

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, April 16, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

'It will get better.' Alex Cora remains confident, despite another Red Sox loss

Nora Princiotti

The Red Sox had an opportunity to get their first series win of the season and head off on a difficult road trip to New York and Tampa Bay with some momentum. Instead, they squandered it in an 8-1 loss to the Orioles on Marathon Monday, settling for a series split in a matchup they should have been able to take advantage of.

Some well-hit balls went right at Baltimore fielders, but the reigning World Series champs shouldn't have needed luck against the Orioles. Baltimore starter Dan Straily began the game with a 19.29 ERA, then had a no-hitter going through four innings. The Red Sox (6-11) managed just four hits in the game.

"There's a lot of searching from the lineup," said manager Alex Cora. "We've had some good games and then we don't. It hasn't been as consistent as we know we can be. There's a few guys who are searching."

J.D. Martinez was 2 for 4 with a double, the only Sox hitter who had anything going.

The first hit Straily allowed was an infield single by Xander Bogaerts to lead off the fifth inning. Rafael Devers moved Bogaerts to third with a single to right and Steve Pearce scored him with a ground out, giving the Sox their only run.

"It will get better," Cora said. "There's no timetable. The sooner the better, obviously. I'm not saying, 'Let's wait a month and fix this.' We're working at it on a daily basis."

Hector Velazquez (0-1, 2.84 ERA) made another three-inning start, but was nowhere near as successful as he was in Arizona, giving up two hits and a run with four walks, a strikeout, and a wild pitch. He threw 57 pitches, 29 for strikes. (Cora said the spot starter was going to be limited to four or five.)

Velazquez said his arm felt fatigued in the second, when he allowed his run on a leadoff walk of Rio Ruiz, a wild pitch, and a Renato Nunez RBI single.

"Today the game was early, so I feel my body was slow, too," Velazquez said. "I pitched one inning Saturday but I felt good today, I feel good, and when we were warming up in the bullpen, I [felt] good too. But in the second inning, slow."

The Boston bullpen, needing to patch together six innings, wasn't up to the task. Marcus Walden, optioned to Triple A Pawtucket after the game, gave up a three-run home run to Dwight Smith Jr. during his two innings. After scoreless frames from Colten Brewer and Brandon Workman, Chris Davis crushed an 89-m.p.h. slider from Heath Hembree in the eighth for a two-run homer.

Davis, in an 0-for-54 slump on Saturday morning, went 4 for 12 with 6 RBIs in the final three games of the series.

"He was mad at himself," Cora said of Hembree. "He knows that he has to manage the game too. You have to avoid damage in those situations."

The Fenway crowd booed after the Orioles scored their final two runs against Tyler Thornburg in the ninth on a walk and back-to-back doubles, with a few "Let's Go Bruins" chants mixed in for good measure.

The highlight of the game for the Sox was Christian Vazquez's genuine enthusiasm for playing second base, something the catcher was asked to do after injuries and illnesses put Cora in a bind while crafting the lineup.

Vazquez found out he'd be at second around 9 a.m. and looked delighted when he started a 4-6-3 double play to end the first inning, even though he hesitated for a moment and opted for an overhand toss instead of a normal underhand flip to Bogaerts.

"I don't want to miss Bogey," Vazquez said. "I want to hit him in the chest and I was trying to go under, but not a good idea."

Vazquez also made a nice diving tag on the back end of an 8-4 putout in the second.

"It was fun," Vazquez said. "It was something different. But the more important thing is getting the 'W,' but we didn't get it. Get it tomorrow."

Red Sox hopeful as struggling Chris Sale leads them to Bronx

Nora Princiotti

The Red Sox look like they could use a jolt of energy and enthusiasm, but they believe that will come from within, not from hyping up their first series against the Yankees.

"I don't think the venue has to do with what we do," said manager Alex Cora. "We've just got to play better."

Boston went 10-9 against the 101-win Yankees in 2018 and plays its first regular-season game in New York this season on Tuesday. One key will be starter Chris Sale, who is hoping to get back on track after opening the year 0-3, pitching just 13 innings with a 9.00 earned run average.

Sale said he felt as lost as he's ever felt on a mound after his last start, when he gave up five runs in four innings against Toronto, but has worked with pitching coach Dana LeVangie to get his delivery in synch in the days since.

"The tempo in delivery is something we're working on, his takeaway — the hand out of the glove, trying to match up his frontside and backside takeaway," LeVangie said.

LeVangie said he feels good about the work, but won't know how much progress he and Sale have made until Tuesday's start.

"We don't want a guy throwing 100 percent in the bullpen," LeVangie said. "We had a conversation in the outfield as he was doing his throwing program. He sort of told me what he's feeling, and then I felt that it was time to talk about what I'm seeing. It made sense to him. It felt good. He felt normal. He threw his bullpen after that and he was excited about it. He felt like the ball was coming out of his hand like it should. All of his stuff was really consistent.

"We'll see where it goes, but we're excited about it, and I think he is, too."

The Yankees (6-9) have their own struggles, but the Sox' trip to New York and MLB-leading Tampa Bay (12-4) is a big one.

The Red Sox were encouraged to get a few good starts from their rotation during their homestand against Toronto and Baltimore, but still went 3-3 against last season's bottom two teams in the AL East.

“We’ve got two division rivals, we just played two of them, we played alright. We played better than we were playing in the beginning,” said Xander Bogaerts. “Now we’ve got two little stronger opponents and we’re playing away.”

The Pedroia plan

With Jackie Bradley Jr., Andrew Benintendi, and Eduardo Nunez not playing Monday, Cora opted to play Steve Pearce in left field and Christian Vazquez at second base so he could have Dustin Pedroia DH and protect his left knee.

With Pedroia, Cora said it would have been “pushing” him to have him play second base in what could have been rainy conditions.

“We have a program, we have to be disciplined,” Cora said before the game. “We were pushing him to play second, but then it doesn’t make sense. Something happens today and we play him and then it’s on us.

“The only thing we can do honestly is DH him and keep him off his feet as much as possible. Not push him so hard. It’s a tough start and it’s tough conditions.”

Pedroia said he’s felt good physically since rejoining the Red Sox on April 9, though he’s off to a 2-for-19 start.

“It will come back to me,” Pedroia said Sunday.

Comings and goings

Brock Holt, recovering from a scratched right cornea, will begin his rehab assignment at Triple A Pawtucket on Tuesday and hopes to rejoin the Red Sox on Friday in Tampa Bay. “Everything is healing like it’s supposed to, scratch is pretty much gone. We should be good to go now,” said Holt, who had a doctor appointment Monday. Holt will play Tuesday and Wednesday in Pawtucket. If he needs a few more minor league at-bats to make sure he’s seeing the ball well, he’ll stay longer, but is hoping he won’t need to . . . Both Bradley Jr. (ill) and Benintendi (right foot contusion) are feeling better, but Cora said “we’ll see” when asked if they’d be available to play Tuesday . . . The Red Sox optioned righty Marcus Walden, who threw two innings of relief on Monday, to Pawtucket after the game, with the corresponding roster addition coming Tuesday. Walden appeared in five of the last eight games, earning his first two MLB wins and allowing 3 earned runs in eight innings . . . Orioles manager Brandon Hyde was ejected in the fifth inning by first base umpire Mark Wegner, continuing to argue the legality of Rafael Devers’s slide into second following a review that upheld it as clean.

What’s wrong with Mookie Betts?

Alex Speier

Mookie Betts spoke for himself, but might as well have been offering a State of the Red Sox address. The 2018 American League MVP had little interest in silver linings or spin.

Like the rest of the 6-11 Red Sox, Betts is off to a start that falls well short of standards established in an otherworldly 2018 campaign. He hasn’t been able to figure out the source of his early woes, but he does have strong feelings about them.

“Basically, what I’m doing is unacceptable,” he said. “It’s tough having so much success last year and not really having any right now. I’m not really doing anything well right now. It sucks. Nothing really else to say, but it sucks and I have to figure out a way to make something happen.”

The impetus for the self-skewering was relatively modest. Betts went 0 for 3 with a walk and a strikeout in Monday’s 8-1 loss to the Orioles. It was a bad game but not an abysmal one.

Yet it pointed to the accumulating frustration that Betts and the Red Sox are experiencing as they try to gain some traction. They are off to the worst start by a defending World Series champion since the post-fire sale Marlins were 4-13 in 1998.

Betts, meanwhile, continued an early-season pattern in which he's been patient to a fault, taking hittable pitches in the middle of the strike zone and occasionally expanding on pitches that are nowhere near it. In his strikeout against Orioles starter Dan Straily, he took a changeup down the middle, then whiffed on a fastball that was nowhere near the strike zone.

Opposing teams have attacked Betts with pitches away — especially breaking balls — to the point where he appears to be having trouble attacking offerings that he frequently demolished in 2018.

Overall, he's been uncertain and tentative at the plate, as evidenced by the fact that he has swung at just 33.3 percent of pitches — the eighth-lowest swing rate of the 302 big leaguers who'd seen at least 100 pitches this year.

“When they've been making mistakes, he's been looking away and is frozen,” said hitting coach Tim Hyers.

To be sure, Betts has had his moments, hitting three homers. Though he's hitting just .222, he's still taking walks (.324 OBP) and when he does connect, he's still driving pitches (.413 slugging). But he is off to a start that he's struggled to fathom.

“There have been many times where I can help score runs or do something and I haven't done it,” said Betts. “I take full ownership of that.”

The Sox similarly have been left to accept that there is a growing urgency to their struggles. Prior to Monday, there had been seven occasions this season on which manager Alex Cora said that the team “will be fine.”

After Monday's loss, Cora's outlook was slightly more reserved. While he recommitted to his belief in his team, he also acknowledged that the Red Sox have played like a club adrift.

“It doesn't concern me,” said Cora. “It's just a bad start. We've shown flashes. We will get better. There's no timetable.”

“Obviously the sooner the better. Trust me, I'm not saying let's wait a month and fix this, but we're working on a daily basis.”

More work will be needed to restore a feeling about the team that has been absent thus. In 2018, the days when Cora fielded a makeshift lineup along the lines of what he employed Monday — Christian Vazquez at second, Steve Pearce in left — seemed like they'd end in wins, or at least competitive games. In 2019, through just over one-10th of the season, that hasn't been the case.

Though much of the team's record has been a reflection of poor starting pitching, the offense from top to bottom has struggled to sustain the consistent pressure that forced opposing pitching staffs to buckle last year.

Dustin Pedroia (.105 after going 0 for 4 Monday), Jackie Bradley Jr. (.149/.196/.170), Eduardo Nunez (.184/.205/.211), Pearce (.125), and Brock Holt (1 for 16) — among others — have gotten off to sluggish starts.

“There's a lot of searching throughout the lineup,” said Cora. “We have some good games and then we don't. It hasn't been as consistent as we know we can be.”

The layering of lineup issues on top of poor rotation performance has resulted in roughly what one might expect. The Red Sox are off to their worst start since 2011 (when they likewise opened 6-11). They've been outscored by 32 runs through 17 games – the worst run differential in the American League, tied for the second-worst in the majors.

Their talent didn't vanish during the offseason. The Red Sox remain capable of going on a tear that would render the opening weeks of the season a footnote. But as they move on from a disappointing 3-3 homestand against the Blue Jays and Orioles — teams expected to reside in the AL cellar all year — they can no longer take for granted that such a run will come easily.

As the Red Sox prepare for a five-game trip to face their most formidable division rivals, with two games in Yankee Stadium followed by three at Tropicana Field, there is an urgency to end this aimless stagger.

“We've got to start winning,” said Xander Bogaerts. “We've got to turn this thing around pretty quick.”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox limping into Yankee Stadium

Michael Silverman

Seventeen games into their season, the Red Sox head into The Bronx Tuesday with exactly six wins under their belt, while the Yankees also have six wins, in two fewer games.

The Clash of the Titans it's not.

It's high time the Red Sox pretend like it is that time.

When the renewal of hostilities in this ancient rivalry feels more like it could be a game of badminton between toddlers or an impromptu race in the halls of a nursing home, the Red Sox should use this two-game series as the best excuse yet to light – not re-light – the fire under their behinds that has failed to ignite this season.

Because the 6-11 Red Sox enter enemy territory in New York looking in worse shape than the 6-9 Yankees.

The Red Sox are pitching worse, they are hitting worse and they certainly cannot fall back on the “But we're missing half our team to the Injured List” like the Yankees justifiably can.

No, here in the middle of April with the season already 10 percent behind them, the Red Sox are limping into Yankee Stadium without any kind of a “we're close to licking this thing” attitude about them.

They know what's gone wrong, but have yet to prove they can fix their wrongs. With the Yankees in a less frantic search mode than the Red Sox, the Red Sox don't look or sound primed to take advantage of this situation.

“I don't think going to Yankee Stadium has to do with what we do,” said manager Alex Cora after the Red Sox' 8-1 series-splitting loss to an Orioles team that took full advantage of its opportunity to take advantage of the struggling Red Sox. “We just have to play better. It can be Yankee Stadium, or Arizona, or in Seattle, Oakland — we just have to play better.”

That the Yankees are not faring any better than the Red Sox in the win column is not any sort of consolation for Cora.

“Right now, honestly, I am not looking around,” said Cora. “I know where people are at, but we have to take care of us first.”

All the statistics in overall batting and pitching – runs scored per game, home runs, batting average, OPS and ERA and WHIP – between the two six-team wins favor the Yankees, but nothing best outlines their run differential. Remember, take into account that the Yankees have played two fewer games than the Red Sox and have scored just one fewer run, 73, than the Red Sox.

And the Red Sox have allowed a whopping 106 runs, which is 43 more than the Yankees pitchers have allowed, at 63.

The Red Sox' run differential is minus-32, while the Yankees are at plus-10.

In other words, the Yankees are not playing as poorly as their record reflects.

And the Red Sox are.

“Right now, we aren't playing consistently well, I would say,” said Xander Bogaerts, one of the few Red Sox hitting consistently this season. “We know what we're capable of doing day in, day out. I think that just hasn't been it yet. I don't know, we're 17, 16 games into the season, but we've got to turn this thing around pretty quick.”

Like Cora, Bogaerts deflected the suggestion that the Red Sox might be catching a break by catching the Yankees when they have been felled by injuries to key players such as Giancarlo Stanton, Gary Sanchez, Miguel Andujar, Didi Gregorius, Troy Tulowitzki Luis Severino and Dellin Betances and at a time when their record suggests that they are down.

“I really haven't given much thought on them,” said Bogaerts. “We can't look too much ahead of us. We've just got to look at the day to day, and tomorrow when we get there or tonight on the plane flight, we'll start thinking about them, but one thing I can tell you, we've got to start winning.”

The Red Sox have not only been repetitive when pounding the “we've got to play better” theme, but also vague.

The relief pitching has been real good, but otherwise, the team is waiting for its rotation and offense to settle in. It's the waiting part that is the mystifier. The Red Sox are smack in the middle of an AL East-only stretch and they went 3-3 against the weak sisters, Toronto and Baltimore.

The big boys, New York and Tampa Bay are next, and the Red Sox can't wait till they come back home again to hit the launch button on this seeseason.

“We've got two division rivals, we just played two of them,” said Bogaerts. “I mean, we played all right. we played better than we were playing at the beginning. Now we've got two stronger opponents, we're playing away, we've just got to go in like we normally do, handle our business, and play the best we can and really rack up the wins pretty quick.”

Mookie Betts unhappy with himself after Red Sox' 8-1 loss to Orioles

Jason Mastrodonato

Mookie Betts couldn't reach it.

He shouldn't have tried to.

In the fourth inning of the Red Sox' latest loss, an 8-1 defeat to the lowly Orioles in which Betts was as bad as any of the Sox hitters on the day, there was a matchup so lopsided that computer programs might've combusted if given the chance to simulate results.

Betts, the reigning American League MVP, was facing Dan Straily, who entered Monday with the highest ERA (19.29) and WHIP (3.21) of any pitcher in the league with four innings this season. Straily had faced 28 batters and none of them had struck out.

On top of that, Marathon Monday is historically a game nobody wants to pitch because of the early start time, which forces big leaguers out of their regular schedule and requires starting pitchers to get to the park shortly after sunrise. For perspective, Red Sox starter Hector Velazquez said he was feeling “slow” all day.

On the other side, Straily stymied the Red Sox. And their MVP.

He was throwing nothing but 82-84 mph changeups and 88-91 mph fastballs against Betts, who hit .434 off fastballs 91 mph and slower last year. He hit .480 off changeups at 84 mph or slower.

And yet in the fourth inning, there was a perfect storm of missed opportunities, bad decisions and out-of-sync swings.

“Basically, what I’m doing is unacceptable,” Betts would say afterward.

Straily started him with an 89-mph fastball on the upper-outside corner. No swing. Good pitch. Strike one. Tip your cap.

Behind 0-1, Betts laid off a pair of 90-mph heaters, one far inside, another on the outside edge for a borderline ball to flip the count to 2-1.

The next pitch was Betts’ to mash, a pumpkin over the heart of the plate. It was a changeup at 83 mph. Betts didn’t swing. Strike two.

“I think Mookie would like to have that one back,” Jerry Remy said on the NESN broadcast.

The count 2-2, Straily threw what should’ve been a non-competitive fastball at 91 mph and about 12 inches outside. But Betts swung anyways, missing for a swinging strike three.

“I’m not exactly sure what’s going on,” Betts said afterward. “I just have to find a way to get some hits and get on base. I’m not really doing anything well right now. It sucks. Nothing really else to say but it sucks and I have to figure out a way to make something happen.”

After going deep in the sixth inning on Opening Day at Fenway Park last Tuesday, Betts went 2-for-18 with just a pair of singles the rest of the homestand.

“Not sure I found anything,” he said. “I think we’ve all been watching the same game. It’s tough having so much success last year and not really having any right now. But I just have to continue to work to get out of it.”

Betts finished Monday 0-for-3 with a walk as his average dropped to .222 on the season.

“Mookie can turn it around in two seconds, he’s just got to get some pitches over the plate and be ready for them,” said hitting coach Tim Hyers. “He’s trying to do so well that I think sometimes he gets in his own way, trying to do too much with each pitch. That’s when you see some balls pop up that he usually drives. He just has to get back to maybe not over-swinging, not using his body so much. Allow his great hands to work, stay on the line.”

It can’t be easy for Betts, who has flip-flopped between the leadoff spot and the No. 2 spot in the order this season and is hitting in a lineup that is drastically underperforming to start the year.

He’s struggled in the past with putting too much pressure on himself, he’s been one to admit. Hyers can see some of that again. Betts isn’t quite sure.

“I wouldn’t say it’s more pressure, but I know there have been many times where I can help score runs or do something and I haven’t done it,” he said. “I take full ownership of that.”

It’s not that Betts isn’t capable of taking a 91-mph fastball 12 inches off the plate and hammering it over the right-field fence. Surely, he’s done more with less. Right now it’s not working. The Sox are telling him to calm down, not try so hard, but they know it’s easier said than done.

“They all want to do it so badly for this city, team, organization, fanbase,” Hyers said. “Sometimes that’s the problem, they want it so bad they want to get three hits in one at-bat. It doesn’t work that way.”

Betts isn’t the only one struggling. Dustin Pedroia is hitting .105 to start the season. Andrew Benintendi hurt himself and missed the final 14 innings of the series. Steve Pearce is hitting .125. Rafael Devers is hitting .254. The catchers have combined to hit .209.

Straily held the Red Sox hitless until the fifth inning, allowed one run on two singles and a groundout and got the win for completing five innings of work. And he struck out his first two batters of the year: Pearce and Betts.

The Red Sox split their four-game set with the Orioles, a team that won 61 fewer games than the Sox just one season ago. The O’s outscored them 21-16 in the series.

“We let them get by with some pitches we should’ve hammered,” Hyers said.

How far away are the Sox’ bats from coming alive?

“Obviously from the outside looking in, it looks pretty far,” Betts said. “But on the inside it seems like we’re a hit or two away from scoring some runs. Maybe a bounce here or there and maybe we score some runs. But I know for sure I have to do start doing something.”

Red Sox notes: Christian Vazquez solid during debut at second base

Jason Mastrodonato

Even with two catchers on the field, a first baseman and designated hitter in the corner outfield spots and a Gold Glove right fielder in center field, the Red Sox defense wasn’t the problem on Marathon Monday.

With illness going through the clubhouse and Andrew Benintendi dealing with a sore foot, regular catcher Christian Vazquez made his first career start at second base in the Sox’ 8-1 loss to the Orioles.

Vazquez turned a double play, made a spectacular dive to place a tag on a runner at second base for an out and made another routine play look easy.

“After the first groundball I was cool,” he said. “It was like the first day of the big leagues, you know?”

An original lineup posted at 8:01 a.m. in morning included Vazquez at catcher, Blake Swihart in left field and Dustin Pedroia at second base.

But at 9:24 a.m., the Red Sox updated the lineup and moved Pedroia out of second base and into the designated hitter spot, leading to questions about whether or not Pedroia’s left knee was acting up again.

“We have to take care of him,” manager Alex Cora said without mentioning what sparked the lineup change after 83 minutes. “I mean, we have a program, we have to be disciplined. We were pushing him to play second but it doesn’t make sense. Something happens today with him and then it’s on us. So the only thing we can do is DH him and keep him off his feet as much as possible and push him so far. It’s a tough start. It’s tough conditions.”

For reasons Cora chose not to mention, Eduardo Nunez was unavailable to start, but available off the bench. The Athletic later reported that Nunez is dealing with a back injury. His absence created an opening at second base for Vazquez.

“If there’s a ground ball, I’m going to block it, so, I’ve got a cup,” Vazquez joked before the game. “Don’t worry.”

Vazquez played first base late in the 18-inning game during the World Series. He’s previously made a few big league appearances at third base and has one minor league appearance at second base.

“Christian always takes ground balls at third, he takes ground balls at second, at first, he does it because of his routine as a catcher,” Cora said.

Steve Pearce made his first start at left field since joining the Red Sox last season and made a sliding catch to narrowly avoid Xander Bogaerts in shallow left. It was the third out with two men on base in the sixth and temporarily kept the O’s lead at 4-1.

“He saved us for a little bit,” Bogaerts said. “Obviously, they added some runs on in the innings after. We play better once we score first. We didn’t do it that much this series. Obviously, we’re going on the road, we’re leading off first. We’ll see what happens.”

Jackie Bradley Jr. remains out with an illness and it’s uncertain whether he or Benintendi will be available on Tuesday in New York.

Velazquez stays consistent

Spot-starter Hector Velazquez, used again to give the rotation some extra rest and line up the struggling Chris Sale for a start in New York, was effective over three challenging innings of one-run ball.

Usually known for his control, Velazquez walked four batters while throwing 29 strikes on 57 pitches.

“The second inning I felt a little tired so my arm was a little slow,” he said. “This is the problem today. My split was no good in the second inning. That’s the reason. Today the game was early. So I feel my body was too slow.”

Crush Davis snaps cold streak vs. Sox

Perhaps the Sox’ low point of the entire series was in the eighth inning Monday, when Heath Hembree served up an 89-mph pitch that didn’t move and sat dead-center for Chris Davis to mash.

Davis came into Fenway Park looking for his first hit of the year. He expanded his hitless streak past 60 plate appearances. Then recorded four hits in his last three games against the Sox, including a two-run blast off Hembree’s straight pitch that went 408 feet into the visiting dugout.

“That pitch to Davis, slider I think it was, back-door slider in that situation,” Cora said. “He knows. He knows. He was going 3-0 for fastball, fastball and when he threw that 3-2 pitch he was mad at himself. You can either bounce it for a swing and miss or you walk him. He knows that he has to manage the game, too. You have to avoid damage in those situations.”

Odds and ends

The Red Sox have yet to win a series this year. They’ve been out-scored in all of them: 16-21 to the Orioles, 12-13 to Blue Jays, 13-20 to the Diamondbacks, 9-18 to A’s and 24-34 to Mariners...

The Sox fell to 70-53 all-time in Patriots’ Day games...

They’re 6-3 when allowing six or fewer runs, but 0-8 when allowing seven or more this year...

The Sox flew to New York wearing Boston Marathon themed clothing....

There's a big attraction in Pawtucket this week, with baseball's top prospect Vladimir Guerrero Jr. in town with Buffalo playing against the Triple-A PawSox. The game was rained out Monday but there's a single-admission doubleheader Tuesday at 4:05 pm at McCoy. Both games will be seven innings.

* **MassLive.com**

Red Sox fans boo as Chris Davis homers, home offense doesn't show up in blowout loss to Orioles

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Manager Alex Cora needed to get creative with his lineup Monday because of injuries and sickness. But his creativity didn't translate into runs.

The Red Sox lost 8-1 to the Baltimore Orioles here at Fenway Park to split their four-game series.

Chris Davis, who had been hitless in 54 straight at-bats entering this series but stroked three hits Saturday, blasted a two-run homer off reliever Heath Hembree during the eighth.

The Fenway Faithful booed as Davis' homer traveled 408 feet to right field and put Boston behind by five runs. Some lighter boos returned when Dustin Pedroia grounded into a double play to end the eighth.

The fans booed again in the top of the ninth when Dwight Smith Jr. delivered a two-run double against reliever Tyler Thornburg.

The Red Sox dropped to 6-11. They still are without a series win. They lost three of four games in Seattle, three of four games in Arizona and two of three games at Arizona.

They split a two-game home series against the Blue Jays before splitting this four-game series with the Orioles. They head to New York for two games against the Yankees on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Andrew Benintendi didn't play after fouling a ball off his foot Sunday. Jackie Bradley Jr. still has the flu. Eduardo Nunez wasn't able to start because of an undisclosed reason. Cora wanted to keep Pedroia (returning from two knee surgeries) from playing the field Monday.

Cora's creative lineup even included Christian Vazquez at second base.

Orioles starter Dan Straily's ERA dropped from 19.29 to 10.24. He allowed just one run in five innings. Straily, who entered with a career 4.32 ERA, had allowed 10 earned, 13 hits and two walks while striking out nobody in 4.2 innings this season.

The Red Sox managed just one run, two hits and one walk against him. He struck out two.

Hector Velazquez started for Boston and allowed one run in three innings. Marcus Walden allowed three runs in the fifth.

Vazquez turns double play, makes diving tag

Christian Vazquez joked before the game that playing second base for the Red Sox on Monday would be a "piece of cake." It apparently is.

Vazquez turned a 4-6-3 double in the first inning. He then made a diving tag on Mookie Betts' outfield assist from center field during the second inning. Betts and Vazquez caught Renato Nunez trying to extend a single into a double.

Boston Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez played two innings at third base in both 2017 and 2018.

Pearce makes running-sliding catch

Steve Pearce, starting his first game in the outfield since being traded to Boston last year, made a sliding catch in left field.

Pearce has played three innings in left field and eight innings in right field for Boston in 2018. But he never started at either of the two positions. He made seven starts in left field and two starts in right field for Toronto before the trade.

Christian Vazquez 'outstanding' at second base for Boston Red Sox in Monday cameo

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Christian Vazquez was perfect in the field in his first big-league game at second base Monday, but that doesn't mean he's gunning for Dustin Pedroia's spot.

"He's an MVP," Vazquez laughed.

Still, Vazquez did everything Boston could have wanted in his cameo at second, starting his day by turning a 4-6-3 double play to end the first. An inning later, Orioles designated hitter Renato Nunez tried to stretch a single into a double but was called out when Vazquez received a Mookie Betts throw from center and dove to tag him.

"After the first ground ball, I was cool," Vazquez said. "It was like (my) first day in the big leagues (as a catcher). After you catch the first pitch, everything is going to be smooth."

Vazquez was originally supposed to catch against the O's but was thrust into emergency duty less than two hours before first pitch. With Andrew Benintendi (foot) and Jackie Bradley Jr. (flu) both unavailable, Vazquez became the second baseman, Steve Pearce went to left field, Blake Swihart caught and Dustin Pedroia was the designated hitter.

Even manager Alex Cora, who has 530 big-league games at second to his name, was impressed with what he saw.

"(He was) solid," Cora said. "He did a good job. He was in tune with the game and all that communication. For a kid that hasn't played second base at the big league level, you could see he was into it."

Vazquez had some help in his unfamiliar spot. In addition to using a defensive positioning card throughout the game, he relied on third base coach Carlos Febles to give him instructions on where to play throughout the game.

"There was communication with the pitcher as far as bunts and all that," Cora said. "Communication with Xander (Bogaerts), with the dugout, with the first baseman. It was outstanding."

Vazquez isn't likely to get another chance at second with Pedroia, Eduardo Nunez and Brock Holt (who is currently on the injured list) ahead of him on the depth chart. But the catcher would likely welcome another shot.

"It was fun," Vazquez said. "It was something different."

Alex Cora's Boston Red Sox have a lot to prove vs. Yankees, Rays after unmotivated start and World Series a distant memory

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Alex Cora's Red Sox should play with a chip on their shoulder, like they have something to prove, at Yankee Stadium and Tropicana Field this week. They shouldn't go in there as defending champs.

After all, this dismal 6-11 start to the 2019 season has made the 2018 World Series a distant memory. The 2019 Red Sox actually have a lot to prove. This club hasn't even won a series in five attempts.

The Orioles, who beat Boston 8-1 here at Fenway Park on Monday, even boast a better record (7-10).

The Red Sox aren't the defending World Series champions as of right now. They are a sub-.500 team that isn't hitting, pitching and fielding well. They have made some bad decisions on the bases and experienced miscommunications in the outfield that have allowed balls to drop for hits.

The starting rotation, which is making a combined \$87.925 million this season, ranks last in the majors in ERA (7.18), batting average against (.297) and WHIP (1.67).

Rick Porcello is averaging 9.5 walks per nine innings through his first three starts compared to 2.2 for his career. Nathan Eovaldi is averaging 6.0 walks per nine innings through three starts compared to 1.6 last year.

Chris Sale has a 9.00 ERA (13 runs, 13 innings) in three starts. The opposition is batting .308 against him.

Mookie Betts, the 2018 AL MVP, is batting just .222 with a .324 on-base percentage, .413 slugging percentage and .737 OPS.

"Basically what I'm doing is unacceptable," Betts said after Monday's loss. "I have to figure out a way to get something done and to help the team."

Boston Red Sox star Mookie Betts went hitless here Monday. He's batting just .222 with a .324 on-base percentage, .413 slugging percentage and .737 OPS. He isn't happy with himself.

The entire Red Sox offense is struggling. Boston ranks 20th in batting average (.236), 19th in on-base percentage (.309), and 21st in both slugging percentage (.383) and OPS (.692).

"We haven't really created a whole lot of opportunities for ourselves," Mitch Moreland said.

Boston plays at New York on Tuesday and Wednesday. It plays at Tampa Bay on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

The Yankees also are underachieving at 6-9 but they have suffered several key injuries. The Rays, meanwhile, are playing as motivated as the 2018 Red Sox. They lead the division at 12-4.

"It's obviously not the start we were looking for," Moreland said. "It's early in the season. We know we've got our work cut out for us. We know what we've got to do. But the guys that are in this room are definitely capable of that."

New York would be a nice place for the Red Sox to turn it around. Both Sale and Eovaldi have had success against the Yankees.

"Anywhere is a good place for it to happen," Moreland said. "But might as well start there."

Cora said he isn't concerned his team has yet to win a series. The Red Sox lost three of four games in both Seattle and Oakland. They lost two of three games in Arizona. They split their two-game series at home vs. the Blue Jays and split this four-game series vs. the Orioles.

“It’s just a bad start,” Cora said. “We’ve shown some flashes with Eduardo (Rodriguez) and David (Price) throwing the ball well. Today we were in the game. We didn’t make some pitches. They hit the ball out of the ballpark. It changed the whole thing.

“For a while there if you start looking, after that Arizona game (last Sunday), we were pitching better, keeping the ball in the ballpark. Not too much damage. Not too much hard contact. I think today was the exception, obviously. We’ve got to keep working at it.”

Red Sox roster moves: Marcus Walden optioned to AAA, corresponding move coming Tuesday

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox optioned right-hander Marcus Walden to Triple-A Pawtucket following their loss to Baltimore on Monday. A corresponding move will be announced Tuesday.

Walden was recalled from Pawtucket last Saturday and made five relief appearances in the last seven games. After allowing just two unearned runs in his first six innings and recording two wins, he gave up three earned runs (including a Dwight Smith Jr. homer) in Monday’s loss that raised his ERA to 3.38 in eight innings.

Boston could do a number of things with the open spot, with the bullpen and outfield looking like obvious areas of need entering a two-game series at Yankee Stadium. The team currently has three open spots on its 40-man roster and could be open to adding someone who isn’t currently on it.

Bobby Poyner (who is on the 40-man) would be the most logical relief candidate to join the team, though Travis Lakins, Erasmo Ramirez and Jenrry Mejia could fit as well. With both Andrew Benintendi (foot) and Jackie Bradley Jr. (flu) both questionable to play Tuesday, someone like Sam Travis or Tzu-Wei Lin could come up and provide outfield depth.

Whoever joins the Red Sox likely won’t be on the roster long. The team will need a 25-man roster spot Friday for the likely activation of Brock Holt and will carry 12 pitchers and 13 position players from that point forward.

Mookie Betts, Boston Red Sox star: ‘Basically what I’m doing is unacceptable’

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Mookie Betts went hitless here Monday. He’s batting just .222 with a .324 on-base percentage, .413 slugging percentage and .737 OPS. He isn’t happy with himself.

“Basically what I’m doing is unacceptable,” said Betts, the 2018 AL MVP. “I have to figure out a way to get something done and to help the team.”

The Red Sox lost 8-1 to the Orioles at Fenway Park to split their four-game series. Betts went 0-for-3 with a walk and strikeout.

The entire Red Sox offense is struggling. Boston ranks 20th in batting average (.236), 19th in on-base percentage (.309), and 21st in both slugging percentage (.383) and OPS (.692).

“I wouldn’t say there’s more pressure (because the entire offense is struggling),” Betts said. “There’s been many times where I can kind of help score some runs or do something and I haven’t done it. So I take full ownership of that.”

Betts went 3-for-21 (.143) with one homer, one RBI, four walks and four strikeouts on the Red Sox’s 3-3 homestand.

“Not sure about anything,” Betts said. “I think we’ve all been kind of watching the same game. It’s tough having so much success last year and not really having any right now. But I just have to continue to work to get out of it.”

He’s not exactly sure what is wrong with his approach right now.

“I’ve just got to find a way to get some hits in a game, get on base,” Betts said. “I’m not really doing anything well right now. It sucks. There’s not really else to say but it sucks. I just got to figure out a way to make something happen.”

He’s confident the Red Sox offense can click soon.

“Obviously, the outside looking in, it looks pretty far,” Betts said. “In the inside, it just seems like we’re a hit or two away from scoring some runs. Maybe a bounce here or there. But for sure I have to do something, especially from the top of the lineup.”

Boston Red Sox’s Brock Holt to start rehab assignment Tuesday at Pawtucket

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox infielder/outfielder Brock Holt will start a rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket on Tuesday.

Holt, who has been on the injured list since Mar. 30 with a scratched cornea in his right eye, said after Boston’s 8-1 loss to the Orioles that he is feeling much better. The plan is for him to play two games for the PawSox on Tuesday and Wednesday.

“That’s the plan and we’ll go from there,” Holt said.

Holt could be activated from the IL as early as Thursday, meaning he’d likely return for Boston’s three-game series against the Rays in St. Petersburg over the weekend. Once he’s active, the Sox are likely to send down a reliever and carry 12 pitchers and 13 position players on the active roster.

Holt is 1-for-16 on the season so far. He has struck out seven times.

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

Red Sox Journal: Vazquez gets first MLB start at second

Bill Doyle

BOSTON — During his five major league seasons, Christian Vazquez has caught in 291 regular-season games, served as designated hitter in six and played third base in four. He also filled in at first base for six innings during the 18-inning Game 3 of the World Series last fall.

But he had never played second base in the majors until Monday in an 8-1 loss to the Orioles at Fenway Park.

The Red Sox needed a second baseman because Dustin Pedroia served as the DH as the team brings him along slowly while he recovers from a knee injury, Brock Holt is sidelined with a scratched cornea and manager Alex Cora said he wanted to stay away from playing Eduardo Nunez at second, but he didn’t really explain why. Nunez may have caught the illness that has sidelined center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr.

So Vazquez played second base for the first time since 2010 when he successfully handled all three chances he had over 4 2/3 innings for Class A Greenville.

“Ground balls, I’m going to block it,” Vazquez said before the game. “I’ve got a cup. Don’t worry.”

Before games, Vazquez takes grounders at first, second and third and turns double plays to improve his footwork as a catcher. It’s something he picked up from Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina.

“We’re comfortable with him,” Cora said before the game. “His baseball IQ is good, too. It wouldn’t surprise me if he turns a few double plays and he throws behind the runner or something like that. He’s very excited.”

Vazquez made Cora look good by fielding Dwight Smith’s grounder and throwing to second to begin a double play to end the first inning.

“He was smooth, man,” shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. “Obviously, behind the dish he’s pretty smooth so I didn’t think we would have a problem with him back there.”

In the second inning, Vazquez made a nice play in catching a throw by center fielder Mookie Betts and diving to tag out Renato Nunez trying for a double. Rio Ruiz scored from second on the play.

In the fifth, Vazquez ranged to his right to backhand a grounder and threw out Cedric Mullins at first.

“It was fun, something different,” Vazquez said.

Should Pedroia worry about Vazquez taking his second base job permanently?

“No, he’s the MVP,” Vazquez said.

Pedroia, the 2008 AL MVP, was originally scheduled to start at second base, but he switched to designated hitter a couple of hours before the game. After undergoing left knee surgery in October of 2017, Pedroia played in only three games last season and he rejoined the team last week after playing three rehab games with Greenville.

“We have to take care of him,” Cora said. “We have a program, we have to be disciplined. We were pushing him to play second, but then it doesn’t make sense. If something happens today with him and then it’s on us. The only thing we can do honestly is DH him and keep him off his feet as much as possible, not push him so hard. It’s a tough start, it’s tough conditions.”

Pedroia went 0-for-4 to drop his batting average to .105 (2-for-19).

Blake Swihart played two innings at second base for the Sox last year and Steve Pearce played 15 games there in 2016 for Tampa Bay and Baltimore, but Cora wanted to give Vazquez a break from behind the plate after he caught the previous three games. So Swihart caught and Pearce played left field and he made a sliding catch in the sixth to save at least one run.

Bradley is sick and left fielder Andrew Benintendi didn’t play either after leaving Sunday’s game after fouling a ball off his right foot. Cora said they’re both feeling better, but he’s not sure if they’ll be ready to play Tuesday at Yankee Stadium.

Honoring Robinson

All players wore No. 42 on their jerseys to honor Jackie Robinson on the 72nd anniversary of his first game with the Brooklyn Dodgers when he became the first African American to play Major League Baseball.

Sale in New York

Hoping an extra day of rest will improve his performance, Chris Sale (0-3, 9.00) will start at Yankee Stadium at 6:35 p.m. Tuesday against New York's James Paxton (1-2, 6.00) when the Sox open a two-game series. ... Reliever Marcus Walden was optioned to Triple-A Pawtucket after Monday's game. No corresponding move was immediately announced.

Orioles 8, Red Sox 1: Birds hammer Boston on Patriots' Day

Bill Doyle

BOSTON — It was Patriots' Day, but it wasn't the Red Sox's day.

Then again, far too few days have been Sox days this season.

The Sox collected a season-low four hits and lost to the Orioles, 8-1, at Fenway Park on Monday in their annual Patriots' Day game to fall to 6-11 for the first time since 2011. They didn't suffer their 11th loss last season until May 9 when they dropped a 9-6 decision at Yankee Stadium to fall into second place in the AL East.

The Sox will open a two-game series at Yankee Stadium at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday. Maybe the intensity of playing visiting their arch rivals will get the Sox going.

"Anywhere is a good place for it to happen," Mitch Moreland, "but it might as well start there."

"I don't think Yankee Stadium has anything to do with it," Mookie Betts said. "I think it's just going out and continuing to play. That's all we can do."

After starting the season 3-8 on the road, the Red Sox expected to fare better at home. They did, but Fenway wasn't quite as friendly as they hoped. Playing Toronto and Baltimore, rebuilding teams with no realistic expectations to contend this season, the Sox managed only to split six games.

"I know it's rough, I know it's tough," Xander Bogaerts said. "We just got to continue showing up every day as I said with that winning mentality. I know we're going to go on a nice run, I just don't know when. It would be nice to go on one pretty soon."

The Sox split the series, 2-2, with the Orioles, who had lost eight of their previous nine games. The reigning World Series champions have not won a series of any kind this season. They're 0-3-2 so far. But on this day of the Boston Marathon, fans should remember that the baseball season is also a marathon, not a sprint.

"It will get better," Sox manager Alex Cora insisted. "There's no timetable. Obviously, the sooner, the better."

The Sox fell to 70-53 on Patriots' Day. Last year the game, also scheduled to be against the Orioles, was rained out for the first time since 1984. It also rained Monday morning, but unfortunately for the Sox it stopped.

On Saturday, they Sox were beaten in large part by Chris Davis, who drove in four runs with a single and two doubles in Baltimore's 9-5 win to break a major-league record 0-for-54 streak. On Monday, the Sox lost to Dan Straily, who entered the game with an earned run average of 19.29.

Straily (1-1) didn't allow a hit until Bogaerts led off the fifth by legging out a hit to shortstop. Bogaerts reached third on Rafael Devers' single to right and scored when Steve Pearce forced Devers at second. The Orioles challenged the play, insisting that Devers slid illegally into second baseman Jonathan Villar so a double play should have been called, but after a video review no DP was ruled. Orioles manager Brandon Hyde was ejected for arguing the ruling.

Cora had hoped that Hector Velazquez (0-1) could pitch four or five innings as a fill-in starter, but he left after throwing 57 pitches, only 29 of them for strikes, in three innings. Velazquez allowed only two hits, but he walked four after not having walked anyone in 9 2/3 previous innings this season. Two double plays helped him limit the damage to one run.

Velazquez wasn't sure if it was the early 11 a.m. start or the fact that he pitched an inning of relief on Saturday, but he admitted he grew tired in the second inning so his split-fingered fastball was ineffective.

After Velazquez left, the Sox bullpen allowed seven runs in six innings.

The Orioles took a 1-0 lead in the second when Rio Ruiz walked, reached second on a wild pitch and scored on Renato Nunez's single to left-center off the Green Monster. Betts threw out Nunez trying for a double on the play.

Marcus Walden struck out the side in the fourth, but allowed Villar's run-scoring single and Dwight Smith's two-run home run down the right-field line in the fifth. Smith cracked a two-run double off Tyler Thornburg in the ninth.

Davis hit a two-run home run to right off Heath Hembree in the eighth. It was his first home run since Aug. 24 and Davis must have been in no hurry to leave Fenway Park.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Maybe Yankee Stadium will zap sleepwalking Red Sox to life

Chris Mason

BOSTON — The Red Sox are playing bad baseball and they've got the numbers to prove it.

After Baltimore smoked them, 8-1, on Marathon Monday, Alex Cora's club fell to 6-11 on the season.

The 106 runs allowed by the pitching staff is the most in baseball, Boston's 15 errors rank worst in the American League, as does their -32 run differential, and five of their 12 batters are hitting below the Mendoza Line.

The eye test has been just as ugly. With yesterday's loss to the built-to-lose Orioles, the Red Sox still have yet to win a series.

"It doesn't concern me. It's just a bad start," Alex Cora said. "We've shown flashes... We've got to keep working at it. We go to New York tonight and have a two-game series."

So how have the reigning World Series champions been so bad? This isn't Space Jam. There are no Monstars stealing all of their talent. These are the same guys that reeled off 119 wins en route to a World Series a year ago.

"We aren't playing consistently well," Xander Bogaerts said. "We know what we're capable of doing day in, day out. I think that just hasn't been it yet. ... We're 17 games into the season, but we've got to turn this thing around pretty quick."

Perhaps Yankee Stadium is exactly what the Red Sox need to be zapped back to life.

Boston's 16-1 ALCS beatdown in the Bronx was a galvanizing moment last October, to the point that Cora was still talking about it at the World Series parade.

"Anywhere is a good place for it to happen, but might as well start there," Mitch Moreland said.

Going from do-or-die games in October to eh-there-are-161-more baseball in April has to be a letdown, and perhaps that plays into commonality of World Series hangovers.

With a date in the Bronx followed by a three-game set with the division-leading Rays, the stakes are starting to get higher. There are no more 11 AM starts with the Orioles ahead.

"We've got two division rivals," Xander Bogaerts said. "Now we've got two stronger opponents, we're playing away, we've just got to go in like we normally do, handle our business, and play the best we can and really rack up the wins pretty quick."

Bogaerts isn't kidding about the wins.

After yesterday's loss, the Red Sox fell 6.5 games behind the Rays in the AL East standings. In 2018, they never trailed anybody in the division by more than 2.0.

"I know it's rough," the shortstop said. "I know it's tough. Just got to keep showing up every day with a winning mentality. I know we're going to go on a nice run. I just don't know when. It will be nice to go on one pretty soon."

The Red Sox slept through their season-opening West Coast trip and just wrapped up a half-awake homestand. With all eyes turning to Yankee Stadium, there'd be no better place to finally wake up than the Bronx.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox, Yanks turn to rivalry to reverse course

Ian Browne and Bryan Hoch

Six months after the Red Sox twice redecored the visiting clubhouse at Yankee Stadium in showers of beer and bubbly -- first to celebrate clinching the American League East, then their advance past the Yankees in the AL Division Series -- the defending World Series champions are returning to the scene of the crime.

The longest-standing rivalry in sports will be on the main stage again on Tuesday, as the Yankees are set to host the Red Sox for a two-game series. The matchup serves as an appetizer for the highly-anticipated showdown that will take place at London Stadium on June 29-30, when Major League Baseball will make its first foray into the United Kingdom.

"It's the biggest rivalry in baseball, for sure, over the last, well, ever," said Red Sox ace Chris Sale, who starts the series opener. "You can just feel the difference and the energy when you go into the ballpark and the sheer hatred when you walk into Yankee Stadium. It's definitely the passion of the fans, you feel it when we play them in Boston or when we go there. It's intense."

Boston is coming off a franchise-record 108 victories in the regular season, while the Yankees posted 100 regular-season wins, their highest total since their most recent World Series championship year of 2009.

That has not translated into results so far this year, as both clubs have struggled; the injury-ravaged Yankees have lost nine of their first 15 contests, while Boston has dropped 11 of its first 17 games.

"After what happened last year, a lot of us in this locker room have a little bad taste in our mouth," Yankees first baseman/DH Luke Voit said. "It was my first time in the playoffs, and it sucks that they won. More fuel to the fire. It will be exciting that we get a chance to get back at them."

The Red Sox just want to start playing like themselves again.

"Absolutely," said Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland. "Anywhere is a good place for it to happen, but might as well start there."

When will the games be played? How can I watch?

First pitch in the Bronx is scheduled for 6:35 p.m. ET on Tuesday and Wednesday. Tuesday's game will be broadcast on WPIX in New York and NESN in New England, as well as by MLB Network. Wednesday's game can be seen on YES in New York, NESN in Red Sox nation and on ESPN.

Who are the starting pitchers?

James Paxton (1-2, 6.00 ERA) will receive his introduction to the rivalry on Tuesday, taking the ball for his first start against the Red Sox as a member of the Yankees. Paxton has struggled through three starts, and revealed on Sunday that he was tipping pitches in his most recent effort against the Astros. He is 2-0 with a 2.49 ERA in four career starts vs. Boston.

"I'm sure I'll be a little nervous going in, having it be my first experience being a part of this rivalry," Paxton said. "But all I can do is go out and enjoy it and bring my best."

Sale (0-3, 9.00 ERA) is off to the worst start of his career and is searching for answers. One issue has been the slider, which has typically been Sale's putaway pitch. The offering has lacked its usual bite so far this season, and that's a big thing Sale has been working on in between starts. The one thing Sale has going for him is his history against the Yankees, both in his career (1.61 ERA) in 17 career appearances and last October. Sale defeated the Yankees in Game 1 of the ALDS, hurling 5 1/3 innings of two-run ball with eight strikeouts. In clinching Game 4, Sale had a dominant eighth inning in relief.

How have the teams changed since October?

The Yankees have had numerous roster changes since the ALDS, especially since they feature a Major League-high 11 players on the injured list. That aside, shortstop Adeiny Hechavarria, right-hander Lance Lynn, outfielder Andrew McCutchen, right-hander David Robertson and infielder Neil Walker are now playing elsewhere. Offseason additions include Paxton, right-hander Adam Ottavino, infielder DJ LeMahieu, infielder Gio Urshela and outfielder Mike Tauchman.

Boston's roster should be largely familiar to anyone who watched the march to the title. Of those who appeared in the ALDS, right-hander Joe Kelly, right-hander Craig Kimbrel, infielder Ian Kinsler and catcher Sandy Leon (now in Triple-A) are no longer around. Kimbrel remains unsigned. Right-hander Colten Brewer is a new face in the bullpen, having been acquired from the Padres in November.

Who is hot?

Red Sox: It seems like J.D. Martinez is always on a hot streak. That has certainly been the case to start this season. The slugger has a hit in 16 of the first 17 games and has five doubles during his six-game hitting streak.

Yankees: LeMahieu is batting .396 and has reached base in all but two games so far this year. Aaron Judge has hit four homers with seven RBIs in his last eight games, after hitting no homers with three RBIs through his first seven. Ottavino owns a 1.13 ERA, with 13 strikeouts in eight innings.

Who is not?

Red Sox: Dustin Pedroia is ice cold since coming off the injured list. The second baseman is hitting .105. He isn't alone. Pedroia is far from alone. Last year's MVP, right fielder Mookie Betts, is hitting .222. After Monday's loss, Betts called his performance "unacceptable."

Yankees: Greg Bird has had trouble making contact, with 16 strikeouts in 35 at-bats. Clint Frazier is 2-for-16 (.125) after notching nine hits in his first 21 at-bats (.429). Brett Gardner is batting .190, and has played more than anticipated due to injuries.

Anything else fans might want to know?

- One entertaining subplot to the ALDS came after Game 2 at Fenway Park, when Judge celebrated the Yankees' 6-2 victory by rolling a speaker to the team bus -- past the Red Sox's clubhouse -- blasting Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York." Boston pasted the Yankees, 16-1, in Game 3, then played the song themselves as they partied following a 4-3 win in Game 4.

- The Yankees took six out of nine from the Red Sox in the Bronx in last year's regular season. It was a different story at Fenway, where the Red Sox went 7-3.

Betts: 'What I'm doing is unacceptable'

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Nobody is taking the rough start of the defending World Series champion Red Sox harder than Mookie Betts.

The winner of the American League's Most Valuable Player Award last season, Betts sounded off -- on himself -- following Monday's 8-1 loss to the Orioles.

"Basically, what I'm doing is unacceptable," Betts said. "I have to figure out a way to get something done and help the team."

While the Red Sox are 6-11 and 6 1/2 games behind the Rays in the American League East, Betts is slashing .222/.324/.413 and has three homers and seven RBIs.

As one of the star players in the game, is Betts putting too much pressure on himself to help his team escape a sluggish start?

"I wouldn't say it's more pressure, but I know I'm definitely -- there have been many times where I can help score runs or do something and I haven't done it," said Betts. "I take full ownership of that."

Could it be a plate approach thing?

"I'm not exactly sure," Betts said. "Just have to find a way to get some hits and get on base. I'm not really doing anything well right now. It sucks. Nothing really else to say, but it sucks and I have to figure out a way to make something happen."

Betts will continue to search in the batting cage and on video until he finds a fix.

"Not sure I found anything," said Betts. "I think we've all been watching the same game. It's tough having so much success last year and not really having any right now. But I just have to continue to work to get out of it."

The Red Sox departed Fenway after Monday's game and headed to New York, where they will start a two-game series against the Yankees on Tuesday night.

Red Sox catcher becomes 2B for a day

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- The ball will find you.

And Christian Vázquez, the catcher who turned into a second baseman for a day, had two words: Bring it.

Due to a variety of injuries, illnesses and maintenance issues, the Red Sox thrust Vazquez into emergency duty and had him make his first start in the Majors at second base on Monday.

In the top of the first inning, Dwight Smith Jr. hit a grounder to second base. Vazquez thought about flipping it to his double-play partner and best friend on the team, shortstop Xander Bogaerts. Instead, he made a traditional throw. Bogaerts caught the feed and fired to first for the inning-ending 4-6-3 double play.

The crowd roared and Vazquez sprinted off the field with a glow on his face. It was the best moment for the Red Sox in an otherwise nondescript 8-1 loss to the Orioles.

“It was fun. Something different,” Vazquez said. “I didn't want to mess Bogey up [with a flip]. I want to hit him in the chest. I was trying to go under but not a good idea.”

In the second, Vazquez had another play to make. Renato Núñez belted an RBI hit to left-center and tried to stretch it to a double. But center fielder Mookie Betts came up throwing. Vazquez corralled it and his catching instincts took over as he dove across the bag and tagged out Nunez.

“He was smooth,” said Bogaerts. “Obviously, behind the dish he’s pretty smooth. I didn’t think we would have a problem with him there.”

Monday’s lineup will surely go down as the most creative of the season for Red Sox manager Alex Cora in terms of defensive alignments.

The second baseman (Dustin Pedroia) was at designated hitter. The first baseman/DH (Steve Pearce) was in left field. And most surprisingly, Vazquez was at second. The man who was originally going to start in left field (Blake Swihart) wound up as the catcher. A guy who can play just about any position (Eduardo Núñez) was on the bench.

Abbott and Costello would have had some fun with this one.

So what exactly led to all of this? Here is the best effort to explain it.

Cora is trying to stay away from Nunez for an undisclosed reason. Maybe he is sick or has a nagging injury.

Vazquez had caught the past three, including day games on Saturday and Sunday. Pedroia is still on a formulated playing schedule in his first week back from missing almost all of last season due to problems with his left knee.

Left fielder Andrew Benintendi (right foot contusion) and center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. (flu) were unavailable unless there was an emergency.

Cora was thrilled that his riskiest move paid off, even though it came in a loss.

“Solid. He did a great job,” Cora said of Vazquez. “He was in-tune with the game, a lot of communication. For a kid who hasn’t played second base at the big league level, you could see he was in it -- moving in the shift, including going to third, and having communication with the pitcher, communication with Xander, communication with the dugout, with the first baseman. He was outstanding.”

Red Sox honor Jackie

The Red Sox celebrated Jackie Robinson Day by including their Jackie Robinson Scholars as part of Monday’s pregame ceremonies.

For the 16th consecutive year, all players from every team wore No. 42 in recognition of Robinson, whose number is retired at every Major League park.

Monday was the 72nd anniversary of Robinson playing his first MLB game at Ebbets Field for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Remembering Boston Strong

Monday also marked the sixth anniversary of the tragic Boston Marathon bombings, and the Red Sox held a moment of silence prior to the game.

The Red Sox played a role in helping the city heal in that 2013 season with their "Boston Strong" mantra, and they wound up winning the World Series.

They wore uniforms on Monday that said "Boston" on the front of the jerseys instead of the traditional "Red Sox". The Sox first wore those uniforms on April 20, 2013, in their first home game after the bombings.

Former Red Sox starter Jake Peavy, who pitched for the '13 team, threw out Monday's first pitch to former teammate Bogaerts.

The Red Sox optioned right-hander Marcus Walden to Triple-A Pawtucket following Monday's loss to the Orioles. A corresponding move to fill his spot on the 25-man roster will be made on Tuesday.

Walden, 30, has made five relief appearances for Boston this season after being recalled from Pawtucket on April 6. The right-hander went 2-0 with a 3.38 ERA and limited opponents to a .167 batting average.

* **WEEL.com**

Red Sox loss on Patriots Day caps poor first homestand of season

Ryan Hannable

Even though it was just Game 17 of the season, boos were heard in the late innings at Fenway Park, and deservedly so.

The Red Sox fell to the Orioles, 8-1, on Patriots Day and also the final game of the first homestand of the season. The team went 3-3, but it should have been way better than that. It was supposed to rebound from its brutal start to the year on the West Coast by playing at home against some bad teams, but that was not the case.

Some of the bad trends from the first few games continued, as the team hasn't looked anything like one won the World Series just a few short months ago.

Entering the game, Orioles starter Dan Straily had allowed 10 earned runs on 13 hits, including four homers, in 4 2/3 innings (two starts). But Monday, the Red Sox made him look like an ace as he went five innings, allowing just one run on two hits, while walking one and striking out three.

Overall, the Red Sox finished with just three hits as a team and for the fourth time in 17 games finished with one run or less. As a reference, the Red Sox didn't get to their fourth game of scoring one run or less until May 27 last year.

"I mean, there's a lot of searching throughout the lineup," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We have some good games and then we don't. So it hasn't been as consistent as we know we can be. There are a few

guys that are searching. Keep working at it. We haven't been able to put good at-bats together in certain games so today was a perfect example. We'll find it and keep working at it. But I think it's just that not everybody is clicking at the same time."

Monday's game featured a spot start for Hector Velazquez as the team looked to give its starters an extra day of rest before a long stretch and while the bullpen has been a strength to open the season, it was not in this one.

Every Red Sox pitcher who pitched, except for Brandon Workman, allowed at least one run, while three allowed multiple runs -- Marcus Walden, Heath Hembree and Tyler Thornberg.

Also, Chris Davis broke out in the series. The Orioles first baseman snapped an 0-for-54 skid over the weekend and then on Monday hit a monster home run over the Orioles bullpen.

After not taking advantage of the six games at Fenway Park, the team will now go to Yankee Stadium and take on a desperate Yankees team for two games before a three-game set over the weekend in Tampa. Usually, that would be a way to pick up at least two wins, but the Rays are one of the best teams in baseball to open the year.

"It doesn't concern me. It's just a bad start," Cora said. "We've shown flashes, Eduardo [Rodriguez], David [Price]. Today, one-run game, didn't make some pitches and they hit that ball out of the ballpark, changed the whole thing. For a while there if you start looking after that Arizona game we were pitching better and keeping the ball in the ballpark and not too much damage, not too much hard contact and today was the exception obviously. We've got to keep working at it. We go to New York tonight and have a two-game series. "

The Red Sox are still seeking a wake-up call for the 2019 season, and maybe Yankee Stadium is what will do it after Fenway Park certainly didn't.

The Red Sox now have a minus-32 run differential, the worst in the AL.

Alex Cora not concerned with bad start to 2019 season

Ryan Hannable

Through 17 games, the Red Sox are 6-11 and haven't won any of their five series' so far.

Even following a bad 8-1 loss to the Orioles on Marathon Monday where the team only had four hits, manager Alex Cora isn't worried.

"It doesn't concern me. It's just a bad start," he said. "We've shown flashes, Eduardo [Rodriguez], David [Price]. Today we one-run game, didn't make some pitches and they hit that ball out of the ballpark, changed the whole thing. For a while there if you start looking after that Arizona game we were pitching better and keeping the ball in the ballpark and not too much damage, not too much hard contact and today was the exception obviously. We've got to keep working at it. We go to New York tonight and have a two-game series."

Cora added: "We have to keep working. We know what we have to do as a group. The coaching staff and the players. We talk the game, preaching, trying to get better. And we will get better so there's no timetable. Obviously the sooner the better, trust me, I'm not saying let's wait a month and fix this, but we're working on a daily basis."

It hasn't been just one area, either.

Pitching, hitting, fielding have all been bad at some points, which have the Red Sox currently at a minus-32 run differential, the worst in the American League.

The 6-11 start is their worst since 2011 when they also were 6-11.

Now, they will travel to Yankee Stadium for a two-game set against the Yankees, who are also struggling, but Cora isn't thinking that way.

"Right now, honestly, I am not looking around," he said. "I know where people are at, but we have to take care of us first."

Red Sox Farm Report: Evaluating potential replacements for Marcus Walden

Nick Friar

The Red Sox leader in wins is back with Triple-A Pawtucket.

Marcus Walden only lasted nine days at the big league level before the Red Sox sent the reliever down on Monday. After surrendering two unearned runs on Saturday, Walden gave up three earned runs on a walk, a single and a home run, all coming in his second and last inning of work.

In addition to his two wins, Walden had 11 strikeouts while holding hitters to a .167 average in eight innings. Free passes were a bit of an issue allowing four free passes and hitting one batter. Though his walks per nine innings average (4.5) was only slightly worse than Heath Hembree's (4.0) and significantly better than Colton Brewer's (8.1).

Regardless, Walden is gone for now, which means Alex Cora will have to select someone else from the farm system. He could call up Sam Travis or Tzu-Wei Lin for short-term depth in the outfield or go with another reliever instead.

Here are his options if he decides to add to the bullpen:

Jenry Mejia

The former Mets closer has dominated Triple-A hitters through his 6 1/3 innings of work. Mejia hasn't given up a run, but what's more impressive is his control: he has hit one batter and is yet to walk anyone.

Mejia isn't on the 40-man roster, but there are three open spots. The only reason he wouldn't be the right man for the job is if the team has any hang-ups regarding his past. But he's sitting 93-94 mile per hour with his fastball, like he did while with the Mets. His slider has a consistent shape and depth, as well.

Mejia is closing games for the PawSox, so he could pitch in tight spots late in games for the Red Sox, as well.

Darwinzon Hernandez

The young lefty turned some heads in spring training with his mid-90s fastball. He only gave up one run in 11 innings of work (0.82 ERA) and struck out 12. Although Hernandez held hitters to a .184 average, he walked eight hitters, as well.

He has only made one appearance with Double-A Portland to this point in the season. In his start on April 7, the lefty struck out 10 in five shutout innings. Hernandez only gave up two hits, but his four walks show control remains an issue.

Bobby Poyner

The Red Sox are well aware of what Poyner brings to the table. He gave up a couple of runs in his first two outings with Pawtucket this year, but he has more experience at the big league level than anyone on this

list, with the exception of Erasmo Ramirez, who we'll get to in a second, and Mejia, who of course hasn't pitched at the Major League-level since 2015.

Durbin Feltman

After giving up a run and two walks in his first outing with Portland, Feltman has been flawless, striking out three in his last two outings. But the 21-year-old is only in his second year of pro ball. As much as he got a taste of the bigs in Fort Myers (3 2/3 innings in four games) this would be a big ask.

Also, the Red Sox would have to add him to the 40-man roster. There's room, but is that something Boston is prepared to do this early?

Travis Lakins

The 24-year-old has two outings where he's surrendered a run and two where he hasn't. He's struck out eight in five innings of work but more importantly, he's only walked one hitter. He could be the option if the Red Sox aren't looking to bring up a left-hander or want to hold off on adding anyone to the 40-man roster.

Erasmo Ramirez

Ramirez is another member of this list not on the 40-man roster. He also has the most MLB experience on this list, having relieved in 100 of his 192 major league appearances. The righty has started two games in Pawtucket, his last being a six-inning effort where he struck out five, gave up three hits and did not allow a single free pass. Adding him to the 40-man might be a reach with the other options readily available.

Josh Taylor

Taylor has appeared in four games for Triple-A Pawtucket, covering 5 2/3 innings. He's thrown two innings in two of his outings, so the Red Sox can stretch him when necessary. However, Poyner and Hernandez make more sense, for different reasons, if Boston elects to call up a lefty.

Chandler Shepherd and Denyi Reyes

These two only make the list of options because they're both on the 40-man roster, but they are unlikely choices. They've worked as starters to this point in the year.

Shepherd has struggled in the early going. Over 10 1/3 innings, he has walked eight and struck out seven. He also has a 5.23 ERA. Shepherd could serve as a long reliever and hasn't pitched since April 12, but he didn't have much success in his third year at Red Sox spring training (seven earned runs in three innings).

Reyes would probably be the last option on this list, being only 22 and having made his last start on Sunday. He also scuffled through big league spring training (five innings, five runs and a .368 opponent's average).

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Red Sox and Yankees closer to last place than first, but for different reasons

John Tomase

Take heart, Red Sox fans. You could be rooting for the Yankees.

Whatever the issues afflicting the local nine -- and they continued in an 8-1 loss to the Orioles on Monday - - at least Boston is trying to solve them with the same players that won last year's World Series.

The Yankees? They're spending more on their injured list (\$80 million) than the first-place Rays are on their entire payroll (\$60 million), and every day seems to bring a new casualty. The team the Red Sox will face for the next two nights in New York bears little resemblance to the one that won 100 games last year and brought out the best in Boston.

Maybe they'll do so again starting Tuesday.

"Absolutely. Absolutely," said first baseman Mitch Moreland. "Anywhere is a good place for it to happen, but might as well start there."

The Yankees are hobbled. New York's most recent misfortune came on Friday, when it placed slugging catcher Gary Sanchez on the 10-day injured list with a calf strain. That brought to 12 the number of Yankees sidelined with one malady or another (though CC Sabathia returned a day later to drop it back to 11).

And we're not talking scrubs, either. To wit:

- * Sanchez expects to return when his 10-day stint expires, and fought even going on the IL for understandable reasons. He has started the year on fire, with six homers and a .732 slugging percentage.
- * Giancarlo Stanton has been out since April 1 with a biceps strain and there's still no timetable for his return, though he acknowledged that if he misses another week or two, then he'll need a rehab assignment before he can face big league pitching.
- * All-Star setup man Dellin Betances recently suffered a setback in his return from shoulder impingement that has sidelined him since spring training. The Yankees had hoped to have him back this month, but it now looks like he'll be sidelined at least another six or seven weeks after receiving a cortisone shot.
- * Ace Luis Severino was scratched from his opening day start with shoulder inflammation, and since beginning a throwing program in Florida, has developed a significant Grade 2 lat strain despite working out under the watchful eye of the medical staff. He was supposed to remain out until mid-May, but it looks like it could end up being a lot longer than that.
- * Promising young third baseman Miguel Andujar is trying to figure out if he can play through a torn labrum that he suffered on March 31. If he needs surgery, it will be season-ending. He recently resumed light tossing and hitting off a tee and isn't considered close to a return.
- * Shortstop Didi Gregorius underwent Tommy John surgery and isn't expected back until the All-Star break.
- * Gregorius's stopgap replacement, former All-Star Troy Tulowitzki, is also on the IL. He is slowly working his way back from a calf strain, and hopes to begin running on a treadmill shortly.
- * Center fielder Aaron Hicks, a pleasant surprise last year with a career-high 27 home runs, has been sidelined since spring training with a bad back, and there's no timetable for his return.
- * Pitchers Ben Heller and Jordan Montgomery are both expected to remain out until late summer after undergoing Tommy John surgery.
- * Center fielder Jacoby Ellsbury -- remember him? -- hasn't played for the Yankees since 2017 and that isn't expected to change anytime soon. He is still recovering from hip surgery and the Yankees recently gave away his locker. One year remains on his \$153 million contract. Nice work if you can get it.

* In one piece of good news, Sabathia returned on Saturday after opening the season on the IR following offseason heart and knee surgery. He was outstanding, limiting the White Sox to just one hit over five shutout innings.

What the twin struggles of the Red Sox and Yankees have done is rob the American League East and baseball of what was supposed to be the game's signature rivalry.

Both clubs won over 100 games last year before the Red Sox dispatched the Yankees in a four-game American League Division Series. The Yankees entered spring training with the hunger of being the hunter, while the Red Sox returned basically everyone from their 119-win machine.

They were supposed to engage in their most spirited pennant chase since 1978, but instead each find themselves on the wrong side of .500. The Red Sox just split four games with the lowly Orioles, while the Yankees lost two of three against the mediocre White Sox.

"Right now, honestly, I am not looking around," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "I know where people are at, but we have to take care of us first."

Both teams are scuffling, and maybe we had it backwards off the top -- at least the Yankees have an excuse.

Now starting at second base... Christian Vazquez? Let Alex Cora explain

John Tomase

BOSTON — Christian Vazquez grew up in Puerto Rico playing pretty much every position on the diamond in the way that kids do. So how about second base?

"Third base," Vazquez acknowledged.

Well, there's a first time for everything. With weather impacting the field and necessitating the move of Dustin Pedroia from second base to DH, and with backup Eduardo Nunez unavailable to start for undisclosed reasons, Vazquez is making his big league debut at second in Monday's marathon matinee against the Orioles.

"It's fun, it's first time I'm going to start a game in the infield," Vazquez said. "Couple of injuries yesterday so I'm here. . . . I started my career in the minor leagues, my first year, two years, second year, at third base. Piece of cake."

Vazquez is one of the dominoes that resulted from left fielder Andrew Benintendi fouling a ball off his foot on Sunday. With Benintendi sore, manager Alex Cora opted to start Blake Swihart in left and Steve Pearce at DH.

The conditions gave him a second thought on Pedroia, however, and the second baseman moved to DH, with Swihart catching and Pearce going to left. That created a hole at second base. Enter Vazquez, who was signed as a catcher/third baseman and still takes daily ground balls at third.

He played nine games at third base and one at second in the minors. He has made four appearances at third base in the big leagues, and even donned a first baseman's mitt in the 18-inning World Series Game 3 last October.

"Played a little bit in the minor leagues, last year in the World Series," Vazquez said. "But it's not going to be tough. If there's a ground ball, I'm going to block it, so, I've got a cup. Don't worry."

Sandy Leon details establishing trust with pitchers

Cora wouldn't specify if Nunez is injured, though he clarified that he's not sick, like center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr., who's sidelined with the flu. That said, Cora enjoyed the outside-the-box thinking that went into this lineup.

"I had plenty of fun," he said. "These are the days that you really enjoy being a manager. It's a challenge and, hey, we're ready to play."

"Where we at roster wise, and Christian has been taking groundballs at second and at short and at third. He's caught three in a row or four in a row or whatever it is. We're comfortable with him as far as making the routine play. He can turn the double play. He played first base in the World Series. That's the biggest stage in this sport. And the first play he made was a step back with the game on the line, a flip to first. He wants to do it, he likes to do it, and we're going with him."

Added Vazquez, when asked how he responded to the news that he'd be donning a second-base mitt: "I said, 'OK, I'm in. Let's go.'"

*** NESN.com**

Red Sox Wrap: Offense Anemic, Bullpen Roughed Up in 8-1 Loss To Orioles

Dakota Randall

Well, maybe the Boston Red Sox will find their form in New York.

The Red Sox lost 8-1 to the Baltimore Orioles on Monday, settling for a split of their four-game series at Fenway Park. Boston's offense managed just four hits, one day after recording just seven against the lowly Orioles.

Hector Velazquez started the Patriots' Day game and took the loss after allowing one run on two hits and four walks over three innings. The do-everything right-hander had only one strikeout.

Marcus Walden, Heath Hembree and Tyler Thornburg combined to give up seven runs in relief.

The only positives for Boston came in the field, where catcher Christian Vazquez started at second base and first baseman Steve Pearce made a great play in left field.

The Red Sox dropped to 6-11 with the loss, while the Orioles improved to 6-11 with the win.

Here's how it went down:

GAME IN A WORD

Anemic.

The Red Sox offense managed nothing against the likes of Dan Strailey and Jimmy Yacabonis while the team's pitching did little to inspire.

ON THE BUMP

— Velazquez did his Velazquez thing — three pretty good innings — and certainly did enough to keep his team in the game.

— Walden pitched a scoreless fourth but unraveled in the fifth, allowing three runs on two hits, including a two-run homer by Dwight Smith Jr.

— Colten Brewer worked around a pair of hits to pitch a scoreless sixth inning.

— Brandon Workman continued his strong season by pitching a perfect seventh.

— Hembree allowed a two-run homer by Chris Davis in a deflating eighth inning.

— Thornburg got roughed up in the ninth, allowing two runs on two hits and a walk.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— Not much to write about here, if we're being honest.

— The only Red Sox run came in the fifth inning when Xander Bogaerts scored on an RBI groundout by Steve Pearce.

— Bogaerts (1-for-4), J.D. Martinez (2-for-4) and Rafael Devers (1-for-2) had the only hits for the Red Sox.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox will head to the Bronx to begin a two-game series with the New York Yankees. First pitch at Yankee Stadium is scheduled for 6:35 p.m. ET on Tuesday.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Troubles continue for Red Sox, who can't seem to do much right

Sean McAdam

The lineup on the field Monday featured a catcher starting at second base and a first baseman/DH patrolling left field. The usual DH was in right field, the usual right fielder was in center and the second baseman was (again) the DH.

And yet, the defense was the least of the Red Sox' issues in the annual Patriots Day game at Fenway.

Christian Vazquez, making his first appearance at second in the big leagues, handled the few chances sent his way, and Steve Pearce, in the outfield for the first time as a member of the Sox, executed a nice sliding catch in the sixth.

Nope, the defense was fine.

Everything else? Not so good.

The Red Sox wrapped up their first homestand of the season with a 3-3 mark. Ordinarily, that wouldn't be grounds for excessive concern, despite the fact they played at .703 clip at home last year. Small sample size, early in the year, yadda, yadda.

But consider that that .500 mark came against two teams on the rebuild, with neither expected to sniff contention for a while and it becomes more worrisome. And coming on the heels of a disastrous 3-8 season-opening road trip and Fenway was supposed to offer a roadmap for the Sox to begin their turnaround, and well, it's a problem.

You can look at all the numbers you'd like — the Red Sox' run differential of minus-32 is eyepopping, by the way — but this being a bottom-line, results-first business, here's the one that should catch your attention the most: the Red Sox have played five series this season and have yet to win a single one.

There's simply no positive way to spin that, even if you were so inclined. In a season almost three weeks old, the Red Sox haven't figured out a way to beat a single team more than they've been beaten.

Ugh.

“Obviously, it’s not the start we were looking for,” Mitch Moreland told BostonSportsJournal.com.

Moreland then dissected the Sox’ main problem, one familiar to all underperforming teams since the game began: “It seems like when we hit, we have a tough time keeping runs off the board. And when it’s kind of the opposite — when we pitch, we don’t score many. It’s kind of vice versa.”

In a bit of a reversal, the Red Sox managed to fail in both components Monday, a rare bit of symmetry for a team seemingly out of sync since its first game. Facing the immortal Dan Straily and his 19.29 ERA, the Red Sox were held hitless until the fifth inning. They finished the afternoon with a total of four hits.

And on the mound, they were similarly inept: Six pitchers were utilized and only two held the Orioles’ young and inexperienced lineup off the scoreboard.

So, pitching and hitting — two of the three basic food groups — have been equally suspect, though not always at the same time. But the Sox’ 6-11 mark reflects deeper issues.

“You look at the game and we haven’t played it the way we’re capable of playing,” Moreland said. “We’re walking guys, we don’t make plays in certain situations that lead to longer innings. As for as at-bats, we’re not getting many innings where we’re constantly putting guys on and putting pressure on the other team. We’re having quick innings. It’s just been a tough run.”

Alex Cora continues to walk the fine line that separates general dissatisfaction with his team’s play and not sounding the panic button. Cora is intent on projecting some stability in the clubhouse. The last thing he needs to do is send a message to his players that he’s lost faith in his roster.

But it’s a walk that becomes harder to navigate each day.

“It doesn’t concern me,” said Cora when reminded that his team has yet to win a series. “It’s just a bad start. We’ve got to keep working on it, keep preaching. We know what we have to do. It’s an awesome group, from the coaching staff to the players. Keep preaching that it will get better, and it will get better.”

That’s the analysis, that’s the pep talk for public consumption. But in the standings, there’s this: the cold, naked shame of being 6-11.

“There are no excuses for it, obviously,” concluded Moreland.

Worse, there are no answers either, at least not yet.

Asked to characterize the mood in the clubhouse, Moreland offered up a string of adjectives, none of them positive.

“Disappointed, frustrated, angry, anxious...,” said Moreland. “There’s a lot of words to describe it, but none of those words are going to help us get it going. In the end, we’ve got to forget all that and go out and play one pitch at a time, one inning at a time, and try to win that pitch, win that inning. That usually leads to winning the game, and after we do that, try to win the next one and get it going.”

BSJ Game Report: Orioles 8, Red Sox 1 – Homestand ends on sour note

Sean McAdam

Velazquez joins the list with control issues: Already in this young season, Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi, known for impeccable control, have seen their walk rates spike at an alarming rate. On Monday, Hector Velazquez joined the club. After not issuing a single walk in his first five appearances, covering 9.2

innings, Velazquez suddenly couldn't find the plate, walking the first batter he faced and four of the first eight batters he faced in his second spot start. Just one of those hitters he walked, but the three walks in the second inning resulted in a 33-pitch second inning, which in turn, limited Velazquez to just three innings of work while the Sox were hoping for at least four, if not five from him. "I think today Hector didn't have his split," said Alex Cora. "He had a good fastball, but the split, out of the hand, right away, was a ball. He was off. He's really a two-pitch pitcher. That's what was going on with him."

Vazquez handles shift to second base: In a surprise move, catcher Christian Vazquez got the start at second base in a makeshift lineup. It was only the second game for him at that spot as a pro — and first since 2010 — but Vazquez met the challenge. He started a 4-6-3 double play on the third batter of the game and in the second, made a nice catch of a throw from outfielder Mookie Betts before applying a swipe tag on Renato Nunez for an out at second. His only other chance — a fairly routine grounder in the fifth — was also handled without incident. "It was fun, something different," said Vazquez. "After the first ground ball, it was cool." He had a unique feed on the double play, with an overhand throw to shortstop Xander Bogaerts with his feet planted toward the plate, but it worked. "I didn't want to miss Bogey," he said. "I was trying to go under(hand), but that wasn't a good idea." Cora praised Vazquez for communicating well with both Bogaerts, the pitchers and others about bunt coverage and defensive alignments.

Holt heads out on rehab assignment: Brock Holt, who has been on the Injured List since April 7 with a scratched cornea incurred the morning of Opening Day, will begin a rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket starting Tuesday. Holt has been with the club in the interim, but has been somewhat limited in what he can do as the team waits for his eye to heal. Early in the season, as Holt tried to play through the injury, he had difficulty picking up pitches and recognizing spin. He'll need some time to get his eyes trained for baseball again and to get his timing down, but when he returns, the Red Sox will, presumably, be able to go back to a four-man bench, thus giving Cora more options to help avoid strange lineups like the one he was forced to field Monday.

TURNING POINT

The Red Sox' last best hope came in the seventh. Trailing 4-1, they finally got their second hit — a leadoff double from J.D. Martinez — but he remained at second as the Sox went down in order after that with two strikeouts.

ONE UP

J.D. Martinez: Martinez remains the lone constant in the Red Sox lineup. He collected two more hits and has hit safely in every game but one.

TWO DOWN

Rafael Devers: Devers committed another error, his second of the series and fifth of the season which is not yet three weeks old.

Dustin Pedroia: Installed in the leadoff spot, Pedroia didn't get on base at all, going hitless in four plate appearances.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"There's a lot of searching throughout the lineup." Alex Cora

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Red Sox lost nearly as many games (two) to the Orioles this series as they did in the previous 22 games (three).

Martinez has reached base in all 17 Red Sox games this season.

The homer allowed by Marcus Walden was the first of his career.

Mookie Betts recorded his fourth outfield assist
Steve Pearce's outfield start was his first since last June while with Toronto.
UP NEXT

The Red Sox begin a five-game road trip in New York Tuesday, with LHP Chris Sale (0-3, 9.00) vs. LHP James Paxton (1-2, 6.00) at 6:35

*** *The Athletic***

What's wrong with the Red Sox? Well, how much time have you got?

Chad Jennings

A baseball season, they say, is a marathon, not a sprint. And there was only one marathon worth watching in Boston on Monday.

The helicopter overhead was monitoring the runners approaching Boylston Street. On the ground at Fenway Park, it was better to look away. The Red Sox managed just four hits, they gave up eight runs, they had a catcher playing second base, and a reliever pitching the first inning. They lost to the lowly Orioles, 8-1, and finished .500 on a homestand that was supposed to breathe fresh life into a lifeless title defense. They have a 6-11 record, and it's only going to get harder from here.

Answers? The Red Sox have none, only a hardened belief that they are better than this and will play that way eventually.

"It will get better," manager Alex Cora said. "There's no timetable. Obviously, the sooner the better. Trust me, I'm not saying 'let's wait a month and fix this,' but we're working on it on a daily basis, you know? It's just, right now, the results are not out there on the field."

Results seemed to be put on a tee Monday morning. All the Red Sox had to do was come out swinging to take advantage. But they didn't. They were facing, by far, baseball's worst team over the past year. They were also finishing a homestand, with Boston Marathon buzz in the background, and a chance to win a series for the first time this season. There's no such thing as a layup in baseball, but the setup clearly favored the defending champs. Instead:

Orioles starter Dan Straily held the Red Sox to one run through five innings. He had been released by the Marlins three weeks ago, and he had a 19.29 ERA in his first two games since joining the Orioles. The four hits by the Red Sox were a season low.

Orioles first baseman Chris Davis hit a home run to put things out of reach in the eighth. He hadn't homered in 35 games before that long ball. He hadn't had a hit in 54 at-bats before going 3-for-5 on Saturday. Dwight Smith Jr. scored a career-high four runs, and Renato Nunez had a career-high three hits. The Red Sox lost for the 11th time in 17 games. It's their worst record at this point in a season since 2011. They didn't take their 11th loss last year until May 9, when they'd already won 25 times. They next have two games against the rival Yankees, then three against the division-leading Rays. This past week was supposed to be the soft part of the schedule, and the Red Sox lost as many as they won. "I don't have an answer for you," Mitch Moreland said. "The game goes that way sometimes. We haven't really created a whole lot of opportunities for ourselves. It's just we haven't got it clicking yet."

That much has been obvious and pervasive. What's wrong with the Red Sox? How much time have you got?

Their strike-throwers aren't throwing strikes: Before Monday's game, spot starter Hector Velazquez had not walked a batter in his past 12 outings dating back 18 1/3 innings to late last year. But he allowed a

career-high four against the Orioles. He seemed to be following the lead of regular starters Nathan Eovaldi and Rick Porcello, typically low-walk guys, who have combined for 22 walks in six starts this season.

Their deep offense is remarkably thin: J.D. Martinez, Mitch Moreland and Xander Bogaerts are the only Red Sox with an OPS above .737 except for Andrew Benintendi, who has an .812 OPS but can't play at the moment because of a sore foot. This is a lineup that showed considerable length last year, but even Mookie Betts is hitting just .222 and Jackie Bradley Jr.'s new-and-improved swing has generated just one extra-base hit to go with a .149 average.

Their depth has been pushed to its breaking point: Benintendi is day-to-day, Bradley is out sick, Eduardo Nunez has a sore back, Brock Holt is on the injured list with a scratched eye, and Dustin Pedroia isn't supposed to play the field too often while he returns from knee surgery. All that left catcher Christian Vazquez to start at second base on Monday, which actually worked pretty well – he started a double play, tagged out a runner trying to stretch a single, and generally made all the routine plays – but it was indicative of a roster without much more room to bend.

Their best relievers haven't had much to do: After all the hand-wringing about the bullpen, the top relievers have been excellent. Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Brandon Workman have combined for just two runs in 22 appearances, but there haven't been enough leads worth protecting. Heath Hembree, Colten Brewer and Tyler Thornburg have combined for 16 earned runs in their 24 appearances.

Their rotation is basically one guy: The Red Sox' five-man rotation is supposed to be their greatest strength, but they've had only five starts last through the sixth inning. Three of those starts belonged to David Price, who is the only starter with an ERA below 7.98. Chris Sale and Eduardo Rodriguez had one good start apiece, but the entire rotation has combined for just two wins (a product of early deficits and a lack of run support).

Their fundamentals are hardly a given: Rafael Devers made his fifth error, bringing him back into a tie for the major league lead and leaving the Red Sox tied for the second most of any team. That's to say nothing of the dropped fly balls and baserunners foolishly thrown out during the opening west coast road trip. The team has been frustrating at best, sloppy at worst.

Their power has faded: A year ago, the Red Sox had the highest slugging percentage in baseball thanks to a ton of doubles and 208 home runs (more or less on par with all but the top three home run hitting teams in the game). So far this year they're in the bottom half of the majors in home runs and bottom third in slugging percentage. They're still hitting doubles at a good clip, but the lineup's not nearly as dangerous from at-bat to at-bat.

"I know it's rough, I know it's tough," Bogaerts said. "Just got to keep showing up every day with a winning mentality. I know we're going to go on a nice run. I just don't know when. It will be nice to go on one pretty soon."

As the Red Sox loaded up to hit the road, there were still hundreds of marathon runners on the course working their way to the finish line. The Red Sox, heading for New York, are still trying to get into the race.

What should we make of Red Sox 'chaos' lineup with Christian Vazquez at second base?

Chad Jennings

It was mid-morning on Marathon Monday, and the Red Sox clubhouse was filling quickly for the only 11 a.m. first pitch of the season. The lineup had long ago been posted in the clubhouse and on social media. Dustin Pedroia at second base. Christian Vazquez catching. Steve Pearce was the designated hitter. No surprises. The early start was only truly unique part of the day.

That was, until manager Alex Cora walked through the clubhouse and muttered something to vice president of media relations Kevin Gregg about a lineup change. Position swap only. Finalizing it now. Standby.

Not five minutes later came this alignment, which will surely be the most unexpected series of names and positions this season:

Dustin Pedroia DH
Mookie Betts CF
Mitch Moreland 1B
J.D. Martinez RF
Xander Bogaerts SS
Rafael Devers 3B
Steve Pearce LF
Blake Swihart C
Christian Vazquez 2B

That's a nine-man lineup with only three guys at their regular spots. One of the game's most accomplished second basemen has been moved to designated hitter so that a catcher can play second for the first time in nine years. A Gold Glove right fielder is in center, a Silver Slugger designated hitter is in right, a platoon first baseman in left, and the lineup's original left fielder has moved behind the plate. That's chaos, and Alex Cora said to be ready for more.

"Don't be surprised if we're moving people around the whole game like we did in the World Series from spot to spot," Cora said. "Should be a fun one. Looking forward to it, honestly."

Honestly, what the hell is this?

It starts with second thoughts about Pedroia

In the original lineup, Pedroia was playing second base for the second time in three days. He's still in the lineup for the third day in a row. As it is, this is more than the Red Sox were expecting from Pedroia this early in the season. Clearly short-handed, the Red Sox were going to push Pedroia during this rainy early start, but they thought better of it.

"I mean, we have a program, (and) we have to be disciplined," Cora said. "We were pushing him to play second, but it doesn't make sense. Something happens today with him, and then it's on us. So, the only thing we can do is DH him and keep him off his feet as much as possible and push him so far. It's a tough start. It's tough conditions."

The wet conditions, though, were only a minor factor, Cora said. He's a big picture manager, and Pedroia is a big-picture situation. In the short-term, he's the obvious choice to play second base. In the long term, it's maybe not the best idea.

"We have to take care of him," Cora said.

Resting Pedroia makes sense, but why Vazquez?

Beyond Pedroia are four players on the active Red Sox roster who have big league experience at second base. Vazquez is not one of them.

Eduardo Nunez has played the position 270 times, including on Opening Day. Betts got to the big leagues as a second baseman and played there in an emergency last season. Pearce has 242 2/3 innings at the second, most recently in 2016. Swihart was training to be a utility man last spring and played two innings there last season.

Instead, the Red Sox went with the guy who got 4 2/3 innings at second base with Class-A Greenville back in 2010.

“Christian has been taking ground balls at second and at short and at third,” Cora said. “He’s caught three in a row or four in a row or whatever it is.”

(It’s three in a row.)

“We’re comfortable with him as far as making the routine play,” Cora continued. “He can turn the double play. He played first base in the World Series. That’s the biggest stage in this sport, and the first play he made was a step back with the game on the line, a flip to first. He wants to do it, he likes to do it, and we’re going with him.”

Roughly an hour before first pitch, Vazquez was on the field with coach Ramon Vazquez, standing at second base and clearly going over positioning.

“If there’s a ground ball, I’m going to block it,” he said. “So, I’ve got a cup. Don’t worry.”

These might be the only nine position players available

Jackie Bradley Jr. was a late scratch from Sunday’s lineup. He’s sick. Andrew Benintendi fouled a ball off his foot on Sunday. He’s day-to-day. Something is wrong with Nunez. Maybe sick? Maybe hurt? Cora only gave a knowing smile and said, “he’s available,” before giving a vague state-of-the-roster announcement.

“There’s a few people sick or they’re banged up,” he said. “Trying to stay away from certain guys, and this is what we have.”

Remember, the team is carrying an extra reliever, having optioned Tzu-Wei Lin back to the minors without replacing Brock Holt, who’s out with a scratched eye. So, basically, this is it. Nine guys, with a 10th who’s only a phone call away.

“Jackie’s sick, but he’s available in an emergency,” Cora said. “He lives across the street so if something happens, we’ll call him.”

Flexibility and versatility are not one and the same

This is a flexible roster. Aside from Moreland, Pedroia, Devers and Bogaerts, every single player has at least some ability and willingness to play outside of his regular position (even Moreland has long-lost experience in the outfield, plus a couple of scoreless innings on the mound). Betts, Swihart, Nunez, Holt and Pearce have experience in both the infield and the outfield. Vazquez played both infield corners at some point last season.

But versatile? Nunez and Holt are still the only true utility players on the team, and Holt’s on the injured list while Nunez is sidelined with some sort of issue. Swihart is an outfielder in a pinch and an infielder in an emergency. Pearce is making only his 10th outfield start since 2017. Betts is in center field because, with Benintendi and Bradley out of the mix, he’s really the only guy who can play that position.

“I don’t know about versatility,” Cora said. “But they’re prepared. ... There were a lot of thoughts. It was like, a lot of discussions and we feel like we’re very comfortable with the guys we’re playing today and where they’re at.”

*** *The New York Post***

Yankees-Red Sox was never supposed to look like this

George A. King III

Donald Trump's hair on top of Oscar the Grouch's mug.

That's how ugly the Yankees' and Red Sox's start to the season has been with no immediate indications it is going to improve quickly for either.

A popular pick to unseat the defending World Series champions in the AL East, the Yankees' injured list includes some of the game's biggest stars and the active roster is drowning in disappointment.

Hence, Aaron Boone's club lugs a 6-9 ledger into Yankee Stadium on Tuesday night against a 6-11 Red Sox squad that looks more like the Blue Jays than the bunch that celebrated a World Series title last year at Dodger Stadium.

According to Elias Sports Bureau, this is the first time since April 12, 2014 the Red Sox and Yankees have met with losing records. They each were 5-6 entering that Bronx matchup.

The sub-.500 records aren't the only thing odd about the season's first meeting of sports' most fierce rivalry.

A midweek series isn't unheard of, but two games on school/work nights rarely matches the intensity of Yankee Stadium and Fenway Park on a weekend. Even the Tyler Austin-Joe Kelly ignited dustup on a Wednesday night at Fenway last April was mild by comparison to other disturbances.

While hoping his staggering club, losers of five of six, begins to end a miserable start on Tuesday, Boone said he understands the Red Sox at some point are going to improve.

"We know what they are capable of," Boone said after his club dropped two of three to the White Sox at Yankee Stadium where the Yankees are 3-6. "Anytime we get together with them, it is going to be tough battles. Both teams before long will probably be rolling pretty well."

Of the two, the Red Sox have the better chance because they don't have big names on the shelf. Furthermore, the Yankees don't know when Luis Severino, Giancarlo Stanton, Aaron Hicks, Dellin Betances, Gary Sanchez, Miguel Andujar, Troy Tulowitzki and Didi Gregorius will return.

That doesn't mean the Red Sox are without warts.

Ace Chris Sale's drop in velocity and 0-3 record to go with an obese 9.00 ERA is alarming and while the Craig Kimbrel-less bullpen has been effective, questions across a six-month season remain.

All four starters are struggling and have contributed to the early mess for each club. James Paxton opposes Sale on Tuesday night and lugs a 1-2 record and 6.00 ERA to the mound after believing he was tipping his knuckle curve and the Astros were swiping signs in his last outing, in which he was punished.

Wednesday evening provides Nathan Eovaldi against J.A. Happ and they have been as bad as Tuesday night's participants. Eovaldi brings an 8.40 ERA into his fourth start and has given up 18 hits (six homers) in 15 innings and has walked (10) as many as he has whiffed. Happ is 0-2 with an 8.76 ERA in three starts.

As for the Yankees getting their first look at the Red Sox after being eliminated from the ALDS last October, Luke Voit was vocal about using the Red Sox as a springboard.

"For sure, after what happened last year. A lot of us were in that locker room and [it] left a little bad taste in our mouth," Voit said. "That was my first time in the playoffs and it sucks to lose. [It's] exciting to get a chance to get back at them."

What happens with that chance is unknown because even as bad as the Red Sox have been, their lineup is better than the Orioles, Tigers and White Sox against whom the Yankees went 3-6 at home to begin a nightmare start to their season.

*** *Associated Press***

Smith Jr. homers, drives in 4 in O's 8-1 win over Red Sox

BOSTON -- Chris Davis knows his homer went a lot further than teammate Dwight Smith Jr.'s two-run shot. He also knows he'll have his time to gloat.

Smith hooked his homer into the first row of seats down the right field line and drove in four, leading the Baltimore Orioles past the Red Sox 8-1 Monday in Boston's annual Patriots' Day game.

"He's been really doing well, there's no reason to talk," said Davis, smiling. "I'll wait a little bit and talk."

Davis also had a two-run shot -- estimated just short of 100 feet longer than Smith's -- projected at 408 feet into the right-field bleachers.

"Honestly, I had no clue if it was going to get over," Smith said of his drive. "Whoever caught it might have helped me out, honestly. A homer is a homer. I'll take it anyway."

Asked about Davis' shot, Smith said: "He crushed it. That's his name -- 'Crush' -- for a reason."

Renato Nunez had three hits with an RBI single for Baltimore, which salvaged a split of the four-game series. It had lost nine of its previous 11 games and was 4-21 in its last 25 against Boston.

Davis halted a record 0-for-54 stretch Saturday, the longest ever for a position player. He started the season 0 for 33.

It was the 60th straight year the Red Sox were scheduled to play on the holiday. The defending World Series champs completed a 3-3 homestand and have yet to win one of their five series this season.

"It doesn't concern me. It's just a bad start," Boston manager Alex Cora said.

Dan Straily (1-1) rebounded from a rough debut start with Baltimore, giving up a run on two hits in five innings. He was tagged for five runs and eight hits over 3 1/3 innings by Oakland last week.

The Red Sox open a two-game series against the Yankees on Tuesday night in New York, the first meeting between the rivals since they ousted the Yanks in the divisional round of the playoffs last October.

Leading 1-0, Baltimore scored three times in the fifth off reliever Marcus Walden. Smith's homer sliced into the seats about 20 feet down from the Pesky Pole, which is 302 feet away, and came after Jonathan Villar's RBI single.

Smith added a two-run double.

Boston played short-handed, with Andrew Benintendi out with a bruised right foot after fouling a ball off it Sunday, and Jackie Bradley Jr. out with the flu.

That led the Red Sox to have catcher Christian Vazquez started at second base for the first time in his career. He handled two grounders and a tag play cleanly.

"He was smooth. He was smooth, man," Red Sox shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. "Obviously behind the dish he's pretty smooth, so I didn't think we would have a problem with him back there."

Orioles rookie manager Brandon Hyde got his first ejection, tossed by crew chief Mark Wegner after his challenge on the "slide rule" at second base was upheld. Hyde said he knew he was going to get thrown out.

"To me, they just made a wrong decision," Hyde said. "I didn't agree with the decision in New York at all."

Spot starter Hector Velazquez (0-1) gave up a run in three innings.

MOOKIE MAD

Reigning AL MVP Mookie Betts was 0 for 3 and let his batting average drop to .222. He criticized himself harshly after the game, taking his share of the blame for Boston's surprising 6-11 start after last year's World Series championship.

"Basically, what I'm doing is unacceptable," Betts said. "I have to figure out a way to get something done and help the team."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Orioles: Smith was back in the lineup after not starting Sunday with a sore right leg.

MARATHON BOMBINGS MEMORY

There was a moment of silence before the game.

Six years ago, two bombs exploded near the Boston Marathon finish line less than an hour after the Red Sox beat Tampa Bay, killing three people and injuring more than 260.

The Red Sox wore jerseys with "BOSTON" in red letters on the front -- something they started during a Marathon tribute when they returned to the field at Fenway Park for the first time after the bombings.

MOVING PARTS

Cora shifted his lineup all around.

Besides Vazquez at second, Steve Pearce started in left field and Dustin Pedroia was at DH.

"Plenty of fun," Cora said about making the lineup. "These are the days that you really enjoy being a manager. It's a challenge and we're ready to play."

An original lineup had Pedroia at second, Vazquez catching and Pearce as the DH.

UP NEXT

LHP Chris Sale (0-3, 9.00 ERA) looks to turn around his rough start against Yankees LHP James Paxton (1-2, 6.00) on Tuesday.