn't found himself at the plate with Pawtucket. He had two hits in the first game and has gone hitless since then. He's now 2 for 15.

—Bobby Poyner made his second appearance of the season on Tuesday. He's given up a run in both outings and struck out five over 2 1/3 innings.

—Nick Lovullo had his first hit of the season with Pawtucket in his first tour at Triple-A. He went 3 for 4 with an RBI, stolen base and two runs against Buffalo.

*** NBC Sports Boston**

Chris Sale admits he's never felt this lost on the mound in his life

Justin Leger

BOSTON - Cold weather aside, Tuesday's Red Sox home opener got off to an encouraging start.

Several notable players from past Red Sox championship teams joined the festivities with trophies in hand, last year's champs collected their new rings, and the Super Bowl LIII champion Patriots joined for the ceremonial first pitch. Then, ace Chris Sale pitched a 1-2-3 first inning and clocked a 94 mph fastball on the radar gun.

Things went downhill from there.

Sale, who let up seven runs on Opening Day in Seattle and then had a career-low average fastball velocity of 89.1 mph in Oakland, saw his struggles continue in his third start. The left-hander allowed five runs, seven hits, and even a steal of home in only four innings pitched.

With a 9.00 ERA after three outings, Sale was asked after Boston's 7-5 loss if he's ever felt this lost on the mound.

"Never in my life," Sale replied.

That's an alarming statement from someone who just inked a five-year, \$145 million contract prior to the season, and it's certainly not one that is going to help the Red Sox feel at ease.

Sale didn't mince words or make excuses after the game. The 30-year-old took full ownership of the loss.

"We've got to win that game," Sale said. "This is very easy to throw on the pile and say we aren't playing good. This wasn't us not playing good, this was me sucking today. That's frustrating because today was the day we were going to turn it around."

Manager Alex Cora noted Sale's improvement in velocity from his last start, but called the ace's off-speed pitches "inconsistent."

"He wasn't able to put hitters away," Cora said. "Velocity was 91, 92. Showed some flashes of 94, 95 at the end. But as far as the off-speed, slider, a little inconsistent ... the changeup wasn't great."

Werner "hopeful" a deal for Mookie Betts contract extension can get done>>>>

"He didn't have too many swings and misses, and we paid the price."

Meanwhile, the Red Sox are 3-9 on the season with sole possession of last place in the American League East. They'll have a day off on Wednesday, then look to get on the right track Thursday vs. Toronto.

Manny Ramirez hopes to make Hall of Fame, admits he has made mistakes

John Tomase

Manny Ramirez knows it might never happen because of choices he made involving performance-enhancing drugs, but he hopes to reach the Hall of Fame.

Speaking to reporters after Tuesday's ring ceremony, where he participated in on-field ceremonies as a representative of the 2004 and 2007 World Series champions, Ramirez acknowledged his mistakes, but hoped for the best.

Sale's extension should make Red Sox very nervous

"We're praying," Ramirez said. "I think life, everybody makes mistakes, nobody's perfect, but I think with time, if it's God's will, we're going to be there. If not, hey, we're just happy we got the opportunity to play the game that we love."

Ramirez was suspended twice for violating the league's performance-enhancing drug policy, including in 2011, when he retired rather than serve a 100-game suspension with the Rays. He was also reported to be on a list of players who failed drug tests in 2003, though he wasn't punished for that possible transgression because the results were meant to remain private.

As a result, he hasn't come anywhere close to Cooperstown, despite retiring with 555 home runs and a lifetime average of .312.

The word often used to describe Manny Ramirez throughout his tumultuous eight years in Boston was "mercurial." It wasn't a compliment so much as a catch-all for behavior that ranged from unreliable to borderline crazy.

But time apparently matures all, because the Ramirez who spoke on Tuesday sounded surprisingly grounded.

Sox show off some bling with 2018 championship rings

"Right now, I've got a family, I've got three kids, and I've got a wife, and that's the most important thing in my life," he said. "That's what I enjoy right now. Being with my family, being with my mom, that's she's still alive. I thought playing against the Yankees was going to be tough, but raising boys is something different."

He also saluted his time in Boston.

"This is the best city to play in and I was here," he said. "Oh man, it's awesome. Every time I went to left field, all the fans cheering and cheering my name, it's a great feeling, especially when you come back and you see Alex (Cora) and you see (David Ortiz), and you see Pedro.

"When I came to Boston, to be honest, I knew it was going to be tough. But it also makes me a better player just to always be on top of my game and always give all I've got. I know sometimes a lot of people saw that I was maybe not working that hard, but I was working hard. I was doing my thing, I was putting my numbers, but like I said, this is an awesome place to play. It was God's purpose for me to be here and play here."

Manny Ramirez, Curt Schilling among former Red Sox at World Series ring ceremony

Justin Leger

BOSTON — The Red Sox brought back some familiar faces for their 2018 World Series ring ceremony on Tuesday.

Before unveiling the new bling, members of Boston's '04, '07, and '13 championship teams were greeted with cheers from the Fenway faithful as they presented each of the four World Series trophies. Here's who made an appearance:

Curt Schilling
Manny Ramirez
David Ortiz
Pedro Martinez
Tim Wakefield
Keith Foulke
Orlando Cabrera
Mike Lowell

Mike Timlin
Manny Delcarmen
Will Middlebrooks
Jarrod Saltalamacchia
Embedded video

Schilling appears to have made amends with Red Sox ownership since last October, when he wasn't invited to throw out the first pitch alongside his '04 teammates prior to Game 2 of the World Series.

After rings were given out to the '18 World Series champions, a few more champs joined in on the festivities. Patriots stars Julian Edelman, Stephon Gilmore, and recently retired Rob Gronkowski threw out the ceremonial first pitch to celebrate their Super Bowl LIII title.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Chris Sale ready to accept blame, but has few answers

Sean McAdam

Chris Sale had reason to believe Tuesday would be different.

The Red Sox were finally through with their marathon season-opening road trip and back home in front of their own fans, who, while battling near-freezing temperatures, were eager to celebrate last year's championship and point the Sox in the right direction.

The pre-game ceremony went as planned, which is to say flawlessly.

The rest? Don't ask.

Sale was handed a quick 2-0 lead after two innings, and just as quickly gave it back. Then it got worse: three more runs allowed in the fourth — including the final one on a straight steal of home — and a quick exit after just 76 pitches and only 12 outs.

As ever, Sale was plenty accountable.

"Today was on me," he said flatly after the Sox dropped their home opener, 7-5 to the Toronto Blue Jays. "We were supposed to win today's game. We score five runs on a day that I start, we've got to win that one. It's very easy to toss on top of the pile and say 'We're not playing good.' But this wasn't us not playing good; this was me sucking today.

"That's frustrating because today was the day we were going to turn it around. We're back home, the (pre-game) ceremony, in front of our fans, playing our first home game. Everyone knew what they had to do except for me and that's a frustrating spot to be in."

But while Sale was eager to take on blame for what had happened, finding answers proved more challenging. When I asked Sale if he had ever felt this lost on a mound, his response was quick and more than a little disconcerting.

"Never in my life," he said.

At this point, it's difficult to determine which is more troubling: Sale's performance through the first three games or his inability to pinpoint the cause.

It's bad enough Sale has twice, in the first three games, allowed five or more earned runs — or, as many as he had in his first two seasons with the Red Sox. It's bad enough that it took Sale until his 13th inning of

work this season to get his first swing-and-miss on a fastball. It's bad enough that a guy who has been nearly unhittable for much of his career allowed six hits in the span of eight hitters.

As teammate Dustin Pedroia noted: "He's going to be fine. He's Chris Sale. Everybody hits tough patches throughout the year — everyone does."

But the fact that Sale can't provide a solution to the mess he's created? That's not a good sign.

On Tuesday, it wasn't about velocity. Unlike his last outing in Oakland — where his average fastball was under 90 mph for the first start of his career — Sale cranked up the heater some, regularly throwing his fastball 93-94 and occasionally hitting 95 mph.

But Sale didn't have much command of his slider or changeup, and with Toronto hitters following the lead of the Mariners and A's and largely laying off (or fouling off) his fastball, Sale consistently fell into hitters' counts — without the wipeout slider or above-average fastball to bail himself out of trouble.

"He was unable to put hitters away," said Alex Cora. "He didn't have too many swings-and-misses and he paid the price."

In Seattle, Sale's arm strength had perhaps not been fully ramped up. In Oakland, he was battling a stomach bug that left him weak. But Tuesday, Sale simply couldn't figure things out.

"Right now I'm just trying to find it grinding," said a subdued Sale. "Obviously, you guys are watching. I'm struggling. I don't know if I've ever pitched like this in my life. Tough spot to be in, but I've got guys in here fighting and I've got to keep fighting. There's no giving up. If something's not working, you've got to go to something else. When that's not working, go to something else."

"I'm working. That only goes so far. This isn't a 'hard work league.' This is a 'do-good league.' I've got to start going out there and performing."

Sale has looked at video and tried to figure out the issue. To date, he hasn't found it.

"If I knew what it was, I'd fix it," he said. "I'm spinning my tires, looking at this, looking at that, seeing if I'm tipping pitches, seeing if it's mechanics, if it's angles. I'm still searching for it."

David Price, who has had his share of tough moments in Boston, feels for his teammate.

"It's tough to watch," Price told BostonSportsJournal.com. "He'll get out of it. I definitely feel for him. He knows I'm here for him if he wants to talk about whatever. So is everybody else. But he's too good, period. The back of his baseball card will let you know how good he has been and how good he is now and what we expect from him going forward. He'll get back to that."

For the spiraling Red Sox, not soon enough.

BSJ Game Report: Blue Jays 7, Red Sox 5 – In battle of last-place teams, Sox lose out

Sean McAdam

Sloppy play continues: There's little doubt poor starting pitching has been the Red Sox' chief failure this season, with just one quality start from the rotation through the first dozen games. But the Sox are not yet mastering some of the little things and that's not helping the cause either. On Tuesday, the team didn't commit any errors, but catcher Christian Vazquez committed two passed balls in the same inning while starter Chris Sale yanked a pitch enabling a steal of home. "If he just throws the ball down the middle, he's out by five feet," lamented Alex Cora. The Jays were also 3-for-3 in stolen base attempts and the Sox contributed a wild pitch. "They're taking advantage of us," said Cora. "We're slow to the plate. We have to do a better job slowing down the running game. Teams are running against us. We have to mix it up. We

saw it during the road trip and we saw it again today.” The Red Sox — particularly the starters — are allowing enough baserunners as it is. Allowing them to take extra bases is only compounding the problem.

Pedroia comes back: It wasn’t exactly the stuff of storybooks. Dustin Pedroia returned to action in a regular season game since last May 29. He was given a standing ovation when he collected his World Series ring and again when he came to the plate for the first time in the second inning. “I felt good,” he said. “It was great to be out there. Obviously, I wish we won. But it’s been a long time since I was able to do that and be out there. It was fun.” on the field, the results weren’t great. He managed a leadoff single down the right-field line in the ninth, but in the three previous at-bats, was hitless, ending three innings while stranding baserunners in scoring position each time. “My first few at-bats, I was trying too hard,” he said, “because I was kind of in a big spot.” Later, he survived a scare on a collision at second with baserunner Teoscar Hernandez, who got his spikes caught in Pedroia’s shoelaces. A few teammates had expressed initial concern that he has re-injured his knee. “My knee can’t get any worse, so it’s going to be alright,” joked Pedroia.

Manny returns: For the first time since 2016 — and only the second time since his playing career ended — Manny Ramirez returned to Fenway Park Tuesday, joining in the pre-game ceremony as the Red Sox celebrated their most recent World Series win and the three that came before. Ramirez was cheered wildly by the fans and later spoke with reporters. “It’s awesome,” he said of the chance to re-visit Fenway. “This is the best city to play in. All the fans cheering and cheering my name, it’s a great feeling.” Looking back on his career with the Sox, Ramirez noted: “When I came to Boston, I knew it was going to be tough. But to be honest, it made me a better player. ... It was God’s plan for me to play here.” Ramirez said he had been invited by the Red Sox “a couple of years” but he was busy with his family. “This time, I wanted to come back and say ‘Hi’ to the fans,” he said. Ramirez, who has drawn little support on the ballot for the Hall of Fame, was asked about his chances to get into Cooperstown. “I hope so. We’re praying. In life, everybody makes mistakes,” he said. In an apparent reference to his two PED suspensions, Ramirez added: “Nobody’s perfect. With time, if it’s God’s will, we’re going to be there. If not we’re just happy we got the opportunity to play the game we love.”

TURNING POINT

As bad as things turned for the Sox in the middle innings, they closed to within a run in the sixth. But in the seventh, consecutive walks by the Boston bullpen and a run-scoring single by Randal Grichuk re-established the Jays two-run lead and ate into the Red Sox’ momentum.

ONE UP

Tyler Thornburg: Thornburg continues to make strides out of the bullpen. He contributed two scoreless innings, allowing just one hit while striking out two.

TWO DOWN

Jackie Bradley Jr.: Bradley insisted that he fixed his swing in the second half and over the winter, but it’s yet to be demonstrated. He was 0-for-4 and is hitting .171 for the season, serving as an anchor in the bottom third of the lineup.

Christian Vazquez: Other than a leadoff single in the third, Vazquez had a brutal afternoon. He was soon erased on the bases while attempting to steal. Then, in the top of the fourth, he committed two passed balls. He also couldn’t glove a pitch from Sale as the Jays stole home.

QUOTE OF NOTE

“Never in my life.” Chris Sale, when asked if he’s ever felt this lost on the mound.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Sox had been 14-2 in their previous 16 home openers. Mitch Moreland has four homers in the first 12 games; the last Red Sox player to do that was Hanley Ramirez in 2015. The solo homer by Mookie Betts had an exit-velocity of 105.2 mph, his hardest-hit ball of the season. Xander Bogaerts has six walks in his last five games.

UP NEXT

After a day off Wednesday, the Red Sox and Blue Jays complete their brief two-game series with RHP Nathan Eovaldi (0-0 8.10) vs. RHP Aaron Sanchez (1-1, 1.64)

Return home offers Red Sox a chance to begin again

Sean McAdam

After six weeks in spring training, another few days in Arizona for exhibition play and a tortuous 11-game season-opening road trip, the Red Sox are finally back home.

The longest season-opening road swing is over and not a minute too soon after the Red Sox dropped three straight series, losing three-of-four in both Seattle and Oakland while dropping two-of-three in Phoenix.

It was a given that the first trek of 2019 would be a challenge. But the Sox couldn't have possibly imagined how poorly it would go.

The Sox have been outscored by 26 runs in their first 11 games. Even after Sunday's shutout victory in the road trip finale, the staff's ERA sits at a bloated 6.28, second-worst in the American League. Opposing hitters have posted an .879 OPS and allowed a staggering 23 homers.

They're only a little better offensively, batting a collective .238 with an equally anemic .378 slugging percentage, ninth-best in the AL. They've already permitted eight unearned runs.

But Tuesday will offer a reprieve from the misery of the first week and a half of the season. Prior to their home opener, the Red Sox will be presented with their championship rings, emblematic of their World Series win and a record-setting season of 2018 that now must seem like a decade ago.

Perhaps the ceremony can serve a dual purpose, reminding them of what they accomplished while providing closure on a season that has hung over them as they stumble out of the gate this time.

All spring, manager Alex Cora was faced with questions about "turning the page," and asked how — or even "if" — he wanted to distance himself from 2018. Cora deftly navigated such questions, maintaining that the team merely wanted to continue writing a new chapter of success.

Of course, the first three series have made that difficult. The Sox have shown lapses in fundamentals that they rarely displayed in 2018. They've demonstrated a lack of communication on the field, highlighted by an embarrassing incident in Oakland when Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr., two of the game's better outfielders, allowed a ball to drop between them in silence. For now, at least, that moment stands as a symbol of the team's early-season futility.

The starting rotation, perceived as a team strength, has instead faltered, with exactly one quality start in the first 11 games. The team is still searching for its first win from a starting pitcher. The road trip culminated with the best effort from a starter to date — a three-inning, one-hit stint from spot starter Hector Velazquez — that served to further illuminate how unreliable the rest of the regular rotation had performed.

The hope is that a return home will provide a sense of normalcy for the Sox. The sell-out crowds provide backing, the atmosphere is intensified and like most teams, the team experiences a comfort in its own ballpark that is impossible to replicate away from home.

Last year, the Sox scored 60 more runs — or almost exactly three-quarters of a run per game — at home than it did on the road. Always an inviting hitting environment, the familiar backdrop and even the cramped-but-familiar home clubhouse will be welcome sights Tuesday.

The pre-game ceremony will feature the usual pomp-and-circumstance: the requisite flyover, special guests, introduction of the roster and ceremonial first pitches. There will be nods to the other franchises in town, and very likely, participation from all of them.

There will be the presentation of the rings, the raising of the new championship banner and, ultimately, a closing of the book on 2018.

That season, with the benefit of hindsight, offered far fewer challenges. The Sox sprinted to a 17-2 start, gaining early momentum and confidence, and the team seemingly never looked over its shoulder the rest of the way. There was no reason.

Already, this year is different. There are ongoing debates over the wisdom of bringing the starting pitchers along slowly in spring training and uncertainty over the alignment of the bullpen, though truthfully, the latter hasn't been much of an issue — in part because there have been so few late-inning leads to protect and because the bullpen has been, with rare exceptions, superb.

The schedule offers a bit of a break. The Toronto Blue Jays, the opponents for the first two games at Fenway, are the only team with a record as bad as the Red Sox. Next in are the Baltimore Orioles, who, after a surprising 4-1 start have reverted to form and dropped four in a row.

The Red Sox have dug themselves a hole with their first road trip of the season. They won't extricate themselves immediately.

But in returning home, they can at least begin the process of digging out.

*** *The Athletic***

Dramatic steal of home represents a new low for Red Sox ace Chris Sale

Jen McCaffrey

The first two innings of the Red Sox home opener on Tuesday offered shades of the Chris Sale that has dominated the American League for the better part of the last decade. That same version of Sale who earned a \$145 million contract extension three weeks ago.

But that early-inning optimism didn't last long.

It wasn't quite as sloppy as the three-inning, seven-run debacle on Opening Day in Seattle. And his velocity wasn't alarmingly low like it had been in his previous start in Oakland, where his fastball sat at a career-low 88 mph. But this version of Sale — four innings, just 76 pitches, five earned runs, third loss in three starts — isn't the Cy Young contender for which they paid. He's clearly struggling to find rhythm and command and he doesn't know where to locate either of them.

When asked after Tuesday's 7-5 loss if he's ever felt this lost on the mound, Sale didn't hide his inner angst.

"Never in my life," he said. "That's not going to stop me. I don't have an inch of back-down in me. I'll never give up. Just got to keep fighting. It's only going to go so far here. Don't care if you're trying hard, like I said, I have to start performing and putting zeroes up and winning games and that's what I'm prepared to do."

Sale retired the first seven batters before hitting a familiar roadblock in the third inning, where he surrendered two runs to tie the game.

The following inning, a moment came that epitomized the start Sale – and, in turn the Red Sox – have had this season: Lourdes Gurriel Jr.’s straight steal of home.

Sale allowed three straight singles to start the inning. The third, from Gurriel Jr., knocked in the go-ahead run. A sacrifice bunt and strikeout later, Sale nearly escaped the mess. But instead of commanding the situation like he has so often in the past, he unraveled. Christian Vazquez’s second passed ball of the inning allowed another run to score and moved Gurriel Jr. to third. Gurriel Jr. crept down the line slowly as Sale was pitching to No. 9 hitter Billy McKinney, and then broke for home on a 1-1 pitch. Sale’s pitch flew to the backstop and Gurriel Jr. scored easily.

“I was geared up to throw a slider,” Sale said. “I saw that he took off. I tried to re-grip it and just kind of pushed it the other way. (That’s) part of it, you know? (You’ve) got to be prepared for that.”

That Gurriel Jr. — who entered today having reached base a total of four times in seven games this season — had the confidence to steal home on Chris Sale, says it all.

The lefty isn’t fooling anyone right now.

Prior to the game, Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Sale had been dealing with a stomach bug prior to his last start, which likely contributed to his diminished velocity. But today? Sale said he had no excuse.

“I feel fine,” he said. “I will never sit here and make excuses. I am a starting pitcher, I have been doing this long enough. I should be able to wake up on Christmas Day and throw strikes. It doesn’t matter what the circumstances are, if it is this or that, or spring training; I have to find a way to get it done. There’s no excuse for that. I have to be better. Like I said, I just flat-out have to be better.”

Through three starts, Sale’s ERA is 9.00. He’s struck out just eight batters in 13 innings, a far cry from his 2.92 career ERA and 10.8 K/9. The lone positive from his third start was that his fastball velocity returned to an average of 92 mph — that, however, was lower than in most other seasons at this time. The missed location and command remain a mystery.

“I’m struggling,” he said. “I don’t know if I’ve ever pitched like this in my life. Tough spot to be in but I’ve got guys in here fighting and I’ve got to keep fighting. No giving up. When something’s not working, you’ve got to go to something else. And when that’s not working, you go to something else. I’m trying to find something. I’m working. That only goes so far. This isn’t the hard-work league. This is the do-good league. Got to start going out there and performing.”

What Sale said could apply to so many of his teammates, as well.

A steal of home with Chris Sale on the mound.

Miscommunication in the outfield by two Gold Glovers.

Runners thrown out on the bases.

Batters missing pitches right down the middle of the plate.

A series of unexpected and unacceptable events have seemingly become the norm this season for the Red Sox.

“We have to play better,” manager Alex Cora said. “I’ve been saying it all along. Better defense, better offense, pitch better.”

The Red Sox may have returned to the East Coast on Tuesday, but their season is still very much in the Twilight Zone.

Triumphant and also disappointing: Red Sox celebration morphs into harsh current reality

Chad Jennings

The Red Sox home opener was a celebration. It was a carefully choreographed, flawlessly executed party of championship banners and World Series rings. There were trumpet players and football players and thousands of screaming fans. It might have been a rock concert, except the jewelry was even gaudier than what you'd see at one of those. It was over-the-top, and it was well deserved.

But it was also the final chapter of a long-closed book, and when the party ended, the Red Sox were right back where they were a day ago, still trying to become the next team worthy of such pomp and circumstance.

It was a triumphant day, and it was a disappointing day, all depending on when you tuned in and where you looked.

At 9:33 in the morning, J.D. Martinez walked into the Red Sox clubhouse with a backpack over one shoulder. This was the moment of infinite possibility. Mookie Betts was already in the room, unpacking boxes of brand-new spikes. Brandon Workman had taken over Joe Kelly's old locker, and he, too, was unpacking boxes. Colten Brewer was wearing a ski cap, even though he was indoors. Andrew Benintendi was drinking coffee, looking bleary-eyed.

On a table in the middle of the room were cardboard boxes full of hats. Each box was marked with either the word "Gold" or the abbreviation "GD." Inside were hats with golden World Series Champions logos on the side and gold trim around the logos in front. David Price was already wearing one. The jerseys hanging in every locker also had letters and numbers lined with gold.

On the clubhouse door, a dry-erase board listed the day's schedule in a blue, handwritten text: "Coaches' meeting at 9:30, position-player meeting at 9:45, pitchers' stretch at 10." There were two more items at the bottom of the list — the pregame ceremony and the first pitch — which clearly had been wiped clear and replaced with someone else's all-capital-letters, heavily punctuated handwriting:

"1:10 — Reminder of how good we are!!

"2:10 — Bust that ass!"

At 10:37 a.m., Alex Cora took his seat behind the microphone. This was the time to address the elephant in the room: the fact that these current Red Sox weren't playing like the champions of a year ago. Cora was three minutes early to his pregame news conference, and a photographer muttered the F-word as he rushed to get the proper lens attached to his camera. Cora said he'd wait for everyone to show up, and so at 10:38 a.m., Jonny Miller asked the first question:

Alex, can you talk about the team's start, and do you think it all starts with the starting pitching?

"We're 3-8, and we haven't pitched," Cora replied. "So, we've been inconsistent offensively. We've been inconsistent defensively. We've been inconsistent running the bases. So, we're 3-8. That's all I can say."

Do you see it turning around soon?

"That's the goal, Jonny," Cora said. "That's the goal. Turn it around. Start playing better."

At 11:32 a.m., the gates opened to those fans who'd been packed by the dozens for at least 20 minutes waiting to get in. This was the moment of anticipation. A fan base frustrated by a slow start was ready to forgive and forget. Celebrate last year, ignore the past week and a half, and move on to better things.

Between Gates A and D, a four-piece brass band played on Jersey Street. A clown juggled bowling pins and spun an oversize ball on his fingertip. Fans posed for selfies with Big League Brian, who stood atop his usual giant stilts.

Minutes passed, and the line to get through the gates showed no sign of slowing. Cell phones in the plastic bins. Step through the metal detectors. Scan your tickets here. The fans just kept coming to see two last-place teams, believing at least one of them still capable of greatness.

At 12:49 p.m., the horn section of the Boston Pops stepped out of the center-field gate, walked across the outfield grass and joined the percussionists and guitar players behind the outfield dirt. The musicians were wearing white coats and black pants — formal attire for this local holiday. This was the moment of preparation.

White tents were set up in the left-field corner. Red carpets extended from each dugout. A table behind second base held the most recent World Series trophy and several rows of black ring boxes sitting atop a blue tablecloth. When singers from the Tanglewood Festival Chorus took their places next to the orchestra, the scene was set.

At 1 o'clock, the mascots (Wally and Tessie) began walking along the dirt next to the left-field stands. Tessie was skipping and blowing kisses. Wally was waving and hugging a cameraman. This was the way the pregame ceremony started, with fun and games on the side, pomp and circumstance in the middle.

While the "Cheers" theme song played, a montage of Red Sox history filled the video board. Ted Williams swung a bat. Roger Clemens smiled at the camera. Jonathan Papelbon threw his glove in the air. Christian Vázquez jumped into Chris Sale's arms.

The Red Sox ownership group walked up the red carpet to stand next to the table of rings, and most were wearing black overcoats. Linda Henry wore all red and walked arm-in-arm with her husband, John. On the video board, the footage shifted to last season. Martinez beamed like you've never seen while holding the World Series trophy. Betts flipped his bat after hitting a home run. Price pumped his fist after a strikeout. Cora sprayed Champagne at Dodger Stadium. The Duck Boats rolled down Boylston Street.

At 1:13 p.m., the 2018 championship banner unfurled to cover the Green Monster. This was the moment of pure celebration. The orchestra finished its opening number, and conductor Keith Lockhart wore a personalized No. 1 Red Sox jersey with his own name on the back.

There were nine championship banners in all, unveiled one at a time, from 1903 to last year, with the largest banners reserved for the four most recent titles. At 1:14 p.m., the Red Sox put a fresh face to the old memories when 12 former Red Sox players emerged from beneath the championship banners. Serenaded by a symphonic version of "We Are the Champions" — complete with an electric guitar solo and a choir singing the chorus — Pedro Martinez came out first with a World Series trophy in his hand. Then came Orlando Cabrera, Tim Wakefield, Curt Schilling, Mike Timlin, Manny Ramirez, Manny Delcarmen, Mike Lowell, Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Will Middlebrooks, Mike Napoli and finally David Ortiz, who had a trophy in one hand and was seemingly livestreaming on his phone with the other. The crowd chanted, "Papi! Papi! Papi!"

At 1:17 p.m., the music changed to Marc Anthony's "Preciosa" as Cora stepped out of the dugout. The song's lyrics, roughly translated, rang out through Fenway Park: "I carry it in my blood for the heritage of my parents, and with pride, I repeat, I love you, Puerto Rico."

Cora was the first to receive his 2018 championship ring. As he walked through the infield, Cora tapped his chest where "Red Sox" was stitched across his jersey. One by one, the coaches, behind-the-scenes staff,

and players were introduced, not with a video montage of their greatest moments, but with actual images of their individual rings with their name on the side.

Price was the first Red Sox player to get his ring. He was introduced as the soundtrack switched to Imagine Dragons' "Whatever It Takes," and he smiled the whole way to the table. The crowd went berserk for World Series heroes Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce, less so for bit-players Carson Smith, Austin Maddox and Brandon Phillips. After Xander Bogaerts got his ring from Tom Werner, he hugged Henry, and with his face safely hidden behind the owner's head, Bogaerts sneaked a peek at the ring itself. When it was Dustin Pedroia's turn, Ortiz hugged him and lifted him off the ground.

By 1:33 p.m., the table was empty except for the tablecloth and the four World Series trophies at each corner. The orchestra launched into "Fanfare For Fenway" while last year's team walked into center field to raise the championship flag. It took a couple of tries because the flag kept getting tangled, but when it finally ascended to the top of the flagpole, just beneath the American flag, the wind dutifully picked up and began waving the 2018 flag to the sounds of "A Hymn to New England."

Walking off the field, Bogaerts, Eduardo Nuñez, Rafael Devers and Eduardo Rodriguez didn't even make it through the infield before their rings were out of the boxes and on their fingers. They posed for a photo together.

At 1:43 p.m., Chris Sale came out of the Red Sox dugout and jogged into the outfield to begin his pregame warmups. This was the moment to turn the page, move on from last year and set straight all that has happened this year.

The visiting Blue Jays already had been introduced, with Randal Grichuk batting .162 and hitting cleanup. This was the underwhelming team tied with the Red Sox for last place in the American League East.

Each active Red Sox player was introduced, and reliever Colten Brewer was the only one who had not just received a World Series ring.

At 1:55 p.m., the football players showed up. This was the moment of context, of expectation, when it became clear just how difficult it will be for the 2019 Red Sox to move past the 2018 Red Sox. New England expects a winner.

Twenty-three Patriots players — led by Rob Gronkowski holding a Super Bowl trophy — walked onto the field to enormous cheers. The message was obvious: Teams in this town come with trophies. Gronkowski, Julian Edelman and Stephon Gilmore threw ceremonial first pitches to Pearce, Bradley and Betts, and then Ozzy Osbourne's voice came screaming through the speakers.

This was the moment of unfortunate foreshadowing.

"I'm going off the rails," Osbourne sang, "on a crazy train."

At 2:05 p.m., Cora met Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo to exchange lineup cards. This was the first major-league game with two Puerto Rican managers, and they took a picture with the umpires at home plate. This was the fresh start. Pedroia led the Red Sox onto the field, but it was Bogaerts who pointed out someone had forgotten to put the rosin bag behind the mound.

Sale's first pitch left his hand at 2:12 p.m. It was 41 degrees, and the scoreboard flashed 92 mph, a marked improvement from Sale's last outing, when his fastball averaged 89. He got through a scoreless top of the first; Mitch Moreland hit a home run in the bottom of the first, and the Red Sox added another run in the bottom of the second.

Sale's velocity was up, the Red Sox were leading, Pedroia was in the lineup, the Patriots were in the building and there were rings in everyone's lockers. Hopes were high.

At 2:48 p.m., reality began to set in. The names might be the same, but at this very moment, these are not the championship Red Sox of a year ago. Sale's fastball was still 92 mph, but he allowed three straight singles in the third inning. The third hit put the Blue Jays on the board. A sacrifice fly tied the game at 2.

At 3:15 p.m., it got worse. Sale allowed another string of three straight hits in the fourth inning. The Blue Jays' go-ahead run scored on a sacrifice bunt. Another run scored on Vazquez's second passed ball. Lourdes Gurriel stole home. The Red Sox were losing, and they were going to lose.

By 5:48 p.m., it was over. The Red Sox had put the tying run on base with no outs in the bottom of the ninth, but they'd flown out twice and the reigning MVP had struck out to end it. It was a 7-5 loss; the Red Sox were 3-9, and they were all alone at the bottom of the division.

At 5:59 p.m., Cora was out of things to say. The Red Sox had closed the book on 2018, and the story of 2019 — so far — just isn't the same. "We have to play better," Cora said. "I've been saying it all along. Better defense. Better offense. Pitch better. ... We just have to get better."

The Red Sox know what better looks like, and this isn't it.

*** *The New York Post***

Chris Sale has 'never' been this lost

Justin Terranova

Amid the Red Sox's myriad problems, Chris Sale might be at the top.

The Boston ace fell to 0-3 — with 13 runs allowed in 13 innings — with his latest shelling coming Tuesday in the Red Sox's home-opening 7-5 loss to the Blue Jays. Sale was asked afterward if he had ever felt this lost in his pitching career.

"Never in my life," the lanky lefty said, according to MassLive.com. "But that's not going to stop me. I don't have an inch of back-down in me. I never will. Never give up. Just gotta keep fighting."

Sale, 30, is coming off a season in which he had two stints on the disabled list due to shoulder issues, but that did not stop the Red Sox from plowing ahead with a five-year, \$145 million extension this offseason.

"If I knew what it was I'd fix it," Sale said. "That's kind of where I'm at. I'm spinning my tires looking at this, looking at that. See if I'm tipping pitches. See my mechanics. See if it's this, if it's angles. I'm still searching. I'll find it. I know who I am, what I can do. I've been there before. I'll keep grinding."

Sale is only one-fifth of the problems in a Red Sox rotation that has an 8.78 ERA and a 3-9 team that currently sits in last place in the AL East.

*** *The Toronto Sun***

Blue Jays bats come to life for Bosox home opener

Rosie DiManno

BOSTON—You want hits? They got hits. Ten knocks off the previously and lamentably moribund Blue Jays bats on a gloomy, grey, ghostly afternoon at Fenway Park. Against the reigning World Series champions. Who now have a worse record than Toronto, at 3-9.

The visitors were 7-5 victors over the Red Sox in Boston's home opener Tuesday.

The Jays had three consecutive knocks in the third inning — for only the second time in 2019 — when they evened the score 2-2 against struggling Boston starter Chris Sale. Alen Hansen launched the Jays' fusillade with a single to left, his second hit in blue and grey threads.

There were a couple of hits, in fact, from the eighth and ninth Toronto batters, a single to right by Billy McKinney, followed by an aggressive bit of managing from the dugout as Charlie Montoyo called for the hit and run with Freddy Galvis at the plate. Galvis stroked a single through the hole at second but Hansen was already well on the move, almost wiping out as he rounded the hot corner, skedaddling home to put the visitors on the board at 2-1.

Teoscar Hernandez lofted a sac fly to score McKinney.

A heavy fog was rolling in by the fourth inning. Poor vision on the field was not offered as an excuse for the third base umpire calling Randal Grichuk out at third after a passed ball. The call was overturned on a Jays challenge.

Cockamamie inning, with a couple of passed balls, a bunt and a straight steal of home by Lourdes Gurriel Jr. — last accomplished by a Blue Jay on March 31, 2018, courtesy of the recently jettisoned Kevin Pillar. It was only the sixth steal of home in franchise history, with Gurriel punching the air as he crossed the plate.

When the dust had settled, seven hits across two innings had put Toronto up 5-2 in front of a disgruntled and teeth-a-chattering sellout crowd.

That was a quick reversal for the Jays after a first inning solo homer off the bat of Boston's Mitch Moreland — the first run surrendered this season by Toronto starter Matt Shoemaker.

The Red Sox rallied in the sixth, with Mookie Betts scraping a strip off Shoemaker with his third home run of the season, a leadoff crack on a 3-2 slow fastball that came off the bat at 106 mph.

A complete cock-up in the left-field corner, with two out, resulting in Boston's second run of the frame. Hernandez seemed camped under an unthreatening fly but the ball bounced off the tip of his outstretched glove, and Xander Bogaerts scored all the way from first.

Hernandez atoned by scoring Toronto's sixth run shortly thereafter, walking, stealing second and scoring on a single by Grichuk.

Ring ceremony: It's never particularly enjoyable being the visitors when the opponents are receiving their World Series rings. (Vulgar diamond-encrusted bling, to be honest.)

But Montoyo was among the Jays who watched the proceedings from the dugout, busting a few moves when his friend and fellow Puerto Rican manager Alex Cora trotted out to accept his jewelry. Montoyo swung his hips rhythmically to the music of the Boston Pops — performing their version of "Puerto Rico" by Marc Anthony, with whom Montoyo had jammed at spring training.

The two skips shared an affectionate embrace when they handed over their lineups, the first time two Puerto Ricans managed against each other in the same major-league game.

When asked what he'd like his players to take away from the experience of eyeballing World Series champions collecting their glitter, Montoyo said: "Why not us? Why not us?"

Pains in the neck: Justin Smoak and Luke Maile were missing from the starting lineup with stiff necks. Smoak apparently slept on it all wrong, going back all the way to the exhibition series in Montreal, and hasn't started four of the past five games.

*** *Associated Press***

Red Sox stumble again, beaten in home opener by Toronto 7-5

BOSTON -- The Boston Red Sox blanketed Fenway Park with pieces of the city's championship past to welcome the newest members of their World Series title club.

It wasn't enough to ward off another setback for a team yet to resemble the one that hoisted the trophy last year.

Chris Sale let a Toronto runner steal home, Mookie Betts fanned with two on for the final out and the Red Sox stumbled again, losing to the Blue Jays 7-5 Tuesday in their home opener.

After getting their World Series rings that had 185 diamonds, rubies and sapphires during a ceremony that included the Super Bowl champ New England Patriots, the Red Sox fell to 3-9. A return to Fenway failed to shake the doldrums that plagued Boston during a season-opening, 11-game trip to Seattle, Oakland and Arizona. The Red Sox dropped to last place in the AL East.

"We're not playing very right now as a team and it's showing," outfielder Jackie Bradley Jr. said. "It's early and these games still count. We have to get better and get better faster."

Red Sox sparkplug Dustin Pedroia went 1 for 4 in his first major league game since May. He played only three times last year while slowed by a knee injury.

The game also made history: It was the first big league matchup of managers born in Puerto Rico, with Toronto's Charlie Montoyo topping Boston's Alex Cora.

Lourdes Gurriel Jr. stole home and had an RBI single as Toronto ended a four-game losing streak. Freddy Galvis drove in two runs to back Matt Shoemaker (3-0), who allowed two earned runs in 5 2/3 innings.

Sale (0-3) never seemed comfortable and surrendered five runs and seven hits before being pulled after four innings. His velocity has been down this season -- his fastball averaged 91.8 mph in this outing -- and he has a 9.00 ERA after three starts.

"I'm struggling and I don't know if I've really pitched like this in my life," Sale said. "It's a tough spot to be in. But I've got guys up here fighting and I've got to keep fighting. There's no giving up. If something's not working you gotta go to something else. When that's not working you got to go something else."

Sale's day hit a low point in the fourth, after Danny Jansen scored on a passed ball. Gurriel kept extending his lead off third as Sale went into a full windup, then broke for the plate. Gurriel easily scored when Sale's pitch was wide and went to the backstop, making it 5-2.

Mitch Moreland and Betts each had home runs for the Red Sox, who got within 6-5 on a two-out RBI double by Xander Bogaerts in the eighth.

The Red Sox put their first two batters on base in the ninth against Ken Giles. But pinch-hitter Blake Swihart and Andrew Benintendi flied out and, with most of the crowd standing on a chilly afternoon and chanting for Betts, the AL MVP struck out and gave Giles his third save.

While the loss spoiled the Red Sox's celebration, Cora said it hasn't affected their resolve to turn their poor start around.

"Now we got our rings and now we got to get back to playing good baseball," Cora said.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Blue Jays: C Luke Maile and INF Justin Smoak both sat with neck issues. Smoak missed two of Toronto's three games in Cleveland last week due to the issue, which appeared again before the series finale.

Red Sox: Cora said LHP Brian Johnson (left elbow inflammation) went through some testing and that the injury is not as bad as originally thought. "At one point, we thought it was the end of the season. It's not that," Cora said. But there is still no timetable for his return

CHAMPIONSHIP CELEBRATION

The Red Sox pulled out all the stops to celebrate their latest title.

While being serenaded by the Boston Pops orchestra giving a rendition of Queen's "We Are the Champions," a giant banner honoring the 2018 champions was unfurled in front of the Green Monster.

Pedro Martinez, Mike Lowell and David Ortiz carried out the 2004, '07 and '13 trophies. Then the 2018 team began filing down the red carpet to collect the championship rings. Cora led the coaching staff and David Price was the first player to receive one.

Also taking part in the ceremony were former Red Sox Manny Ramirez and Curt Schilling, who have been absent from previous commemorations.

MILESTONE

Cora and Montoyo became the first pair of Puerto Rican-born managers to face each other in a major league game.

"It was a special moment," Montoyo said.

Cora said it is yet another promising milestone for managers with Puerto Rican ties getting opportunities in Major League Baseball. Nationals manager Dave Martinez was born in New York to Puerto Rican parents.

"At one point before I got hired here we had no Puerto Rican managers," Cora said. "And all of a sudden we have three out of 30. That's a pretty good rate."

UP NEXT

Red Sox host Blue Jays again on Wednesday night.

Red Sox celebrate title, with assist from Pats

BOSTON -- Ten trophies.

The New England Patriots brought their six Super Bowl trophies to Fenway Park on Tuesday to help the Boston Red Sox celebrate their latest World Series championship and unfurl a new banner in front of the Green Monster for the fourth time in 15 years.

"It's pretty cool to see all of them together," Red Sox utilityman Brock Holt said after the 7-5 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays in the home opener dropped Boston to 3-9 in its title defense.

"It's amazing to think about: We've won four, and the Patriots seem to win every year," he said. "Boston's a sports city, and a lot of people are pretty spoiled with the talent that's been here the last however many years."

The wait is over.

It has been more than three months since Boston last had a chance to pat itself on the back for a sports title, when the Patriots beat the Los Angeles Rams in the Super Bowl. That capped a run of 12 titles since 2001 - the Bruins and Celtics each won one -- for a city that once considered itself cursed.

"It's a city of greatness," said Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts, the reigning AL Most Valuable Player.

The ceremony was more subdued than the previous ones, especially the 2004 banner-raising that ended an 86-year title drought.

First the four World Series banners marking the Red Sox titles from the early 1900s were draped over the Green Monster. They were soon covered by four more from the 2000s that covered the whole wall.

Martinez, 2007 Series MVP Mike Lowell and 13 Series MVP Ortiz carried out the trophies. Then the 2018 team began filing down the red carpet to collect the championship rings near second base, where they were congratulated by ownership, team management and MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred.

Each ring includes 185 diamonds, rubies and sapphires totaling 15 carats. The inside has the player's signature and nickname, along with the Oct. 28 clinching date and the team's postseason slogan, "Damage Done."

Alex Cora led the coaching staff down the red carpet, out of the first base coaching box; David Price, who was the winning pitcher in Game 2 and again in the Game 5 finale against the Los Angeles Dodgers, was the first player to receive his ring.

Also receiving a loud ovation was second baseman Dustin Pedroia, who was activated from the injured list earlier Tuesday after missing most of last season with a knee injury.

Then the whole team filed out to center field to raise the 2018 pennant.

"I remember my first time, when I came here in 2000, everybody was talking about the curse. We never thought about the curse," said Manny Ramirez, the MVP of the drought-busting '04 Series. "We came, we won two, and now they won two more. It's awesome. When you see those trophies, then you realize it was worth it, coming here."