

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, April 20, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Power surge lifts Red Sox over Rays

Peter Abraham

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Mookie Betts was a study in blunt accountability earlier this week, saying his performance for the Red Sox this season had been unacceptable.

Two hitless games against the Yankees followed. Betts then grounded out in his first two at-bats against the Tampa Bay Rays on Friday night, one for a double play.

To that point, the reigning American League Most Valuable Player had not had an extra-base hit or run batted in since April 9.

Betts then started the process of turning his season around. He doubled and scored a run in the sixth inning then hit a long go-ahead home run in the eighth as the Sox came back to beat the first-place Rays, 6-4.

Betts and Mitch Moreland had back-to-back home runs. That drew such a roar from the Sox-centric crowd of 21,324 at Tropicana Field that it sounded like Fenway Park.

As he rounded first base after a 424-foot shot to center, Betts pumped his fist. He needed that moment.

“We fought to stay in the game. Just excited,” Betts said. “A lot of emotions going through my head there.”

Betts has slumped only occasionally in his career. But when he does, he wears it like a suit of armor as the frustration weighs on him.

J.D. Martinez can accept a bad week because he knows the results will come if he sticks to his routine. But Betts beats himself up. You can tell his OPS from his expression.

“I think everybody in here, maybe except for him, knows it’s coming. Nobody in here is as worried about him as he is,” Moreland said. “He’s the best player in the game in our eyes.”

“You watch this guy night in and night out the way he affects the game and changes the game, whether it’s on the base paths, defensive side, at the plate. It’s only a matter of time before he gets it rolling.”

If there can be such a thing as a must-win series in April, this is it for the Sox, who came in eight games behind the Rays. They started the three-game set with one of their best efforts of this fractured season.

“We have two shots to win the series. This is the first time I can say that this whole season,” manager Alex Cora said.

The offense produced 10 hits, five for extra bases. Brandon Workman, Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier shut the Rays out over the final three innings, not allowing a hit.

The defense also turned three double plays, newly promoted second baseman Tzu-Wei Lin in the middle of each of them.

When Brasier stranded a runner on second in the ninth inning for his fourth save, the Sox (7-13) snapped a three-game losing streak.

“Sometimes you can get going in this game with one swing. Mookie had that swing,” Martinez said. “That was big for us. We needed to look at the scoreboard and see results.”

As a result of Blake Snell landing on the injured list with a fractured toe, the Rays used a series of relievers against the Sox. They were almost perfect over the first four innings as Ryan Stanek and Ryan Yarbrough threw 43 pitches and didn’t allow a hit.

The Rays had a 2-0 lead on Eduardo Rodriguez by that point. Brandon Lowe hit a 334-foot home run into right field corner in the second inning. Avisail Garcia’s triple drove in a run in the third inning.

The Sox ended a scoreless streak of 11 innings in the fifth when they took a 3-2 lead.

Martinez drew a leadoff walk and scored from first when Rafael Devers drove a double to the gap in right field. Christian Vazquez followed with a home run to center field.

He has four homers on the season, one more than all of 2018 and one shy of his career high set in 2017.

The Sox took a 4-2 lead in the sixth inning against the third Tampa Bay pitcher, righthander Wilmer Font.

Betts snapped an 0-for-12 streak with a double down the line in left. After Moreland singled, Martinez singled to center and Betts scored.

The Sox were set up for a big inning but Font struck out Xander Bogaerts, Devers and Vazquez.

The Rays tied the game in the bottom of the inning. Austin Meadows singled to center before Garcia reached on an error by Devers. He has six already this season.

Daniel Robertson’s double down the line in left scored two runs. With one out, Workman replaced Rodriguez and got Willy Adames to ground into a double play.

Rodriguez was charged with three earned runs over 5½ innings. His last two starts (five earned runs over 12 innings) were a vast improvement over the first two (11 earned runs over eight innings).

Rodriguez was watching from the clubhouse when Betts gave the Sox the lead back.

“We know who he is,” Rodriguez said. “He’s not hitting the ball pretty good right now. But when he gets hot, it’s going to be hot. You’re going to see that show every day.”

Red Sox trade Blake Swihart to Arizona

Peter Abraham

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Red Sox gave away Blake Swihart’s No. 23 on Friday afternoon, assigning it to rookie infielder Michael Chavis when he was called up from Triple A Pawtucket.

Then they parted with Swihart a few hours later.

The utility player was traded to Arizona along with \$500,000 in international bonus pool space for minor league outfielder Marcus Wilson.

Wilson, 22, was assigned to Double A Portland. He is a former second-round draft pick who has hit .255 with a .727 OPS over parts of six professional seasons. Baseball America ranked him as the No. 20 prospect in Arizona’s system.

The Sox included the bonus pool space to get a better prospect back from the Diamondbacks, president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said. They feel Wilson has potential.

“He’s somebody we’ve liked since the day he was drafted,” Dombrowski said. “We had interest back then from [scouting director] Mike Rikard and his staff.”

Wilson was only 17 when he was drafted and played five seasons in Rookie or Single A before moving up to Double A Jackson this year. He is considered an average defender with developing offensive skills.

Wilson was drafted in 2014 when Red Sox vice president Tony La Russa was the chief baseball officer of the Diamondbacks.

That Arizona wanted Swihart was no surprise. General manager Mike Hazen was the Red Sox farm director when Swihart was drafted in 2011 and the assistant GM when Swihart made his major league debut in 2015.

Manager Torey Lovullo also knows Swihart well from his time on the Red Sox coaching staff.

Hazen said the Diamondbacks plan to use Swihart as a utility player more so than a catcher. The Diamondbacks are already carrying three catchers and plan to stay with that group.

For Swihart, who is from New Mexico, Arizona represents a chance to play close to home and reset his career. He had a .679 OPS over parts of five seasons for the Sox before being designated for assignment on Tuesday.

The Sox have been trying to trade Swihart going back to last season.

“We were close a couple of times,” Dombrowski said. “There were clubs that would show interest but never really bought a lot of value back in the deals. It never got that close.”

Pedroia relieved

Dustin Pedroia felt a popping sensation in his left knee when he fouled off a fastball from J.A. Happ in the second inning of Wednesday night’s game against the Yankees.

As he rotated his hips to swing, Pedroia’s cleat stuck in the dirt and his knee pushed back against the brace he has been wearing all season.

“I torqued and my knee didn’t,” Pedroia said.

Pedroia stayed at the plate and flied out to right field before telling manager Alex Cora he needed to come out.

Based on Pedroia’s fearful expression, Cora feared his second baseman had suffered a season-ending injury.

“I was thinking about the worst,” the manager said.

But when Pedroia was examined at the Hospital for Special Surgery in Manhattan on Thursday, the diagnosis was irritation. There was no further damage to any ligaments or cartilage.

Pedroia was placed on the 10-day injured list as a precaution. He rejoined the team Thursday night and has felt fine since.

“I was nervous,” Pedroia said. “It was good news, the best I can get. We’re just going to let it calm down for a few days and then it should be all right.”

Pedroia is likely to use a different style of brace when he returns to playing.

“I shouldn’t be taking swings and feeling that. It was just a weird freak thing,” he said. “I’m kind of over those freak things. I just want to get out there and have fun and play and help us win. Hopefully that’s coming.”

Cora said there is no timetable for Pedroia to return or any decision made as to whether he will play any minor league games first.

Lin, Chavis recalled
The Red Sox made a series of roster moves.

Infielder Eduardo Nunez was played on the 10-day injured list retroactive to Thursday with a mid-back strain.

Righthander Erasmo Ramirez, who allowed four runs in three innings of relief on Wednesday against the Yankees, was designated for assignment.

Chavis and Tzu Wei-Lin were recalled from Triple A Pawtucket. Lin started at second base against the Rays and went 1 for 4.

With Pedroia, Nunez and Brock Holt all on the injured list, the Sox plan to use Lin as their primary second baseman for now.

The 25-year-old has hit .286 for Pawtucket and played one game for the Sox earlier this season. Lin has hit .254 with a .722 OPS in 63 career games in the majors.

Nunez’s back had left him unable to swing a bat properly.

“It’s the middle of the back. It’s been going on for a few days,” Cora said. “We tried to give it two days. Offensively is where it’s bothering him. It’s very rotational.”

Holt, who has a scratched right cornea, has been fitted with a new contact lens and could play for Triple A Pawtucket on Monday.

Chavis, 23, has only five games of experience at second in his career, all this season for Pawtucket. The Sox plan to use him off the bench for what could be a short stint.

“This is the big leagues. When we need somebody, we need somebody,” Cora said. “He can play first; he can play third; he can hit . . . we’ll find ways to get Michael at-bats.”

Chavis was the 26th overall pick of the 2014 draft. He struggled for three seasons before a breakout 2017 season. He was then suspended 80 games in 2018 after testing positive for an anabolic steroid.

Chavis returned to hit .298 with a .919 OPS in 46 minor league games last season. He hit .250 with a .954 OPS in 12 games for Pawtucket this season.

Ring him up

Cora and Dombrowski presented Tampa Bay lefthander Jalen Beeks with his World Series ring during batting practice. Beeks appeared in two games for the Sox last season before being traded for Nathan Eovaldi. . . . Jackie Bradley Jr. turned 29 on Friday . . . Andrew Benintendi returned to the lineup after missing three games with a sore left foot, the result of a foul ball. He went 0 for 3 from the leadoff spot; he and Bradley were the only starters without a hit.

Red Sox put Eduardo Nunez on injured list

Peter Abraham

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Red Sox made a series of roster moves Friday ahead of their game against the Tampa Bay Rays.

Infielder Eduardo Nunez was played on the 10-day injured list retroactive to Thursday with a mid-back strain.

Righthander Erasmo Ramirez, who allowed four runs in three innings of relief Tuesday against the Yankees, was designated for assignment.

Infielders Michael Chavis and Tzu Wei-Lin were recalled from Triple A Pawtucket. This is the first time Chavis has been on the major league roster.

On Thursday, the 6-13 Sox placed Dustin Pedroia on the injured list with left knee inflammation and recalled righthanded reliever Marcus Walden.

With Nunez, Pedroia, and Brock Holt all on the injured list, Lin and Chavis are the only second basemen on the roster.

The 25-year-old Lin has 14 games of major league experience at the position. Chavis, 23, has only five games of experience at second in his entire career, all this season for Pawtucket.

Chavis was the 26th overall pick of the 2014 draft. He struggled for three seasons before a breakout 2017 season. He was then suspended 80 games in 2018 after testing positive for an anabolic steroid.

Chavis returned to hit .298 with a .919 OPS in 46 minor league games last season. He hit .250 with a .954 OPS in 12 games for Pawtucket this season. Chavis homered in three of his last five games for the PawSox.

Chavis has been primarily a third baseman in his professional career, with games at first base, shortstop, and second base.

Lin hit .286 for Pawtucket. He played one game for the Sox earlier this season, and has hit .254 with a .722 OPS in 63 career games in the majors.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Mookie Betts comes alive as Red Sox capture 6-4 win over first-place Rays

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Mookie Betts, feeling so lost at the plate he's started looking to Alex Cora during the middle of at-bats for affirmation, finally got a pitch he couldn't miss.

It was timely. It was well-struck. And it broke a tie in the eighth inning to lift the Red Sox to a borderline-desperate win, 6-4, over the first-place Rays, who entered the day with MLB's best record at 14-5.

The Red Sox moved to 7-13, cut their deficit in the East to seven and finally have a chance to win their first series of the season over the weekend.

"We know where we are in the standings," said Cora. "But it's more about that we have two shots to win the series. Step by step. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. But we have a chance to win the series. That feels good."

It was a day of good feelings for a team that badly needed them.

First they learned that Dustin Pedroia's knee injury wasn't as bad as they feared. Then they watched Eduardo Rodriguez take another step forward with an outing deemed "outstanding" by Cora afterward.

But what they needed more than anything was to see their best player having a little bit of fun again.

"I think everybody in here, except for maybe him, knows it's coming," said Mitch Moreland. "Nobody in here is as worried about as him as he is. He's the best player in the game in our eyes. It's only a matter of time before he gets it rolling."

The look on Betts' face as he rounded first after his eighth-inning home run was less joy than relief. He pumped his fist twice around first, touched second, pumped his fist again, touched third and did it one more time on the way to home.

"A lot of emotions going through my head there," he said. "The main thing was that it put us ahead."

The reigning MVP entered Friday without an extra-base hit in seven straight games, tied for his longest such streak since 2017. It was starting to get to him. Last Monday, after a tough day at the plate contributed to the Sox' missing a chance to win a series against the lowly Orioles, Betts proclaimed his play "unacceptable." It didn't get much better in two games against the Yankees, when he went 0-for-7 in a series sweep.

"I'm the first one to hit every day," he said Friday. "I put in my work. It just hasn't shown. But it's definitely not from a lack of effort."

He started this one vs. the Rays 0-for-2 at the plate. Then he punched a full-count double to get himself going in the sixth inning, when he yanked a slider down the left-field line and later scored as the Sox took a 4-2 lead.

That hit right there "definitely felt like a weight came off my shoulders," he said.

It should've been good enough, with Rodriguez pitching confidently and the bullpen well-rested with Thursday's off-day.

Except that Devers, in his third big league season, keeps making rookie mistakes in the field. He made such a difficult play look easy in the fifth inning, rolling over a hot shot to his left and sending it quickly to second base for a buttery-smooth double play.

But he made such a routine play look difficult in the sixth, when Rodriguez put a double play on a platter for Devers, who let it roll through his legs. Daniel Robertson hit a two-run double to tie the game and the 2019 Red Sox appeared ready to outdo themselves with another loss that looked too gross to stomach.

Then finally, at long last the game's best player awoke. He watched as Rays flamethrower Diego Castillo threw him two balls off the plate to start the at-bat in the eighth. Ever so patient — perhaps too patient this year — Betts watched again on a 2-0 fastball down the pipe, a pitch he should've hammered.

But Castillo gave him another one, 97 mph and sinking over the heart of the plate. Betts handled it perfectly.

Not too hard, not too soft, just a simple swing that used the pitcher's speed to send it straight over the center-field fence. It left his bat at an unassuming 103 mph, just 6 mph faster than it came in.

"It's just one but it's definitely a starting point," Betts said. "The main thing was I helped, in some way, today."

Hitting coach Tim Hyers has been saying Betts needs to use less body and trust his hands. After the game, Hyers was asked if Betts used less body on that home run swing.

“I don’t know,” Hyers said, “but it was a bomb.”

Betts entered the game hitting .200 with a .676 OPS through 19 games. He ripped off his helmet after crossing home plate and soaked in the moment with high-fives and hugs in the dugout. Mitch Moreland went deep right behind him to give the Sox’ bullpen a much safer two-run lead.

Inside the dugout, they were still celebrating Betts’ homer.

“When you look around in big league stadiums, you look everywhere, there’s the average,” Cora said. “Back in the day, you didn’t have that. You only learned because of the newspaper. Now it’s all over the place. Although you don’t want to look, it’s there for you. It’s not cool when you’re struggling. It’s hard to smile when you’re struggling.”

“But he prepares, gives 100 percent regardless of the results. Sometimes, yeah he gets down, because he knows what he can do. But just like the team, it’s a long season. Still got plenty of games. Good to see him doing that.”

It could be the beginning of a hot streak.

“We’re about to see,” Cora said. “I’ve been saying, we’re getting close.”

Inside the clubhouse, the Sox feel it from their MVP.

“We know who he is,” Rodriguez said. “We know he’s not hitting the ball good right not but when he gets hot, it’s going to be hot. You’re going to see that show every day.”

Red Sox trade Blake Swihart to Diamondbacks

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Blake Swihart will stay in the Red Sox family, just not the current Red Sox family.

Swihart was traded to the Arizona Diamondbacks on Friday afternoon, reuniting him with former Red Sox bench coach Torey Lovullo, the Dbacks manager, and former front office members Mike Hazen, Jared Porter and Amiel Sawdaye, who was the Red Sox’ director of amateur scouting when the Sox drafted Swihart 26th overall in 2011.

“It’s an interesting situation with Blake because at times when we’ve talked about him, clubs have interest but it’s not a fit for them because of his role and if they have a fit at that particular time,” said Dave Dombrowski, Red Sox president of baseball operations. “Especially now, being out of options with teams. Last year, too. I would say (Arizona’s) people had interest in him for a while, because they liked him.”

The Sox also sent the Diamondbacks some international bonus pool money in the deal while acquiring 22-year-old outfielder Marcus Wilson, a second-round pick in 2014 who was considered the 20th-best prospect in Arizona’s system, per MLB.com.

The 6-foot-3, 175-pound outfielder is a career .255 hitter with a .727 OPS over parts of six years in the minors.

“He’s a guy we’ve liked since the day he was drafted,” Dombrowski said. “We had interest back then. He’s an athletic, tool player that we think has some projection. He’ll go to Double-A right now.”

Despite trying to trade Swihart for some time, Dombrowski said the Red Sox never got a deal done until they designated him for assignment this week.

“I’m happy for him that he’ll get an opportunity,” Dombrowski said. “I have no idea what his usage will be. I’ve always thought if he’s not going to catch for somebody that he’s a real good National League player because he can come in, go to different spots, be a third catcher, put him in the outfield, play third base. I don’t know how they’ll use him. I’m happy for him. Wishing him nothing but the best.”

Red Sox, Dustin Pedroia get good news on injured left knee

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Dustin Pedroia didn’t know what to think when he felt something in his surgically-repaired left knee pop during a foul ball at Yankee Stadium on Wednesday night.

He told manager Alex Cora what happened. Cora heard the word “pop” and immediately feared the worst.

Was this the end of Pedroia’s career?

“The way he reacted that day, I was like, ‘oh, this is it right here,’” Cora said Friday afternoon before the Red Sox’ game with the Rays. “But we got some positive news.”

While in New York this week, Pedroia met with doctors — not the same surgeon who originally operated on his knee, he said — and was told that it’s not a serious issue. Pedroia said he’s hoping to be back after the 10-day minimum on the injured list.

“Yeah I was nervous,” he said. “It was good news. The best I could get...I was a little upset, man. I’ve been through a lot. It’s fun being out there and playing. I shouldn’t be taking swings and feeling that. It was just a weird freak thing. I’m kind of over those freak things. I just want to get out there and play and help us win. Hopefully that’s coming.”

The freak thing this time, Pedroia said, was that his cleat got caught in the dirt as his body torqued on a foul ball, but his knee never torqued, thus the pop sensation he felt.

“More kind of scared me than anything,” he said. “So I saw the doctor yesterday and it could’ve been a couple of things. We’re going to let it calm down for a few days and it should be all right. It just twisted the wrong way. Sometimes the batter’s box is real tacky.”

Pedroia said he’s trying to find a new brace to wear that doesn’t restrict his knee so much and gives him more flexibility when swinging.

This setback is nothing like the one he had last May, when he played just three games and then was finished for the season.

“No it’s not like last year,” he said. “This was just one thing. I just got stuck and torqued on it and my spike didn’t even move. It was just a freak deal. We’ll figure it out.”

The Red Sox will be careful with him as he recovers this time, but feel like the veteran second baseman will back soon.

“Yes it was a relief,” said president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. “I really didn’t know what it took place when he left the game and when I went back down he was gone. Nobody had known what had taken place at that point. You get concerned based on as many things as he’s had taken place with him. Then we met with him last night when he got back face to face...You could tell he was relieved. Felt much better. He was irritated but the fear was it could’ve been worse.”

Pedroia was 2-for-20 but only struck out twice, a sign that he was seeing the ball OK but wasn't making enough quality contact. A minor league rehab assignment hasn't been ruled out this time around, though the Sox haven't made that decision yet.

"Now it's a matter of seeing how he reacts in a week, go through the same trail with the workload, all that," Cora said. "Whenever he's ready, he's ready. When he said something popped in my knee and the way he was in the clubhouse, I was thinking the worst. But we got some good news. We'll go from there."

Pedroia couldn't hide his good mood on Friday but is already desperate to get back in the lineup.

"I know we haven't played good at all," he said. "I know everyone says, 'oh it's early,' and all that. But we have to find a way to be good and get back after it. It takes everybody to do that."

Prospect Michael Chavis likely a short-term solution

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Red Sox summoned their top position player prospect, Michael Chavis, from Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday with the idea that it would be a short-term solution.

He's not yet ready to be the everyday second baseman, the Sox believe. But they're going to give him a chance to prove them wrong.

The 23-year-old Chavis, a former 26th overall draft pick in 2014, will play mostly first and third base in his first stint in the majors, manager Alex Cora said.

Tzu-Wei Lin was also recalled and will play second base while Dustin Pedroia (knee), Eduardo Nunez (back) and Brock Holt (eye) remain on the injured list.

"We've got Lin and he's going to play a lot," Cora said. "I know yesterday somebody asked me about Michael on the radio and I said this is a work in progress. But this is the big leagues. When you need somebody, you need somebody. He's been making the routine play at second base. We'll work with him to turn double plays. He can play first, third. He can hit. He's a right-handed bat that can help us out.

"Most likely Lin will play the majority of games at second but we'll find ways to get Michael at-bats. He's swinging the bat well. And far, from everything I've read. Happy for the kid that he's a big leaguer. Hopefully he can make an impact like he did in spring training."

Chavis was a shortstop in high school but quickly transitioned to third base in the minor leagues. He also began playing first base in the 2017 Arizona Fall League and split time at the corner infield positions last year, when he hit .298 with a .919 OPS in 46 games between three levels after returning from suspension due to performance enhancing drugs.

This year, he's played five games at second, six at third and one at first base with the PawSox, where he had a .954 OPS and four homers in 12 games.

The Sox are looking at Chavis as a short-term solution until others are ready to return from the injured list.

"We think he can play second but hasn't played there enough," said president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. "The feeling when we saw him in spring training, a lot depends on the future with our club and how we shape up... You can never tell. Guys come up and he'll have the ability to play some. We're short on infielders. And he can hit. We're not bringing up with the anticipation it's long-term, but if he earns it, by all means. I think it's a good experience for him."

Chavis seems like just the kind of player who could provide a spark to a sleepy team off to a 6-13 start.

“I don’t think we’re looking to him to provide a spark,” Dombrowski said. “That has to come from other people on the club. But it’s great to get someone like him. And really Lin is going to play more. But we like Lin a lot too. Second base has been an unfortunate situation. Really we’ve scuffled there so far, mostly due to health.”

The Red Sox don’t like the idea of jamming Chavis into action at second base and weren’t going to call him up until it was decided that Nunez needed time on the injured list to recover from his back injury.

“He was in consideration yes, but we don’t think he’s ready to play second base every day,” Dombrowski said. “He can go over there and play but we weren’t ready to entrust him with that. His bat we think he can hit. That was the reason behind that.”

BACK TIGHTNESS FOR NUNEZ

Nunez had tried playing through his back injury due to the Red Sox’ needs at second base, but it became too much for him and the Sox placed him on the injured list on Friday. He was hitting just .159 with a .360 OPS.

“Just his back, middle of his back, it’s been going on for two days,” Cora said. “We tried to give it two days, then he has to play. It’s offensively where it’s bothering him. It’s very rotating right now. There’s not much he can do. There was a game at home basically he even tried to bunt in a weird position with a man on third and two outs, whatever. People are like, ‘what is Alex doing? This guy is nuts.’ Basically it’s like, let’s make something happen. There was another at-bat where he actually predetermined not to swing and ended up walking. There was another one that he felt he could swing and it was a bad slider.

“He’s been fighting it but it gets to a point where it’s like, stay away from it, get better, come back, work on your swing, get a few at-bats and hopefully when he comes back he’s the same guy we saw in spring training, straight to the ball and very explosive.”

The Sox have been playing with a short bench all week, starting on Monday, when they had to use Christian Vazquez at second base.

ODDS AND ENDS

Holt, dealing with a scratched cornea in his right eye, is due to resume his minor league rehab assignment in Pawtucket on Monday.

“They’re working on the contact and were supposed to get it today, the one that hopefully makes him feel better,” Cora said. “If everything goes well he’ll take BP tomorrow with Nunez back home at Babson College. From there, Triple-A is going home on Monday, hopefully he can start there.”

Rick Porcello will start on Saturday vs. Charlie Morton and the Sox hope Porcello has fixed something after allowing 12 walks to just 10 strikeouts to start the year.

“Mechanics, he’s still working on that,” Cora said. “There are a few things he’s doing right, others that are not as good. They feel like mechanically they’re getting there. We’ll see tomorrow.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Mookie Betts’ 424-foot homer lifts Boston Red Sox over Rays; Mitch Moreland, Christian Vazquez also go deep

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox needed a win and reigning AL MVP Mookie Betts needed to break out of his prolonged slump.

Both things happened Friday.

Betts, who entered with a .676 OPS, connected on a 97.1 mph sinker from Rays righty Diego Castillo and crushed it 424 feet for a solo home run to center field, putting the Red Sox ahead 5-4 in the eighth.

Betts pumped his fist as he rounded the bases.

Betts and Mitch Moreland went back-to-back. Moreland's homer traveled 411 feet to right-center field. Betts also doubled and scored in the sixth inning.

The Red Sox won 6-4 at Tropicana Field.

Matt Barnes hurled a perfect eighth inning. Ryan Brasier record the save in the ninth.

Eduardo Rodriguez pitched 5.1 innings and allowed four runs, three earned, seven hits (one homer) and one walk while striking out six. The Red Sox's defense didn't help him.

Boston fell behind 2-0 in the third. Rafael Devers belted a 371-foot RBI double to right field to cut the Red Sox's deficit to 2-1 in the fifth inning.

Christian Vazquez, the next hitter, delivered a 408-foot home run to center field. It put Boston ahead 3-2.

Vazquez has bashed four home runs already. He hit three home runs all of last season. He's one home run shy of his career-high of five in 2017.

Shutdown inning thanks to Devers' double play

Eduardo Rodriguez recorded a shutdown inning in the bottom of the fifth right after the Red Sox took a 3-2 lead in the top half.

Yandy Diaz reached on an infield single with one out. But then Tommy Pham grounded into an inning-ending double play. Devers made an excellent play:

Rays tie it in sixth after Devers' error

Devers failed to make a routine play that could have resulted in a double play in the sixth.

Avisaíl García's routine grounder went right through Devers' legs. It should have been a double play. Instead it put runners at first and second with no outs.

Daniel Robertson, the next hitter, ripped a 95.8-mph, two-run double down the left field line that tied the game.

Boston Red Sox trade Blake Swihart to Diamondbacks for outfielder Marcus Wilson

Christopher Smith

The Boston Red Sox have traded catcher Blake Swihart and international amateur signing bonus pool space to the Diamondbacks in exchange for minor league outfielder Marcus Wilson.

Wilson, an outfielder, was Arizona's second-round pick in 2014 and began the year at Double-A.

The 22-year-old Wilson batted .235 with a .350 on-base percentage, .529 slugging percentage, .879 OPS, two homers, two doubles, one triple and seven RBIs in his first 12 games (34 at-bats) for Double-A Jackson this season.

He's a 6-foot-3, 175-pound right-handed hitter. The Diamondbacks selected him in the second round of the 2014 MLB draft out of Junipero Serra High in Gardena, Calif. He was not on Arizona's 40-man roster. He will be Rule 5 Draft eligible this coming December.

He posted only a .678 OPS in 111 games at High A last year.

The Red Sox designated Swihart for assignment Tuesday.

The 27-year-old Swihart, who Boston selected in the first round (26th overall), batted .231 with a .310 on-base percentage, .385 slugging percentage and .695 OPS in 29 plate appearances this season.

He started six games at catcher. He also has played six innings in left field and one inning at first base this year.

Who is new Boston Red Sox prospect Marcus Wilson?

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox swung a trade Friday night, sending catcher Blake Swihart (and international signing money) to the Diamondbacks for outfielder Marcus Wilson. Swihart will be reunited with former Red Sox employees Mike Hazen and Torey Lovullo in Arizona.

Marcus Wilson is batting .235 with a .350 on-base percentage, .529 slugging percentage, .879 OPS, two homers, two doubles, one triple and seven RBIs in 12 games (34 at-bats) for Double-A Jackson.

Wilson, 22, was Arizona's second-round pick (69th overall) out of Junipero Serra High School in California in 2014. He began the year at Double-A, hitting .235/.350/.529 with three steals and two homers.

MLB.com ranked Wilson as the 20th-best prospect in Arizona's system entering the season after he hit .235/.309/.369 with 10 homers and 16 steals at High-A. The 6-foot-3, 175-pound righty has been brought along slowly, spending three seasons playing at rookie levels after entering pro ball.

Wilson is a toolsy player who has gotten on base throughout his minor-league career and could project as a center-fielder in the big leagues as a strong defender and excellent speed. He has never had much power (though he did hit 10 homers in 2017) but has shown the ability to put the ball in play throughout his career.

Wilson will head to Portland and is likely to spend the rest of the year there. It's likely he'll be ranked somewhere between the 10th and 20th-best prospect in the Sox organization, joining fellow outfielders Jarren Duran, Nick Decker and Gilberto Jimenez in a system that is largely devoid of promising young outfield options.

Designating Swihart for assignment stripped the Red Sox of all their leverage in Swihart talks, so Boston needed to include international bonus pool space to increase the return.

Boston Red Sox's Michael Chavis a 'work in progress' at second base, could provide bench bat in first big-league stint

Chris Cotillo

One day before the Red Sox brought Michael Chavis up to the majors, manager Alex Cora provided some insight into how the organization viewed its top prospect.

Appearing on WEEI's "Ordway, Merloni and Fauria," Cora said Chavis needs to improve defensively at second base.

"He's a work in progress," Cora said on OMF. "Right now, actually we have communication with (the Pawtucket coaching staff). You start asking about how he's doing at second. He hasn't played that much. There are a few plays where he needs to get better. We're comfortable with him making the routine plays. But as you know, there are other plays that come into play at the minor leagues and at the big-league level. Like you said, he's a work in progress. He's getting close to what we want. You never know. Injuries and all that come into play. He can be here to contribute, but as of now he needs a little more work at second base."

Injuries did come into play, with Eduardo Nunez (back tightness) and Dustin Pedroia (left knee irritation) joining Brock Holt (scratched cornea) on the injured list in the last two days. With their top three options at second base all hurt, the Red Sox brought up both Chavis and Tzu-Wei Lin for their weekend series against the Rays.

Chavis was drafted as a shortstop but has primarily played third base and first base in the minors. He worked out at second base during the offseason and spring training and has made just five starts at the position (all this year) in his career.

Michael Chavis could play some second base this season. He slashed .298/.381/.538/.919 with nine homers, 14 doubles and 27 RBIs in 46 games (33 at Double-A Portland, eight at Triple-A Pawtucket, five at Short Season Lowell) during 2018.

Chavis' lack of experience means he likely won't be Boston's primary second baseman with Holt, Pedroia and Nunez all out. Lin, a plus defender who has big-league experience at second in each of the last two seasons, is starting Friday and appears to be the preferred option.

If Chavis is going to make an impact in his first stint with the Sox, it'll likely come in a pinch-hit opportunity. He could also see a start at one of the corner spots if Boston wants to give Rafael Devers, Steve Pearce or Mitch Moreland a day off.

Chavis probably won't be on the roster long. Holt, who played in a rehab game at Pawtucket on Tuesday, could come back as early as Monday if his sight improves in games over the weekend.

Michael Chavis' promotion to Boston Red Sox should be motivational reminder to Rafael Devers of talent right behind him

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox have recalled highly-touted prospect Michael Chavis and infielder Tzu-Wei Lin from Triple-A Pawtucket. They have designated Erasmo Ramirez for assignment and placed Eduardo Nunez (mild back strain) on the injured list.

This marks Chavis' first major league stint.

It should be interesting to see if the Red Sox use Chavis much or if he's simply in the big leagues for a brief time to sit on the bench until Brock Holt (scratched cornea) is ready to return from the injured list.

Manager Alex Cora indicated Thursday on WEEI the Red Sox would not promote Chavis because he "needs a little more work at second base."

"There are a few plays he needs to get better at," Cora said.

Red Sox top position prospect Michael Chavis released three balloons, two birthday balloons and one purple balloon into the air. Mamma Furr's favorite color was purple.

Why the change of heart?

Chavis has played mostly third base in his minor league career. But he has made five starts at second base, six starts at third base and one start at first base in 2019 for Pawtucket. He never played second base in a professional game until this season.

Chavis wasn't promoted to replace second baseman Dustin Pedroia (knee) who returned to the injured list Thursday. Lin likely will play second base Friday and in the majority of games until Holt returns. Chavis likely received this promotion simply to provide bench depth with Nunez sidelined.

But Cora should start him at third base tonight. He's not here to compete with Rafael Devers for the starting job. This isn't about third base.

But why not start Chavis at third Friday when the Rays use an Opener?

It might provide another source of motivation for Devers, especially if Chavis were to deliver a couple hits.

Cora also should give Chavis some time at second base. Maybe he needs to improve at a few plays. But he hasn't made an error and has turned four double plays in 22 chances at Pawtucket. He can handle it.

Devers needs to begin to play better both offensively and defensively. The 22-year-old has only two RBIs. He hasn't homered. He has a .351 on-base percentage, which is good, but he's not slugging at all (.308 slugging percentage).

He also has made five errors in 19 games (18 starts) at third.

Boston Red Sox prospect C.J. Chatham is 13-for-42 (.310 batting average) with a .388 on-base percentage, .476 slugging percentage, .864 OPS, seven doubles, six RBIs, five walks, seven strikeouts and six runs in 11 games for Double-A Portland.

The 2019 season should be a breakout season for Devers and still plenty of time remains for it to be. He experienced a sophomore slump last year in his first full major league season before hitting well in September and the postseason. Pitchers adjusted to him in 2018. Now it's time for him to make adjustments.

Devers is extremely talented. He has a spot on this team longterm. He's under team control through 2023. But whether he remains at third base remains to be seen.

Competition never is a bad thing. Devers is a hard worker. He is motivated. He wants to play well. He's hard on himself. But Chavis starting at third base Friday — or at some point this weekend — might be a motivational reminder to Devers that the Red Sox's two top prospects both are third baseman. Baseball America ranks Bobby Dalbec No. 1 and Chavis No. 2 in the system.

Devers has two other talented players right behind him. He must start hitting for power.

Michael Chavis, Boston Red Sox top prospect, called up for major-league debut; Eduardo Nunez placed on injured list

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox called up top prospect Michael Chavis on Friday afternoon ahead of their series opener against the Rays at Tropicana Field, according to a team announcement.

Chavis and fellow infielder Tzu-Wei Lin will join the team in St. Petersburg. Infielder Eduardo Nunez was placed on the 10-day injured list (retroactive to April 18) with back tightness and pitcher Erasmo Ramirez was designated for assignment.

Boston took Chavis, who was drafted as a shortstop out of high school in Georgia, with the 26th overall pick in the 2014 draft. He transitioned to third base early in his minor-league career and now has the ability to play first, second or third base.

Chavis is an offense-first player who has had an up-and-down minor-league career. Shortly after being ranked by Baseball America as the No. 85 prospect in baseball, he received an 80-game drug suspension last April and dealt with injuries throughout the season. Chavis impressed in his first big-league camp this year, hitting .273 with four homers and 10 RBIs in 11 games before being optioned.

Chavis' defense is considered a bit of a liability, but the Red Sox are clearly willing to take a chance with Nunez, Brock Holt (scratched cornea in right eye) and Dustin Pedroia (left knee irritation) all on the injured list. Chavis and Lin will be the team's primary options at second base until the regulars return.

Holt will likely be the first regular to return, as he is expected to resume his rehab assignment with Pawtucket at some point this weekend. Nunez, who tried to play through his injury throughout the last week, will be eligible to return next Saturday and Pedroia's timetable is unknown.

Pedroia was placed on the injured list Thursday night after exiting Wednesday's game after one at-bat. Reliever Marcus Walden was called up in his place.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox make statement with 3 HRs vs. Rays

Dawn Klemish

ST. PETERSBURG -- On Friday night, the Red Sox decided they'd had enough.

Enough of the questions, the second-guessing and, most of all, the losses.

And so, in the eighth inning, they made a statement.

Will it be enough to send the team back on the same kind of winning tear it rode in 2018? Only time will tell. For one night, the Red Sox were simply content to enjoy the 6-4 win over the Rays and let tomorrow bring what may.

The victory snapped Boston's three-game slide overall and a four-game slump against American League East-leading Tampa Bay.

"We have something to prove," Dustin Pedroia said before the game. "I think everyone's highly motivated. I understand it's difficult to win the World Series in back-to-back years. Everyone's motivated; that's not an issue. It's just a matter of playing well, and we haven't done that up until the first 19 games. So we're all focused on trying to get back on track."

There were several positives to take from Boston's series opener at Tropicana Field.

J.D. Martinez extended his on-base streak to 19 games, Christian Vázquez homered for the third time in five games, the defense flashed leather and Eduardo Rodriguez did what he could to keep his team in contention.

Even so, the Red Sox were locked in a 4-all tie after a Daniel Robertson double up the third-base line erased Boston's two-run lead in the sixth inning.

The Red Sox used the seventh frame to step back and formulate a new game plan. They sent Mookie Betts to lead off the eighth, and he knew just what to do.

"We fought to stay in the game," said Betts, who parked a 2-1 pitch over the wall in straightaway center field for his fourth home run of the season. "[I was] just excited. A lot of emotions going through my head there. The main thing was that it put us ahead."

Betts' knock proved the eventual game-winner. But just in case, Mitch Moreland followed suit with his team-leading sixth home run.

The back-to-back roundtrippers marked Boston's first since Sept. 26, 2018, against the Orioles.

"We know what we're capable of," Moreland said. "We've got a great team. We've just got to keep rolling like that."

After a slow start out of the gate, the Red Sox roared to life in the fifth inning with a three-spot to take control of the game, 3-2. Martinez walked to open the frame and scored one out later, on Rafael Devers' line-drive double to center field. The next hitter, Vazquez, lifted a 2-1 pitch just over the wall in center field for his fourth home run.

Vazquez's four homers are the most by a Boston catcher before the end of April since Jarrod Saltalamacchia hit four in 2012.

"From top to bottom, it was solid," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "It was good to see."

Martinez extended the lead in the sixth inning by singling in Betts, who'd stroked a leadoff double to snap an 0-for-12 skid. Betts is now slashing .311/.388/.521 with 24 doubles, 14 homers and 44 RBIs in 80 career games against the Rays.

"We were relentless today at the plate," Cora said. "That's good to see. We'll turn the page. We'll show up [Saturday] and ... we've got two shots at winning the series. This is the first time I can say that all season.

"It's good to feel that way."

Top prospect Chavis called up by Red Sox

Ian Browne & Dawn Klemish

ST. PETERSBURG -- With a collection of injuries in the infield, the Red Sox have created some excitement for this weekend's three-game series against the Rays by promoting Michael Chavis, their No. 1-ranked prospect, from Triple-A Pawtucket.

Friday marked the first callup to the Major Leagues for Chavis, who is ranked No. 75 among all prospects by MLB Pipeline.

In a subsequent move, infielder Eduardo Nunez was placed on the 10-day injured list with a mid-back strain, retroactive to Thursday. In addition, infielder Tzu-Wei Lin was recalled from Pawtucket and right-hander Erasmo Ramirez was designated for assignment.

When a player's contract is designated for assignment -- often abbreviated "DFA" -- that player is immediately removed from his club's 40-man roster, and 25-man roster if he was on that as well. Within seven days of the transaction (it was previously 10 days), the player must either be traded, released or placed on irrevocable outright waivers.

Second baseman Dustin Pedroia was placed on the injured list on Thursday with irritation in his left knee, so Lin and Chavis will help replenish Boston's infield, which is also without Brock Holt, who is on the IL with a scratched cornea in his right eye.

Though Chavis has played five games at second base for Pawtucket, he is just starting to learn the position. On Friday, Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Lin will garner the majority of the playing time there.

"We've got Lin; he's going to play a lot," Cora said. "[Chavis] is a work in progress. He's been making the routine plays. He can play first, he can play third and he can hit. That's a right-handed bat that's going to help us out."

Chavis is most comfortable at third base and first base, but his calling card is his bat. He has four homers, six RBIs and a .954 OPS in 40 at-bats this season.

It will be interesting to see if Chavis can provide an energy boost for a Boston team off to a 6-13 start.

The Red Sox selected Chavis in the first round (26th overall) of the 2014 Draft out of Sprayberry High School in Georgia.

After initially struggling in the Minors, Chavis busted out in 2017, when he smashed 31 homers in a season split between Class A Salem and Double-A Portland.

Many people expected Chavis to debut for the Red Sox at some point in 2018, but his progress was slowed when he was suspended 75 games for testing positive for dehydrochloromethyltestosterone, a PED. Chavis flourished after returning from his suspension, hitting .298 with nine homers, 27 RBIs and a .919 OPS in the Minors last season.

He spent the first few weeks of Spring Training with the Red Sox this year, and made his presence felt, leading all Boston players in homers (four) and RBIs (10) in just 22 at-bats.

"Most likely, Lin will play the majority of the games at second, and we'll find ways to get Michael at-bats," Cora said. "He's swinging the bat well, and far. I'm happy for the kid that he's a big leaguer, and hopefully he can make an impact like he did in Spring Training."

The 25-year-old Lin offers some infield stability and versatility at a time when the Red Sox need it. He began the season with Pawtucket before being recalled by Boston on April 6. He made his lone appearance for the Red Sox that night, pinch-hitting in the club's 5-4 loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks.

In seven games with the PawSox this season, he has gone 8-for-28 (.286) with three doubles and three walks, making five starts at shortstop, one at second base, and one in left field. One of only four position players in Major League history born in Taiwan, the left-handed hitter has appeared in 63 games for Boston over the past three seasons.

Red Sox get prospect from D-backs for Swihart

Dawn Klemish

ST. PETERSBURG – On Friday, the Red Sox answered a question that had been looming in the background for some time, trading Blake Swihart and international bonus pool money to the D-backs for Minor Leaguer Marcus Wilson.

The 27-year-old Swihart was pegged to be Boston's catcher of the future when he was drafted in the first round (26th overall) in 2011. But a major foot injury derailed his progress, and though the Red Sox carried him on the roster that won the '18 World Series, there were doubts whether Swihart still fit into the organization's long-range plans.

In a move that suggested Boston was leaning toward Swihart as its backup for starter Christian Vázquez in late March, the team designated Sandy Leon for assignment, only to recall him Tuesday and designate Swihart.

When a player's contract is designated for assignment -- often abbreviated "DFA" -- that player is immediately removed from his club's 40-man roster, and 25-man roster if he was on that as well. Within seven days of the transaction (it was previously 10 days), the player must either be traded, released or placed on irrevocable outright waivers.

Swihart caught 129 games for Boston over the past five seasons, but also made appearances at left field (23 games), right field (14), first base (11), third (3) and second (1). In 12 games with the Red Sox this season, Swihart hit .231 with a double, a home run, four RBIs and two walks.

"It's an interesting situation with Blake, because at times when we'd talk about him with clubs, clubs have interest but then sometimes it's not a fit for them because of his role and what they have at that particular time, especially now being out of options," said Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski. "I've always kind of thought he's ... a really good National League player because he can come in and play different spots.

"He wasn't going to get the opportunity to play with us right now. He couldn't go down to Triple-A. We like him a lot, he's a good person. We wish him nothing but the best."

Swihart will shift to the National League West, but the move won't be without familiar faces as D-backs manager Torey Lovullo was the Red Sox bench coach from 2013-16, and general manager Mike Hazen served as assistant GM and GM from 2012-16 before departing for Arizona.

Wilson, 22, was drafted out of high school in 2014 and played parts of six seasons in Arizona's system, rising as high as Double-A Jackson. The D-backs' No. 20 prospect, per MLB Pipeline, hit .235 for the Suns this season, collecting two doubles, a triple, two home runs and seven RBIs. He'll report to Double-A Portland.

"It's a guy we've liked since the day he was drafted," Dombrowski said. "We've had interest back then. We followed him, of course, like we do everybody in professional baseball. ... He's an athletic, tool player that we think has some projection to him."

Pedroia on knee prognosis: 'The best I could get'

Ian Browne & Dawn Klemish

ST. PETERSBURG -- Two days following exiting after just one at-bat against the Yankees when he felt his surgically repaired left knee "pop," Dustin Pedroia was relieved to learn the issue was a minor one that won't keep him out of action for long.

"I was nervous, obviously, to feel that [pop]," he said prior to Boston's series opener against the Rays on Friday. "[The prognosis] is good news. The best I could get."

Pedroia was taking swings in the batter's box Wednesday when, according to him, "I torqued and the knee didn't." After he was examined by a doctor in New York on Thursday, Pedroia said he believes the issue was actually related to his knee brace.

"I didn't know what to think. I hadn't had any issues to this point," he said. "It's just one of those weird deals. Some of the [batter's] boxes are really tacky; I just rotated and got stuck.

"It kind of scared me more than anything. We're just going to let it calm down for a few days and it should be all right."

On Friday, Boston recalled righty Marcus Walden to fill Pedroia's spot on the roster. Infielders Tzu-Wei Lin and Michael Chavis, Boston's top prospect per MLB Pipeline, also joined the Red Sox from Triple-A Pawtucket to help fill the temporary void.

Pedroia, who joined the Red Sox in St. Petersburg for the three-game series against the Rays, said the brace will be re-evaluated during his stint on the IL and expects no issues going forward. He is coming off a major left knee injury that sidelined him for all but three games last season. The left knee was also a major hindrance for Pedroia in 2017, when he was limited to 105 games.

The most recent setback isn't expected to keep him out for long.

"We have some positive news, and it's just a matter of seeing how it reacts during the week," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "Whenever [Pedroia's] ready, he's ready."

After a productive offseason, Pedroia hoped he had finally turned a corner. He passed every test the Red Sox gave him in Spring Training and in a three-game Minor League rehab assignment to start the season. He made his debut for Boston in the home opener on April 9.

Pedroia also started at second base on Thursday and Saturday. The Red Sox had him DH on Sunday and Monday, and he was not in the lineup for Tuesday's series opener at Yankee Stadium. The club had been basing Pedroia's playing time on a maintenance plan in which he could build back up from all the time he missed. He is 2-for-20 at the plate, but he has made a few stellar plays in the field.

While the latest mishap landed him on the 10-day injured list, Boston's second baseman said he won't hesitate to jump right back into action once he's medically cleared to do so.

"I've been through a lot," Pedroia said. "It was fun getting out there and playing. I shouldn't be taking swings and feeling that. It was just a weird, freak thing. I'm kind of over those freak things. I just want to get out there, have fun and play and help us win."

Walking wounded

Cora said Brock Holt expected to get contact lenses on Friday to help with his scratched right cornea. If all goes well, Holt is expected to take batting practice with Eduardo Núñez (10-day IL, mid-back strain) on Saturday and rejoin Pawtucket on Monday.

What to expect from Red Sox's Chavis in bigs

Jim Callis

The defending World Series champion Red Sox are in dire need of victories and infielders, and they're hoping that the lone MLB Pipeline Top 100 Prospect (No. 75) in their organization can help in both areas. They summoned Michael Chavis from Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday.

Boston's biggest hole is at second base now that Brock Holt, Eduardo Nunez and Dustin Pedroia all have landed on the injured list. Though Chavis began playing second base for the first time as a pro this April, Red Sox manager Alex Cora told reporters that the club will give Tzu-Wei Lin (also recalled Friday) most of the at-bats at the position until Chavis gets more acclimated there.

Chavis, 23, was the 26th overall pick in the 2014 Draft and signed for \$1,870,500 out of Sprayberry High (Marietta, Ga.). After struggling in his first three pro seasons while trying to do too much at the plate, he settled down his approach and emerged as one of the better power-hitting prospects in the Minors.

He finished third in the Minors in extra-base hits (68) and fifth in homers (31) in 2017, but Chavis tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance during the offseason. He said he had no knowledge of how

dehydrochloromethyltestosterone got in his system, though that had no bearing on him serving an 80-game suspension to begin last season. Once he returned, he batted .298/.381/.538 with nine homers in 46 games, mostly in Double-A.

Chavis led the Red Sox with four homers in Spring Training despite getting just 22 at-bats, and he opened 2019 by going 10-for-40 (.250) with four homers in 12 games in Triple-A. He generates his power with a combination of bat speed, strength and loft in his right-handed swing.

Chavis fell into the trap of trying to swinging for the fences early in his pro career and started to find success after improving his pitch recognition and two-strike approach while also doing a better job of using the entire field. His walk and contact rates have improved as he has risen through the Minors.

Though Chavis signed as a shortstop and played there in his pro debut, his below-average speed necessitated a move to third base during instructional league in 2014. He has worked hard to improve his agility and athleticism, becoming an acceptable defender with solid arm strength at the hot corner.

Because the Red Sox have 22-year-old Rafael Devers at third base and another slugger at the position coming up behind him in Bobby Dalbec, they began playing Chavis at first base in 2017. They also had discussed trying him at left field and second base and giving him time at the latter spot this month. He lacks the quickness clubs typically want at second, and it's too early to know whether he can be a viable option there.

It's also unclear how much playing time Chavis will get in Boston and how long his first taste of the Majors will last. If he were to receive 400 at-bats, he'd be capable of posting a .260/.330/.480 line with 20 homers.

* **WEEI.com**

What a difference a good Mookie Betts makes

Rob Bradford

It's not as simple as one player single-handedly turning things around -- even when it's one of the best players in Major League Baseball.

But watching Mookie Betts run around the bases Friday night at Tropicana Field certainly offered a reminder as to how things could be for these Red Sox.

After going hitless in his first two at-bats, making him 0 for his last 12, Betts came through with a double in the sixth inning, eventually scoring his team's fourth run. But it was the eighth inning when the right fielder's usual presence was truly felt, with Betts launching the eventual game-winning homer over the center field fence. He was immediately followed by another home run from Mitch Moreland and the Red Sox found themselves on their way to beating the best team in baseball, Tampa Bay, 6-4.

Suddenly the .200 batting average Betts came into the night with had found its way up to .216. And instead of heading into Saturday nine games back, the Red Sox edged one game closer to the first-place Rays with a seven-game deficit.

Baby steps.

"When you look around in big league stadiums and there's a lot of -- look everywhere, there's the average," Red Sox manager Alex Cora told reporters. "Back in the day, you didn't have that. You only learned because of the newspaper. Now it's all over the place. Although you don't want to look, it's there for you. It's not cool when you're struggling. It's hard to smile when you're struggling. But he prepares, gives 100 percent regardless of the results. Sometimes yeah he gets down because he knows what he can do. But just like the team, it's a long season. Still got plenty of games. Good to see him doing that."

When Betts is rolling along the lines of what was presented in his 2018 American League MVP the whole equation for the Red Sox feels different.

In games the outfielder homered last season the Red Sox went 22-5. They were 33-13 when he drove in a run. And in games he crossed the plate the Sox' record was 68-18.

The top of the Red Sox' batting order -- which now has Betts hitting second -- simply hasn't been the same kind of threat it was a year ago. The No. 1 spot has the 18th-best OPS in baseball (.699), with next position in the batting order 20th overall (.742). This wasn't how it worked while making that World Series run.

Heading into the 20th day of April a year ago Betts was hitting .391 with six homers. The Red Sox, in fact, had six players totaling a .300 batting average or better at that time. Now? There's one, J.D. Martinez.

"We're about to see," said Cora when asked if it felt like Betts was about to break out. "I've been saying, we're getting close. It's great for him that he contributes offensively. We put good at-bats all over the place today. That was good to see. We can't rely on one guy here. Everybody has to do their part. Raffy (Devers), Christian (Vazquez), Xander (Bogaerts), Mitch (Moreland), top to bottom it was solid. It was good to see. Seems like offensively, for how bad it looked three days ago, today it felt better, against a great pitching staff. Those guys have great stuff so we battled today."

Blake Swihart traded to Diamondbacks for minor league outfielder

Nick Friar

It's official: Blake Swihart is no longer a member of the Boston Red Sox. The organization made the announcement prior to Friday night's game against the Tampa Bay Rays.

The Arizona Diamondbacks placed the winning bid on Swihart, sending Boston minor league outfielder Marcus Wilson in exchange for the catcher/utility player and international amateur signing bonus pool space.

Wilson, 22, was ranked the Diamondbacks No. 20 prospect by Baseball America entering 2019. Last year, he batted .235 with a .678 OPS, 10 homers and 26 doubles in 111 games with Class A Advanced Visalia. He also struck out 141 times.

This year, Wilson is with Double-A Jackson, where he's hitting .235 again, though his OPS is up to .879 in the young season. Through 12 games, Wilson has two home runs, two doubles and a triple, along with 13 strikeouts.

Wilson was not a member of the Diamondbacks 40-man roster, which means the Red Sox do not need to put him on theirs.

Swihart leaves the Red Sox after having been in the organization since he was drafted in 2011. He spent parts of five seasons at the big league level, hitting .255 with a .679 OPS, nine home runs, four triples and 28 doubles in 203 games.

Dustin Pedroia expects to be activated after 10-day stint on injured list

Rob Bradford

Dustin Pedroia evidently got some good news.

The second baseman, who was forced from Wednesday night's game in New York after experiencing pain in his surgically-repaired left knee, told the media in St. Petersburg, Fla. that he doesn't expect to be out of the lineup long.

Pedroia was replaced on the 25-man roster by reliever Marcus Walden, with the Red Sox making two more moves Friday when they promoted both Tzu-Wei Lin and Michael Chavis. Eduardo Nunez was placed on the injured list while Erasmo Ramirez was designated for assignment.

Red Sox make multiple roster moves, including promoting top prospect Michael Chavis

Ryan Hannable

The Red Sox made a number of roster moves Friday, including the promotion of top prospect Michael Chavis.

On Thursday night, the team placed Dustin Pedroia on the injured list and recalled right-hander Marcus Walden. On Friday, the team made a few more moves, including:

- Eduardo Núñez was placed on the 10-day injured list with a mid-back strain retroactive to April 18.
- Right-handed pitcher Erasmo Ramírez was designated for assignment.
- Infielders Tzu-Wei Lin and Chavis were recalled from Triple-A Pawtucket. Chavis will wear No. 23.

If Chavis plays, it will be his major league debut. The infielder is the No. 1 ranked Red Sox prospect according to MLB.com. With Pedroia and Nunez on the injured list more than just Lin was needed in the infield, which is why Chavis has been promoted.

The Red Sox will look to snap a three-game losing streak Friday night in Tampa.

Sorry Red Sox fans, the Rays aren't going anywhere

Rob Bradford

People want to find excuses for why the Rays have been so good and how the success might not be sustainable.

One of the most prevalent reasons given for Tampa Bay's initial burst against the big boys in the American League East is that maybe they're doing with the smoke and mirrors that come with being flooded with analytics. The Rays do, after all, have one of the smallest payrolls in the game but they do have one of the largest analytics departments.

Nice try.

"The analytics side I feel like we're getting way more information over there than they're getting," said former Ray and current Red Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi. "We're doing the same things they're doing over here."

OK, so if it's not just manipulating the system with numbers than how do we explain this 14-5 start for Kevin Cash's team, who head into its three-game series with the Red Sox carrying an eight-game lead over Boston? Maybe they're just good. It's time to accept that fact.

Since April 18, 2018, the Rays have as many regular season wins as the Red Sox and Yankees, having gone 100-64. During that stretch, Tampa Bay's starters carry the second-best ERA (3.19) in the majors. And over those 365 days, the offense has the second-highest batting average (.262) and on-base percentage (.337) in MLB.

And now they're adding to their arsenal by putting all kinds of pressure on their opponents via the running game, having totaled the third-most steals in the majors (19).

"When I was over there we expect to win the World Series. That's our goal. Any time you have the group of guys, the payroll might not be there but obviously, they're a good team, they enjoy playing together and have good chemistry," Eovaldi said. "Right now they're firing on cylinders."

And while the Rays clearly found themselves as 2018 rolled along, it is what they have implemented the following season that has punctuated their existence.

Start with the two players they got for Chris Archer, starting pitcher Tyler Glasnow and outfielder Austin Meadows. Through the first 19 games, they would be in the conversation for Cy Young and MVP, respectively. Glasnow is 4-0 with a 1.13 ERA in his four starts, while Meadows has been a revelation in right field, hitting .365 with a 1.129 OPS, six homers and three stolen bases.

Charlie Morton, the Rays biggest free agent investment (2 years, \$30 million), carries a 2.18 ERA in his four starts. Tommy Pham, who Tampa Bay acquired in a trade last July is hitting .286 with a .814 OPS. Yandy Diaz, the enormous third baseman nobody could figure out why didn't hit with any power while with Cleveland, now has four homers and a .898 OPS. Avisail Garcia was considered a top prospect when dealt from Detroit to Chicago in the three-way trade that brought Jake Peavy to Boston, but hadn't lived up to the billing. This year he has, hitting .311 with a .872 OPS.

Then there the players the Rays have drafted and developed, such as second baseman Brandon Lowe who Cash said in spring training has the potential to pop as many as 30 home runs. The rookie already has five.

And we haven't even mentioned Cy Young winner Blake Snell.

And when people want to crap on that idea of using relievers to serve as openers, they might want to think twice. What makes it work are the arms. The Rays are a lot of good ones up and down their active roster. One that might be familiar is former Red Sox Jalen Beeks, whose improved velocity has teamed with a changeup he's using a whole lot more to allow for a flurry of high-leverage relief outings.

Oh, and by the way, Tampa Bay has also found themselves one of the game's most feared conventional closers in Jose Alvarado. The 23-year-old is 4-for-4 in save opportunities while striking out 16 over 9 1/3 innings.

The moral of the story is that if the Red Sox are going to right their ship it's not going to be easy. They heading into play the best team in baseball.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Mookie Betts blasts desperately needed homer, but what really mattered was his reaction

John Tomase

The swing looked vintage. The fist pump around the bases felt like a dam bursting.

But for my money, the most encouraging aspect of Mookie Betts' go-ahead homer to center on Friday night was his ear-to-ear grin in the dugout.

Sounds corny, but we haven't seen much in the way of happiness from Betts this season. Mired in a slump that dates to the 2018 postseason, the defending MVP has spent April trying to find his way, with limited success.

On Friday night, however, he showed signs of life. Not coincidentally, so did the Red Sox, taking an embarrassingly important 6-4 victory from the division-leading Rays in the opener of a three-game series at Tropicana Field.

After grounding into a double play as the second batter of the game and seeing his average fall to .197, Betts found his groove. He doubled to left leading off the sixth and scored on a J.D. Martinez single. Then he unloaded on a 97-mph, dead-red fastball in the eighth off Diego Castillo to break a 4-4 tie, slamming it 424 feet to center.

Betts pumped his fist once around second, once as he neared third, and once again as he turned towards home plate. He may not have exhibited the exuberance of, say, his joyous race around the bases after his marathon at-bat grand slam against J.A. Happ last year, but he at least looked more like himself in the dugout.

He ran the high-five gauntlet before breaking into a broad smile, which he repeated moments later at the bat rack.

That's the Betts the Red Sox want to see. That's the Betts the Red Sox need to see. The season hasn't started the way anyone wants, but it's not like it's over.

"When you look around in big league stadiums and there's a lot of -- look everywhere, there's the average," manager Alex Cora told reporters in Florida, including Jason Mastrodonato of the Boston Herald. "Back in the day, you didn't have that. You only learned because of the newspaper. Now it's all over the place. Although you don't want to look, it's there for you. It's not cool when you're struggling.

"It's hard to smile when you're struggling. But he prepares, gives 100 percent regardless of the results. Sometimes, yeah, he gets down, because he knows what he can do. But just like the team, it's a long season. Still got plenty of games. Good to see him doing that."

Betts takes his struggles very seriously, which is why he termed his play unacceptable last week. The concept of a short memory doesn't always apply. He wears it when things aren't going well, and he'll work himself to exhaustion trying to make it right.

He needed to feel rewarded.

"He keeps working," Cora told reporters. "He was hitting .380 or .400 last year and kept working the same way. He tries to be the best out there. He showed up today and worked his swing and didn't start the right way, but the double, then he crushed that pitch. It's good to see him contribute."

Cora has insisted for the last week that a hitter as talented as Betts can turn things around with just one swing. Who knows?

Maybe this was the one.

Michael Chavis, top Red Sox hitting prospect, called up to big leagues

John Tomase

Help is on the way for the struggling Red Sox offense, and it's in the form of their best hitting prospect.

Infielder Michael Chavis, who has had quite the tumultuous career since being selected in the first round of the 2014 draft, was summoned from Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday, along with infielder Tzu-Wei Lin and will join the team in Tampa for a three-game series with the Rays.

What to make of David Price's candid remarks

They'll be taking the places of infielder Eduardo Nunez, who was placed on the 10-day injured list with a sore back, and right-hander Erasmo Ramirez, who was designated for assignment after one bad relief outing.

The big name is Chavis, a 23-year-old right-handed slugger who's hitting .250 with four homers and a .954 OPS at Triple-A Pawtucket. Drafted as a shortstop/third baseman, Chavis has played five games at second base this year, his pro debut at the position, and could be a possibility there with Dustin Pedroia, Brock Holt, and now Nunez each on the IL.

In a radio interview on Thursday with WEEL, Red Sox manager Alex Cora suggested that Chavis wasn't ready for second base in the big leagues.

"There are a few plays he needs to get better at," Cora told Ordway, Merloni, and Fauria. "We're comfortable with him making the routine plays. But there are other plays that come into play. He's a work in progress. He's getting close to what we want. You never know. Injuries come into play."

Chavis's debut comes after a whirlwind minor league career that saw him drafted 26th overall in 2014 before hitting just .223 in his full-season debut a year later. He looked like a potential bust in 2016, batting .237 between two levels of Single-A, before exploding in 2017 with 31 homers between High-A Salem and Double-A Portland.

He thwarted that positive momentum at the start of 2018, however, by testing positive for a banned substance and earning an 80-game suspension. He returned last year to mash nine homers in 46 games with a .919 OPS, earning the No. 2 spot on Baseball America's list of top 10 Red Sox prospects.

Tyler Glasnow and Austin Meadows could end up being Tampa Bay's Derek Lowe and Jason Varitek, thanks to killer trade

John Tomase

Want to know how the Tampa Bay Rays are in first place? What might be baseball's best trade since Derek Lowe and Jason Varitek for Heathcliff Slocumb is a good place to start.

If you're consumed by the playoff runs of the Bruins and Celtics and a little turned off by baseball after watching the defending champs step on a rake and lose some teeth, it's possible you don't know much about Tyler Glasnow and Austin Meadows.

Red Sox call up top prospect, Michael Chavis

That's about to change. They're what Tampa received from the Pirates for former ace Chris Archer last July 31, and they've been difference-makers through the first three weeks of the season.

Glasnow, a 6-foot-8 right-hander with a 100 mph fastball and hammer curve that's reminiscent of Kerry Wood, is 4-0 with a 1.13 ERA while averaging a strikeout an inning. Meadows, meanwhile, is hitting .349 with six homers and 17 RBIs between left, right, and DH.

They're driving Tampa's blazing 14-4 start, which has produced an 8.5-game lead on the Red Sox as the teams begin a three-game set on Friday at Tropicana Field.

Anyone who saw this coming is a liar. Teams made 37 trades in the final week of last July, and this one didn't register as seismic. The Red Sox, for instance, acquired Nathan Eovaldi from the Rays for Jalen Beeks (now a solid lefty out of Tampa's pen, by the way), notable relievers like Joakim Soria, Ryan Pressly, and Zack Britton joined contenders, and the Nationals debated trading Bryce Harper right until the clock struck 4 p.m.

The Archer trade was considered a win for the Pirates, who were three games out of the NL wild card and also acquired Rangers closer Keone Kela in an opportunistic bid to leapfrog the Braves, Rockies, and Dodgers. The cost of two underachieving prospects didn't feel steep.

"The return for Archer right now is disappointingly light," wrote ESPN's Keith Law, "with two of the three players already named -- both former top prospects who have failed to pan out to date."

"I am a big fan of Austin Meadows," wrote Tommy Rancel of ESPN and The Athletic. "He can just hit. Not sold on Glasnow as a second piece unless the third piece is better than I'm expecting."

What to make of David Price's candid remarks
Even noted Rays fan Dick Vitale weighed in with uncharacteristic gloom.

"Is this the best we can get for a top of the rotation starter like @ChrisArcher22 with a friendly contract?"
Dickie V. tweeted in declaring the deal decidedly not awesome.

To be fair, others praised the Rays for acquiring a pair of former ace prospects who had fallen on hard times. MLB.com had ranked Glasnow the game's No. 9 prospect entering 2017, while Baseball America and Baseball Prospectus had both placed Meadows at No. 6.

But each had disappointed since, with Meadows exhibiting high contact rates but negligible power for a corner outfielder, and the 6-foot-8 Glasnow struggling to throw strikes with inconsistent mechanics.

Archer ended up going 3-3 with a 4.30 ERA, numbers in line with what he did in Tampa, but not nearly enough to lift the Pirates into the playoffs. They went 26-27 down the stretch.

Meadows and Glasnow didn't do much in their introduction to Tampa, either, with the former hitting .250 in 10 games and the latter going 1-5 with a 4.20 ERA in 11 starts. The scrappy Rays, with their crazy opener strategy and high-octane bullpen, very quietly won 90 games, setting the stage for their emergence in 2019.

The left-handed hitting Meadows bats leadoff and announced his presence by homering off of Houston's Justin Verlander to open the season.

"He's got the ability to do everything well," Rays manager Kevin Cash told the Tampa Bay Times. "He can run. He can run on the bases. He covers ground in the outfield. He's worked so hard on his defense to continue to gain ground. And then hit. Whether it's a quality at-bat, or hit for power, we've seen both. He's got a chance to be a pretty special player with this opportunity that he's earned to get going here in the lineup, and be a big part of our group."

Glasnow has benefited from working with Rays pitching coach Kyle Snyder, one of Terry Francona's favorites during their days in Boston, where Snyder won a World Series ring in 2007 as a reliever.

Snyder is also 6-8 and knows the challenges of repeating a delivery at that size. Glasnow has dominated hitters with his fastball-curveball-slider arsenal. The Red Sox will get a look at him opposite David Price in Sunday's finale.

"I was kind of in limbo — even within myself — in Pittsburgh," Glasnow told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "I didn't know if I was going to be a reliever or a starter. But the Rays were just like, 'You're going to be a starter. We know what you can do. We've seen you pitch.' It made me kind of believe in myself. The Pirates gave me every opportunity to succeed. They gave me probably more than I even deserved, I guess, because 2017 wasn't a good year at all. It was just hard getting everything to click."

That hasn't been the case in 2019, not even remotely. More than 20 years after the Red Sox fleeced the Mariners to land a pair of stalwarts for a washed-up reliever, the Rays have potentially struck similar gold, and now they're everybody else's problem.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Finally, Mookie Betts makes an impact

Sean McAdam

It's almost shocking, nearly one-eighth of the way through the season, how little Mookie Betts has contributed to the Red Sox.

The same player who captured the 2018 AL MVP and earned his way into the conversation about the game's best player, had contributed little to the Red Sox ignominious start.

In the field, he's had a few misplays, typified by an instance in Oakland in the second week of the season that saw a ball drop between him and teammate Jackie Bradley Jr. At least twice, he's been slow to run to first on balls he thought were going foul — only to have them remain fair.

And in the batter's box, Betts has been strangely silent. Whether hitting first or second, Betts has been alternately passive or over-eager. Following a three-hit day on Opening Day, he had had exactly one game in which he collected more than one hit. Before Friday night, he had been mired in a 3-for-32 funk with just one extra-base in the previous 10 games.

Maybe, just maybe, things began to turnaround for him in the Red Sox' 6-4 win over the first-place Tampa Bay Rays Friday.

Betts doubled and scored in the sixth, ending an 0-for-12 skid. Then, leading off the eighth in a 4-4 game, he drilled a pitch from Rays reliever Diego Castillo over the fence in straight-away center for his fourth homer.

As Betts rounded the first base bag, he couldn't restrain himself, showing an uncharacteristic bit of emotion with a triple fist bump in celebration.

It may have been out of relief as much as anything. Betts had entered the night with a .200 batting average and he unquestionably was aware of his shortcomings.

"When you look around in big league stadiums," Alex Cora told reporters, "you look everywhere and there's your average. Back in the day, you didn't have that. You only knew it because of the newspaper; now it's all over the place. Although you don't want to look, it's there for you. It's not cool when you're struggling. It's hard to smile when you're struggling.

"One thing's for sure — he prepares. He goes out there and gives 100 percent, regardless of the results. Sometimes, he gets down because he knows what he can do. But just like the team, it's a long season."

Betts can be tough on himself and the team's abysmal start, coupled with his own quiet start with the bat, was no doubt weighing on him. Betts showed up early at Tropicana Field Friday for some extended early batting practice, determined to work his way out of his April funk.

"It's great for him that he contributed offensively," said Cora. "But we put together good at-bats all over the place today. Everybody has to do their part."

In theory, that's certainly true. But Betts, as the team's best overall player, knows what's expected of him and every day that he doesn't help the slumping Sox execute a turnaround undoubtedly weight on him.

Whatever he tried with his early work, it delivered far better results.

"I've been working a lot," Betts said after the game. "I don't have much to show for it, but I'm doing what I can to help the team win."

Other members of the lineup have produced with far more consistency. J.D. Martinez has hit safely in every game but one and has the team's best OPS. Mitch Moreland has cranked six homers, the last of

which came immediately after the one Betts hit to start the eighth. Xander Bogaerts has been his consistent self.

But Betts has the ability to jump-start the team offensively at the top of the order and hasn't. The lineup has a different look to it when he's driving hard-hit balls from either the first or second spot in the order.

He wasn't just the league's most valuable player a year ago; he's also their most important, and it's not much of a stretch to suggest that as Betts goes, so go the Red Sox.

Until Friday night, he hasn't gone and neither have they. With the extra work Friday and the results Friday night, it's possible that's starting to change.

"Tonight was a good night," said Betts, confining his satisfaction to the present.

Could this be the start of something? Could Betts have begun to turn around his — and by extension, his team's — season?

"We're about to see," said Cora with a smile. "We're getting close. We're getting close."

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 6, Rays 4- Two homers in eighth snap losing streak

Sean McAdam

Devers giveth and taketh away: Rafael Devers can be frustrating at times and Friday perfectly encapsulated why. At the plate, Devers came alive with a big double in the fifth, delivering the Red Sox' first hit and first run of the game with one swing. In the bottom of the same inning, he went sprawling to his right to knock down a hard-hit grounder, and from his knees, began an inning-ending 5-4-3 double play to keep the Sox tied. The play showed his athleticism and good instincts. But the very next inning, Devers didn't get his glove down fully on another ball hit to his right, and instead of starting another huge 5-4-3 double play, gave the Rays runners at first and second with no out. The next hitter, Daniel Robertson, pulled a double down the left field line, scoring two, the first of which was unearned thanks to the misplay by Devers. That error was his sixth in 20 games, a pace that can't continue if Devers is going to remain the team's everyday third baseman. There's a lot to like about Devers — his raw powers and ability to occasionally make spectacular plays at third. But he's got to be more consistent and cut down on the errors.

Starting pitching continues improvement: It fell short of qualifying as a quality start, but Eduardo Rodriguez took the Sox into the sixth, allowing four runs — just three earned — as the string of better turns from the rotation continued. Rodriguez didn't qualify for the win and wasn't nearly as impressed as he was last time out when he allowed just two runs 6.2 innings while racking up eight strikeouts. But Rodriguez worked out of a first-and-second, no out jam in the first. He yielded a solo homer that barely snaked out in right field near the foul line in second and gave up a run in the fourth. But he deserved a better fate in the sixth when Devers's miscue paved the way for two runs. Again, it wasn't a masterpiece by any means. But of late, Red Sox starters are at least doing what they failed to do over the first two weeks: give the team a chance by getting into the sixth and keeping the opponent within reach.

Sox move on from Swihart: The Blake Swihart Era officially came to an end just before game time when the Sox announced that they had sent Swihart to the Arizona Diamondbacks in exchange for minor league outfielder Marcus Wilson. The move was hardly unexpected given that Swihart had been designated for assignment earlier in the week as the team promoted veteran catcher Sandy Leon. The hope was that the Sox could something/anything for Swihart, rather than have him claimed on waivers. Dave Dombrowski was able to work out a deal with Arizona, an organization flush with former Red Sox people — GM Mike Hazen, manager Torey Lovullo and assistant GM Amiel Sawdaye, who originally drafted Swihart for the Sox. This should give Swihart a chance to play more while also moving him closer to his New Mexico home. As for Wilson, he's a 22-year-old outfielder who was a former second-round pick listed as the Diamondbacks' 20th best prospect this spring. At Double-A this year, he had an .879 OPS. In the past, he's

had difficulty making contact. It's unclear whether he's a true prospect still, or merely an organizational player.

TWO UP

Christian Vazquez: The Red Sox catcher supplied a big two-run homer fifth — his fourth homer of the year — added a single in the eighth and also threw out a would-be base stealer.

Matt Barnes: Once more inserted in the biggest high-leverage spot of the game, Barnes made quick work of the Rays 3-4-5 hitters in the eighth, retiring the side with two strikeouts.

ONE DOWN

Brandon Workman: For the second straight outing, Workman struggled with his control. He issued two walks in the seventh and has now walked four of the last eight hitters he's faced.

TURNING POINT

After the Rays rallied to tie the game in the sixth and Eduardo Rodriguez was lifted, Workman got a huge double-play to bail the Sox out of a first-and-second, one-out jam.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

“We got two shots to win the series and that's the first time I can say that this season. It's good to feel that way.” Alex Cora.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

J.D. Martinez extended his hitting streak to nine straight games. He's reached base in all 20 games this season.

Xander Bogaerts extended his hitting streak to five games.

Barnes has struck out exactly half of the batters he's faced — 14-of-28.

The win marked only the second time this season that the Sox have won the first game of a series.

Boston has allowed 12 unearned runs this season.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Rays continue their series Saturday with a 6:10 start featuring RHP Rick Porcello (0-3 11.12) vs RHP Charlie Morton (2-0 2.18)

*** *The Athletic***

Red Sox top prospect Michael Chavis is here. What can we expect of him?

Jen McCaffrey

As soon as Dustin Pedroia exited Wednesday's game in New York in the second inning with an apparent injury, the conversation around the Red Sox quickly turned toward the team's top position player prospect, Michael Chavis.

Chavis, Boston's first-round pick in the 2014 draft, has been among the club's top three prospects (according to MLB.com's prospect pipeline) each of the last three seasons. But his arrival has been no sure thing, as his development has not exactly followed a linear path.

With Pedroia headed to the 10-day injured list with left knee irritation, his most recent comeback from knee surgery, the Red Sox must turn to Plan C at second base.

Plan B is already out the window; the Red Sox already have Brock Holt on the injury list with a scratched cornea, and he's not close to returning. Fellow backup infielder Eduardo Nunez hit the IL on Friday with a mid-back strain. This all comes in a week when the Red Sox are so short on second-base depth that Christian Vazquez played in his first major-league game at the position Monday.

So now Chavis and infielder Tzu-Wei Lin will man the position for the foreseeable future. Lin is a capable defender but not a high-ceiling prospect. Instead, the focus will be on Chavis and what life he can inject into the struggling Red Sox lineup. The 23-year-old missed half of 2016 with a torn thumb ligament, posted a strong 2017 with .282 average and .910 OPS in 126 games, but then missed most of the 2018 season with a suspension for performance-enhancing drugs.

The Red Sox invited Chavis to big-league spring training this season, and he impressed in 11 games, with four of his six hits going for home runs. In Pawtucket this year, he's hitting .250 (10-for-40), and six of those 10 hits have been for extra bases, with two doubles and four homers. (It should be noted a new baseball being used at the Triple-A level this year has reportedly led to increased offensive rates across the league. Nevertheless, Chavis has hit 44 homers in 184 minor league games since the start of the 2017 season.)

Unlike Boston's past three top position player prospects — who were promoted to the majors and remained with the team (Mookie Betts in 2014, Andrew Benintendi in 2016 and Rafael Devers in 2017), Chavis will not have the benefit of a pre-planned midseason call-up and gradual easing into action.

Betts returned briefly to Pawtucket in 2014 but has since been a mainstay in Boston. Benintendi was promoted Aug. 2, 2016, straight from Double-A Portland and has not once returned to the minors. Similarly, Devers debuted on July 25, 2017, after nine games in Pawtucket and has not been sent back to the minors. But each of them was promoted because he had reached the threshold of what he could prove at the minor-league level. In Chavis' case, while his numbers have been strong in short stints, the Red Sox had wanted to see his production within an uninterrupted stretch of playing time.

"He's been limited in opportunity over the last year and a half due to injury and other things," Red Sox director of player development Ben Crockett said in spring training. "I think getting a number of at-bats under his belt in Triple A will certainly help that. Getting the exposure to the way he'll be attacked in Triple A, which will probably be closer to the way he'll be attacked in the big leagues. It was a really short stint at the end of the year, so I think as those guys see him more he'll probably be attacked differently and it'll be up to him to stay consistent with his approach but also start to understand how teams are game planning and plan back."

But they don't have that luxury now, with so many injuries at the major-league level.

Chavis' promotion also comes with the caveat that he's played just five professional games (all over the past three weeks) at second base. Drafted as a shortstop, Chavis saw most of his playing time in the minors at third base (261 games). But with Devers taking over the third-base role in Boston, Chavis started getting reps at first base and now second. The lack of clarity surrounding Pedroia's future led to Chavis making an accelerated transition to second in spring training.

The Red Sox have played top prospects at unfamiliar positions in the past. Betts played just 50 games in the outfield after spending much of his minor-league career at second base. Yoán Moncada, who was promoted in 2016 before being traded that winter to the Chicago White Sox in a package deal for Chris Sale, spent all of his minor-league development at second base before being moved to third base when he hit the majors. In Betts' case, he flourished. In Moncada's case, he was not given enough time to develop at the position and subsequently faltered.

Chavis' promotion might not be ideal, but the flailing Red Sox don't have a lot of options.

“I think any time you’re in Triple A I think that’s an opportunity, and to be on the 40-man roster, and a guy that’s played really well, and had a strong offensive performance I think he’s certainly close (to the majors),” Crockett said in March. “The major-league need and opportunity will dictate that, but I’m sure he’s going to do everything he can to push us.”

In the end, the push came from elsewhere.

*** *The USA Today***

Red-hot Rays – for now, the AL's best – barrel into first battle against champion Red Sox

Gabe Lacques

For the better part of a decade, the Tampa Bay Rays have attracted certain buzzwords that stick to them like a sweat-soaked shirt in a Pinellas County summer.

Innovative. Disruptive. Efficient.

Here’s one that should really haunt the American League East Division hierarchy: powerhouse.

Yes, the franchise that brought you Joe Maddon’s managerial zaniness, four-man outfielders and the "Opener" has now amassed a roster that, through the season’s first 19 games, performed exactly as the Rays envisioned.

That’s a little scary.

In an industry where most of the proprietary edges have vanished as teams rush headlong into the analytics era, the Rays — off to a 14-5 start entering Friday — have managed to stay ahead of the game and, for the moment, ahead of their big-money brethren in the AL East.

Friday, the Rays play the first of 38 games against the defending World Series champion Red Sox and Yankees. For now, the getting is good.

The Red Sox (opening-day payroll: \$224 million) are 6-13, the worst record in the AL East, as nearly every member of their title team has underperformed.

The Yankees (\$208 million) are 8-10, with a litany of stars on the injured list and a laundry list of legitimate questions surrounding the starting pitching.

The Rays? At an opening-day price tag of about \$60 million, they have fielded the best team in baseball, by any measure. With the appropriate April sample-size caveats in place, Tampa Bay:

— Sports a major league-best +46 run differential, or, 88 runs better than the -42 Red Sox.

— Leads the major leagues in ERA and OPS against at 2.50 and .588 and ranks second the AL in batting average against (.208) and WHIP (1.02).

— Ranks third in the AL second in strikeouts per nine innings (10.04).

— Ranks third in the AL in OPS (.795) and runs (96) and second in extra-base hits (68).

Sustainable? We shall see. But in what’s increasingly a young man’s game, the Rays — with just one regular, Tommy Pham, older than 30 — are hitting the AL with a wave of young talent.

Backing them up is a farm system that ranks a consensus No. 2, behind only the Padres.

“They’ve got a ton of good prospects, a ton of good young players,” Evan Longoria, the greatest player in franchise history, told USA TODAY Sports on Thursday. “That helps. When you’ve got a lot of good players, it doesn’t matter what kind of philosophy you have. If you have better players than anyone else, you’re going to win.”

Longoria was traded from Tampa Bay to San Francisco in December 2017, kick-starting a remodel that resulted in a near wholesale turnover of the 40-man roster over a three-year period. Senior VP and GM Erik Neander purged several more veterans that winter. By June, the club trotted out its “Opener” strategy, starting a relief pitcher for a one- or two-inning stint to limit the liability of a back-end rotation member.

Teammates initially chafed at the trades. Traditionalists seethed at the “Opener.” Erstwhile ace Chris Archer was dealt in July.

The Rays won 90 games.

Come the offseason, they zagged again, dealing 23-year-old first baseman Jake Bauers for Yandy Diaz, an unheralded 27-year-old with one career home run and no position. They even sent cash along to the Indians to make the three-team deal with Seattle work. The reasoning: They loved Diaz’s hard-hit ball rate.

Naturally, Diaz has slugged four home runs, sports a .923 OPS and 155 OPS-plus - and is hitting the ball softer than all of his lineup mates.

Oh, he gets his barrels — Diaz’s hard-hit rate, at 40%, ranks 103rd among all major leaguers with at least 30 batted-ball events.

It’s just that Tommy Pham (12th in MLB at 55%), Kevin Kiermaier (26th), Avisail Garcia (37th), Willy Adames (49th), Mike Zunino (73rd), Brandon Lowe (85th), Ji-Man Choi (87th) and Austin Meadows (98th) all hit the ball 95 mph or harder with greater frequency.

Pham and Meadows were acquired in July trades, Zunino in December and Garcia after the White Sox non-tendered him. Now, the Rays account for nearly 10% of the major leagues’ top hard-hit artists.

Their lone offseason splurge — a two-year, \$30 million deal to right-hander Charlie Morton — hasn’t disappointed: The Rays have won three of his four starts, and he’s struck out 25 in 20⅓ innings.

Tyler Glasnow, acquired with Meadows in the Archer trade, has struck out 24 in 24 innings, has a 1.13 ERA and renders the temporary loss of Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell to a toe injury quite palatable.

Heck, young right-hander Yonny Chirinos might soon graduate from the “Opener” plan and become a bona fide starter. He’s posted a 3.26 ERA and 19 strikeouts in 19 innings of starter/follow-the-Opener work.

For now, they have three traditional starters and two days of openings. It is a far different look from the greatest teams in franchise history: the 2008 squad that won 97 games and the AL pennant and the 2010 team that won 96 games behind Cy Young runner-up David Price. Those teams beat back the Red Sox and Yankees for division titles, a tall order for this group given those teams won 108 and 100 games, respectively, in 2018.

The process really starts Friday at Tropicana Field, with the first of six games in 10 days against the defending champions.

“They’re off to a really good start, but you have to keep it up,” says Longoria, a rookie in 2008. “If we were halfway through the season, I’d be feeling a lot more confident.

“Obviously, you want to be in the position they’re in now, but in that division, in particular, you’ve got to keep the pedal to the metal.”

Or the barrel to the ball.

*** TampaBay.com**

Rays hope it’s not the start of something as Red Sox roll to 6-4 win

Marc Topkin

ST. PETERSBURG — Mutual admiration ran deep before Friday’s first of 19 overall meetings, and the opening of back-to-back weekend series, between the Rays and the Red Sox. Boston manager Alex Cora was effusive in his praise for how the Rays raced off to the best record in the majors.

“They have a great team,” he said. “Everyone knows it in the big leagues. It’s not that nobody knows what’s going on here.”

And the Rays, in turn, were charitable about the defending champs’ rough start and complimentary about Boston’s potential to turn things around.

“We knew they have a really good team,” centerfielder Kevin Kiermaier said. “I know they haven’t gotten out of the gate quite like they wanted to, but the talent that’s over in that clubhouse, there’s no denying that.

“They’re going to come out and click here pretty soon. We’re going to do our best to make sure it’s not (this) weekend.”

And after the Red Sox rallied for a 6-4 win in the series opener, the Rays’ challenge now is to make sure it’s not the start of something.

“We’re not freaking out or anything like that,” said reliever Ryan Yarbrough, who let an early lead get away. “We kind of know where we’re at. We have Charlie (Morton) going (Saturday), and we have a lot of confidence in him. Our offense has been great so far this year. We’re not really too concerned. It’s just more about executing pitches and see what happens.”

The loss was just the Rays’ sixth of the season, against 14 wins, and marked the first time in three-plus weeks of play they had dropped consecutive games. Cash said the focus just shifts to winning Saturday and having a chance to extend their season-starting series winning streak to seven.

“We’ve done a good job finding ways to win series,” he said. “We still want to put ourselves in position, and the only way we can do that is come out and play good and win (Saturday.)”

Cora is eyeing a similar prize: “We’ve got two shots at winning the series. This is the first time I can say that all season. It’s good to feel that way.”

With Tropicana Field loud and vibrant with a mixed allegiance crowd of 21,343, the Rays, as has been their recent MO, got off to a good start.

Brandon Lowe homered, his sixth in 20 team games, to give them a 1-0 lead in the second, and Avisail Garcia stayed hot by tripling in Yandy Diaz with two outs in the third to make it 2-0.

With scheduled starter Blake Snell sidelined with a broken toe from an unfortunate bathroom incident, Rays pitchers showed well early on, opener Ryne Stanek and Yarbrough holding the Sox hitless into the fifth. Wilmer Font got the sixth inning off to a bad start as well, increasing the deficit to 4-2.

The Rays came back to tie, briefly anyway, on a big two-run double by Daniel Robertson, who had been 0-for-his-last-21 and showing it.

"It felt good," he said. "It felt good to do something productive for the team. I guess when you go through those stretches, you try to tell yourself to have little victories, see the ball, hit it hard. I was just lucky to get it down the line there. Obviously it was a big time in the game, but that being said, we lost the game."

Then the Sox struck the Rays where it hurt. Mookie Betts and Mitch Moreland hit back-to-back homers, their first such combo of the season, off Diego Castillo, who had been one of the Rays' most-reliable but also most-used relievers.

"There are some things I don't have control over," Castillo said, via translator Manny Navarro. "It is what it is. I wasn't trying to do that, it's just part of it."

Cash suggested workload could've been an issue. Castillo wasn't having it.

"I feel good," he said. "It's just sometimes it's not going to go your way."

Moreland said the Red Sox see it as more than that.

"We know what we're capable of," he said. "We've got a great team. We've just got to keep rolling like that. We've got to keep it going. They're a good team over there, and they've obviously gotten off to a good start. For us to battle back and put up some crooked numbers late and take the game like that is a good first one."

*** *Associated Press***

Betts, Moreland homer in 8th, Red Sox beat Rays 6-4

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Mookie Betts hasn't looked much like the 2018 AL MVP yet. Two key hits Friday night might help jumpstart the Boston star's season.

Betts and Mitch Moreland hit back-to-back homers for the go-ahead runs in the eighth inning and the struggling Red Sox beat the MLB-best Tampa Bay Rays 6-4.

"A lot of emotions going through my head there, but the main thing is it put us ahead," Betts said. "It's just one (game), but it's definitely a starting point. The main thing is I helped in some way today, and that's kind of my viewpoint on playing."

With the game tied at 4, Betts hit a leadoff shot off Diego Castillo (0-2) and Moreland connected three pitches later.

"You're talking about two pretty talented hitters," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "Not surprising if you don't locate it or command it the way you want, they can make you pay."

Betts finished 2 for 4 and raised his batting average from .200 to .216. Last season, the Red Sox outfielder hit a big league-leading .346 with 32 homers and 80 RBI on his way to the MVP award.

Christian Vazquez also homered and Brandon Workman (1-1) went 1 2/3 scoreless innings for the Red Sox, who are 7-13 and trail the AL East-leading Rays by seven games. Ryan Brasier worked the ninth to pick up his fourth save.

"The standings?" Boston manager Alex Cora said. "We know where we're at, but it's more about we've got two shots to win the series. That feels good."

The Rays are the last team in the majors to have consecutive losses this season. Castillo was also the loser in a 6-5, 11-inning loss to Baltimore on Thursday night.

"It's a long, long season," Cash said. "We'll be fine."

After 20 games last season, the eventual World Series champion Red Sox (17-3) were 10 games up on Tampa Bay (7-13).

Daniel Robertson, mired in an 0-for-21 slide, got the Rays even at 4-all with a two-run double during the sixth. The inning was setup when Boston third baseman Rafael Devers misplayed what looked a double-play grounder from Avisail Garcia with one on and no outs.

Devers had a run-scoring double in the fifth for Boston's first hit before Vazquez put Boston ahead 3-2 on his two-run shot to center.

Vazquez has three homers and eight RBI in his last five games.

Betts, hitless in his previous 12 at-bats, doubled in the sixth and scored as the Red Sox grabbed a 4-2 lead when J.D. Martinez extended his hitting streak to nine games with an RBI single.

"I've been struggling all year, and to be able to hit a double in a spot like that, it definitely felt like a weight came off my shoulders," Betts said.

Martinez has a hit in 19 of 20 games this season.

Brandon Lowe hit his fifth homer in the last nine games, a solo drive that just cleared the fence at the 322-foot mark down the right-field line in the second before Garcia's third-inning RBI triple as the Rays went up 2-0.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: 2B Dustin Pedroia was examined by doctors Thursday and it was determined that his latest left knee injury is not serious. "We're just going to let it calm down for a few days and then it should be all right," Pedroia said. He was hurt in Boston's game Wednesday night and went on the 10-day IL on Thursday.

Rays: Ace Blake Snell (fractured right fourth toe) will have a bullpen session Saturday. "He continues to heal really quickly, which we're very encouraged about," Cash. ... C Mike Zunino went on the paternity list.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

Boston GM Dave Dombrowski and Cora presented Rays LHP Jalen Beeks with his 2018 World Series ring. Beeks appeared in two games last season with the Red Sox before being traded to Tampa Bay July 25 for RHP Nathan Eovaldi.

UP NEXT

Red Sox RHP Rick Porcello (0-3, 11.12 ERA) and Rays RHP Charlie Morton (2-0, 2.18 ERA) are Saturday night's starters. Porcello is 8-5 with a 2.86 ERA in 15 road starts against Tampa Bay.

Pedroia gets good news on latest knee injury

Boston Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia said he received good news about the irritation in his left knee that led to his return to the 10-day injured list.

The 35-year-old was activated April 9 after starting the season on the injured list with inflammation in the knee but left Wednesday night's game against the New York Yankees in the second inning. He was examined Thursday, when Boston put him back on the IL.

"More kind of scared me than anything," Pedroia said before Friday's 6-4 win at Tampa Bay. "I was nervous, obviously, to feel that. We're just going to let it calm down for a few days and then it should be all right. I hadn't had any issues up until this point."

Pedroia said he felt a pop as he went to rotate on a swing.

"Sometimes the batter's box are a little tacky and things like that," Pedroia said. "The brace I wear is strapped around, so it kind of like torqued, and my knee didn't."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora thought the injury could be serious.

"The way he reacted that day, I was like, 'Oh, this is it right here,'" Cora said. "I was thinking the worst. I'm relieved. We got some positive news. Now it's just a matter to see how he reacts during the week. When he's ready, he's ready."

Pedroia has appeared in six games with Boston, making four starts at second base and two as a designated hitter. He is 2-for-20 with a walk, one RBI and one run scored. He did not need an MRI.

"I've been through a lot," said Pedroia, who will use a different type of brace when he returns. "It's fun being out there playing. It was just a weird, freak thing."

"It's been going on for a few days," Cora said of Nunez's back issues. "He's been fighting it. It gets to the point that, let's stay away from him, get him better."

Boston also traded catcher Blake Swihart and international amateur signing bonus pool space to the Arizona Diamondbacks in exchange for minor league outfielder Marcus Wilson.

Infielders Tzu-Wei Lin and Michael Chavis were recalled from Triple-A Pawtucket. Cora said Lin likely will get the majority of the time at second base with Pedroia out.

Chavis, 23, is on an active major league roster for the first time. He was the 26th overall pick in the 2014 amateur draft.

"We'll find a way to get Michael at-bats," Cora said. "I'm happy for the kid that he's a big leaguer. Hopefully he can make an impact."