

## ***The Boston Red Sox Monday, April 22, 2019***

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

**This is what we expected from the Red Sox all along**

Christopher L. Gasper

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Put that Red Sox schedule back on the refrigerator. Those future dates at Fenway Park and other Major League Baseball venues can be circled. There will be a baseball season in Boston after all. The season and the Red Sox are back on.

The Sox put the capper on what was an ecumenically glorious day on the Boston sports scene whether you were a devout Red Sox, Celtics, or Bruins follower. All Boston sports prayers were answered on Easter Sunday with a holy trinity of triumph for the Hub.

The Left for Dead Sox broke out the brooms against the first-place Tampa Bay Rays at Tropicana Field. The resurgent Red Sox earned the sweep in their first extra-inning game of the season, snatching a 4-3 decision in 11 innings at the Trop to pull within five games of the American League East lead and four games from .500. It turns out reports of the Red Sox' demise were greatly exaggerated.

Instead of a last stand, this series against Tampa Bay was a first glimpse at what the defending World Series champions are truly capable of when they escape the hardball haze they spent the first 19 games of the season in. There's a lot of baseball left to play. The Sox preached they had recovery time from their tailspin. But patience isn't the forte of the Fenway Faithful. Pessimism and panic are Boston baseball birthrights. The Sox entered this series staring eight games up at the Rays from the AL East basement. Boston did not want to make its degree of difficulty for a fourth straight division title quadruple axel-like.

The most encouraging aspect of the Sox' first series win of the season was how it was done. Boston rediscovered its winning ways with quality at-bats in the late innings, excellent situational baseball execution, and attention to detail so sharp it was serrated. It also did it with an ensemble cast approach.

On Friday night, the Sox got no-hit for four innings, then pounded out 10 hits, and pulled away in the eighth with back-to-back home runs from Mookie Betts (officially out of his slump) and Mitch Moreland, reminiscent of the team that led the majors in runs scored last season.

On Saturday night, they survived squandering a 5-0 lead and scratched out the decisive run in the ninth, riding a huge pinch-hit double from new kid on the big league block Michael Chavis and a game-winning sacrifice fly from Andrew Benintendi. They stole the final out with catcher Christian Vazquez alertly picking Tampa Bay's Tommy Pham off first base with the tying run on second.

On Sunday, the Sox shrugged off Matt Barnes surrendering the tying home run in the eighth for the second consecutive day. They dug deep and played small ball in the 11th to ding overpowering Rays reliever Jose Alvarado for the second straight day, manufacturing the winning run after Vazquez followed Jackie Bradley Jr.'s sacrifice bunt with a sac fly to deep center to plate Rafael Devers.

That's what good teams do. They're not one-dimensional. They possess multiple means of victory. It's how the Sox turned last season into one big victory tour. Frankly, the Sox will take wins any way they can get them as they try to dig out of the early season crater they created. But winning three close games in three days in the late innings against one of their chief AL East competitors was reassuring for the Red Sox, who deep down might have been beginning to have their own doubts.

“It allowed us to show that we’re still a good team,” said Bradley. “And we beat a really good team in the Rays, who have been playing really good ball. We were able to sweep them at their place. We still got a lot more games to go, but it’s a good start.”

Speaking of good starts, don’t look now, but the Red Sox rotation is beginning to find its footing. Sunday’s starter David Price (five innings, five hits, two earned runs, 10 strikeouts, and two walks) deserved better than a no-decision. The crafty and cranky lefty made it two strong starts in a row, overpowering his former club.

For the first time in his distinguished career, Price registered double-digit strikeouts in an outing of five innings or fewer. Eight of those strikeouts were swinging, and five came on his two-seam fastball, according to MLB tracking data. Price’s 100th and final pitch of the outing was a changeup to strike out Daniel Robertson, who had dented him for a two-run gap double in the third, stranding a runner on first to keep it a one-run game.

Price’s pitch efficiency was hindered by his K-count and some defensive inefficiency behind him. With one out in the fifth, Xander Bogaerts slid for a Yandy Diaz grounder and allowed it to burrow beneath his body for a base hit. The next batter, Pham, hit a grounder to newbie second baseman Chavis. It looked like a 4-6-3 inning-ending double play with a sure-handed flip from Chavis, but Pham beat Bogaerts’s slow turn at second.

Bogey atoned in the sixth when he delivered a clutch bases-loaded single that put the Sox up, 3-2, and put Price in position for the win. However, it was another bad news day for Barnes. He served up the game-tying homer in the eighth for the second straight outing, doubling-over on the mound in disbelief. Pham did the honors Sunday.

No Sox starter earned a victory in this series, and they still only own two on the season. However, they’ve stopped giving their fielders whiplash from bloated WHIPs. In their last nine games, Sox starters have a 3.21 earned run average after posting something that looked like it was from the Romanian gymnastics judge in the first 13 games (8.79).

“We aren’t worried about outside this clubhouse,” said Price, who has been the best Sox starter. “We know the type of team we have inside the clubhouse, and I think we showed that the last three days.”

Yes, they did. The Sox looked like exactly who we thought they were, one of the best teams in the American League. This could be the Tampa Bay turning point.

Now, it’s up to them to not look back and keep the momentum moving forward as they return home to face the Detroit Tigers with Chris Sale on the mound. If Sale can revert to form like the rest of the team did here in the friendly, climate-controlled confines of the Trop then the Red Sox will really rejoice.

The Red Sox resurrection story was obviously not the most notable one of this sacred period on the calendar.

But the Sox too have arisen.

**Michael Chavis may not look like a second baseman. But what a second baseman looks like has changed**

Peter Abraham

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Michael Chavis appeared in 11 games for the Red Sox during spring training before he was optioned to Triple A Pawtucket on March 12.

He played second base once, for four innings on March 4 against the Washington Nationals.

The Red Sox thought they were set at the position with Brock Holt, Tzu-Wei Lin, Eduardo Nunez and Dustin Pedroia on the 40-man roster.

But with Holt, Nunez, and Pedroia now on the injured list, Chavis started at second base on Sunday in a 4-3, 11-inning victory against the Tampa Bay Rays.

Chavis was drafted as a shortstop in 2014, then quickly moved to third base. Other than that taste in spring training, his only experience at second base was five games in Triple A this season.

“He can make the routine play. We saw it in spring training. We have some good coaches here who can help him out, put him in the right spot,” manager Alex Cora said.

Chavis is built like a high school defensive end, not the body type you usually find at second base in the majors. But what constitutes typical at that position has changed.

Defensive positioning has moved second basemen further away from the base, making nimble feet less of a requirement.

“I took pride playing defense at second. There are a lot of things that are different,” Cora said. “You still have to make the plays, but defensively they put you in spots where the ball is going to be hit.

“It’s not like a tough play. They put you in a spot where most likely the ball is coming right at you, so it’s a routine play.”

The slide rule at second base, which debuted in 2016, also changed the nature of the position. A less nimble second baseman can stand his ground to turn a double play without fear of being rolled over.

It helps explain why 6-foot-4-inch, 230-pound Travis Shaw started 36 games at second base for Milwaukee last season. The Brewers have used career third baseman Mike Moustakas at second base for 17 games this season.

Austin Barnes, who was primarily a catcher in the minors, has played parts of 48 games at second base for the Dodgers since 2015.

Chavis is part of that trend.

“I feel pretty comfortable out there,” he said. “The coaches have been great. I’m prepared.”

Chavis, who played 10 innings in the field before being replaced by Lin, turned a double play in the first inning, handled three routine grounders and caught a pop. He was 0 for 4 with a walk at the plate.

Martinez streaks on

J.D. Martinez’s infield single in the first inning extended his hitting streak to 11 games. He has hit safely in 21 of the 22 games this season.

That’s the longest such streak for a Red Sox player to start a season since Eddie Bressoud hit safely in 24 of the first 25 games in 1964.

Martinez has reached base safely in every game, the longest streak for a Sox player to open the season since Manny Ramirez reached in the first 23 games of 2001.

Martinez finished 1 for 3 with two walks.

Rare finish

When Christian Vazquez ended Saturday's game by picking Tommy Pham off first base, it was the first Red Sox victory since at least 1961 to end with a catcher's pickoff and the first in the majors since April 24, 2017, when San Francisco's Buster Posey nabbed Justin Turner of the Dodgers at second base.

Vazquez has seven career pickoffs, the most by a Sox catcher since Rich Gedman had 12 from 1980-90.

Sox travel well

The three-game series drew 63,023, which by Tampa Bay standards was an accomplishment. A large percentage of the fans, close to half, were Red Sox fans . . . Righthander Erasmo Ramirez, who was designated for assignment on Thursday, cleared waivers and was outrighted to Triple A Pawtucket . . . The Rays made a series of roster moves before the game. Austin Meadows (sprained right thumb) went on the injured list. Infielder Joey Wendle was activated off the injured list. Righthander Jake Faria was optioned to Triple A and righthander Hunter Wood went on paternity leave. Righthander Emilio Pagan was recalled from Triple A along with utility player Andrew Velazquez . . . The Sox allowed four triples on Saturday, the first time they have done that since June 9, 1983, against Detroit at Fenway Park. It was the second time in team history going back to at least 1908 that the Sox allowed four triples and won the game. The previous time was on Aug. 15, 1948, against the Washington Senators. No major league team had won a game allowing four triples since the Tigers beat the Royals on Sept. 21, 1998, at Kauffman Stadium. One of the triples in that game for Kansas City was by Carlos Febles, now the third base coach of the Red Sox.

### **How the Red Sox pieced together a series of small yet meaningful plays to pull off this win**

Peter Abraham

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The ball Rafael Devers served out over second base in the top of the 11th inning on Sunday afternoon was measured at 71 miles per hour off the bat, undoubtedly slower than many of the cars rushing by Tropicana Field on Interstate 275.

But it landed for a single, Tampa Bay Rays center fielder Kevin Kiermaier deciding to hold back rather than risk the ball bouncing off the artificial turf and getting by him.

A series of small, yet meaningful events followed for the Red Sox.

Michael Chavis drew a five-pitch walk, pitcher Jose Alvarado working him down and in after the rookie doubled off him on Saturday to help win that game.

Then Jackie Bradley Jr. was able to get his bat on a 98-m.p.h. fastball and put down a successful sacrifice bunt, his first since 2015.

Bunting to get to the No. 9 hitter isn't conventional, but the Sox preferred a productive out from Bradley rather than having him swing away at Alvarado. That lefty-lefty matchup didn't favor Bradley.

"It's as tough as anything in baseball," said Bradley about trying to bunt that particular pitch. "I was glad to get the job done."

With the infield in, Christian Vazquez's job was to get the ball in the air. But he had not had a sacrifice fly since 2017.

"That guy is nasty, but I was trying to drive it," Vazquez said. "I had faced him before and I felt pretty good."

Vazquez took a curveball off the plate — "Forget that pitch," he said — and swung at a fastball. He hit it deep enough to center field to score Devers.

From small things, big things come. The Red Sox had their run and held on for a 4-3 victory that completed a three-game sweep.

After a 2-8 start, the Sox have won seven of 12. They are now only five games behind the first-place Rays and start a 10-game homestand on Monday night.

“Hopefully this gets us on a good roll,” said Ryan Brasier, who had the save in all three games of the series. “Coming in and beating these guys like that, it can go a long way.”

Alvarado entered the series having thrown 9⅓ scoreless innings this season with 16 strikeouts. The Sox faced him twice and scored two runs on three hits and two walks.

Sox manager Alex Cora is an advocate of aggressive swings and an attack mentality at the plate. But he played for one run on Sunday.

“We don’t do that usually, but in the spot we were in, we had to do it,” he said. “You have to give those guys credit.”

Vazquez was 0 for 7 against Alvarado in his career with two strikeouts. But Cora didn’t mind the matchup.

“He’s been swinging the bat well, direct to the ball. He’s a good situational hitter,” the manager said. “He has a pretty good idea how to play the game. Against a tough guy who keeps the ball down, he put a good swing on it.”

It was only the second time in his career Vazquez drove in a run in extra innings.

“I’m not usually in that position,” he said. “It was fun.”

David Price allowed two runs on five hits over five slow-paced innings. He struck out 10 with two walks and threw 100 pitches.

Red Sox starters have a 3.21 earned run average in the last nine games. The rotation had an 8.79 ERA through 13 games.

“We’re getting better, absolutely,” Price said. “We can still get better. We understand that; we know that and we believe that. Keep it going.”

The Sox scored twice to take a 3-2 lead in the sixth inning.

Mookie Betts knocked Rays starter Tyler Glasnow out of the game with a single to right field. Pinch hitter Steve Pearce drew a walk off reliever Adam Kolarek. Chaz Roe then walked J.D. Martinez to load the bases.

Xander Bogaerts singled to right center, driving in two runs.

Brandon Workman and Colten Brewer worked perfect innings. Matt Barnes, who threw 29 pitches in the first two games of the series, was the choice in the eighth. He got one out before hanging a curveball that Tommy Pham drove over the fence in right field.

It was the second home run allowed in as many games for Barnes.

Marcus Walden replaced Barnes and went two innings for the win. He retired six of the seven batters he faced.

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

**Red Sox sweep caps happy Easter Sunday**

Tom Keegan

It's official. The Red Sox have completed their evolution from baseball's lovable losers of the 20th-century to envied champions of the 21st.

The Red Sox aren't the Patriots yet, neither as rulers of their sport nor objects of scorn, but they're inching in that direction. The latter half of that equation surfaced during, of all times, the NBC broadcast of Game 6 of the Bruins-Maple Leafs series Sunday.

Even revered Doc Emerick, genteel voice of the NHL, took his whack, however mild, at baseball's April pinata during his call of the Bruins' 4-2, Game 7-forcing victory over the Maple Leafs in Toronto.

"Often in baseball, fortunes are measured by how much money you spend," Emerick said. "How them Red Sox doing?"

Much better, thank you for asking, but they still have a lot of real estate to cover to get back on top.

A couple of hours after Emerick's rib, which he punctuated by saying he was "half-kidding," Jackie Bradley dropped a beautiful bunt to move a pair of runners 90 feet, Christian Vazquez drove in the winning run with a deep sacrifice fly to right and Ryan Brasier put the finishing touches on the 4-3, 11-inning victory with a 1-2-3 save, sending the Red Sox into a 10-game homestand feeling like winners.

If you're going to win your first series of the season more than three weeks into the season, it might as well be a sweep against one of your two biggest threats to repeating as AL East champions.

The second-place Yankees had a big weekend too and have won five-of-six to move within 2-1/2 games of the Rays, but it was not a weekend without its costs. Aaron Judge checked onto a Yankees injured list more crowded than a slumping hitter's head with a strained oblique muscle.

Bradley's head just might have found what it needed to find room to relax.

Many a prolonged hitting slump has ended with a bunt for a base hit, so it's not a reach to believe that Bradley's perfectly placed sacrifice bunt can be just the tension-reliever the .148-hitting center fielder needed to get his season going.

Bradley has been far from alone in a rough start to the season for the 9-13 Red Sox.

Some of the stumbling out of the gate undoubtedly can be traced to manager Alex Cora's decision to take it slowly in a second half of February and into March that felt in many ways as much like a spring break as spring training.

The lack of intensity during the exhibition season played a part an atypical lack of alertness in the field in the early stages of the regular season. The lack of innings in exhibition games from much of the rotation played a role in the starting pitchers getting rocked early, but with David Price (10 strikeouts in five innings) leading the way, the rotation has a sunnier outlook. Nathan Eovaldi's bone chips were cleared up in surgery a year ago and he returned in style. No reason to believe he can't do that again if he elects to have surgery.

Chris Sale, yet to prove he's all the way back from shoulder woes that dogged him last fall, holds the key to the rotation remaining a strength that can restore the Red Sox. Starting with the opener of the homestand vs. Tigers, Sale can either keep the good vibes flowing or continue the cloud of doubt that hovers over the club's decision to sign him to a five-year, \$145 million contract extension.

Not that they had any reason to look at that way, but it was on the Red Sox to complete the Happy Easter Sunday hat trick for Boston, a memorable day with the Bruins series-evener bookended by sweeps from the

Celtics over the overmatched Pacers and the Red Sox three-game sweep of the formerly hot Rays, whose lead over the fourth-place Red Sox dwindled to five games.

The Red Sox were up to the challenge and the weekend amounted to what Bradley rightly termed as “a good start.”

### **Red Sox complete sweep of first-place Rays with 4-3 win in extras**

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — For days, Alex Cora has been making a prediction to anyone who will listen.

“We’re getting close,” the manager said Saturday night. “Getting real close.”

He was preaching similar optimism on the radio last week, even after the Red Sox were swept in New York, fell to eight games back of the first-place Rays and hadn’t won a series in six tries.

But Cora’s team showed up to Tropicana Field this weekend and put together a dramatic three-game sweep against MLB’s best team.

The Sox blew a lead in the eighth but took it back in the 11th to secure a 4-3 win over the Rays.

“Played good baseball,” Cora said. “We’ve been saying all along we need to get better at a lot of things. Starts with the rotation. David (Price) grinded it out today. They put some good at-bats. But gave us five and the bullpen was outstanding. Just one pitch. We’ll take that pitch in any at-bat with that guy on the mound.”

All three wins this weekend were decided by two or fewer runs, and the Sox scored the game-winning run in the eighth inning or later all three times to cut the Rays’ lead in the American League East from eight games to five.

The Rays came into the series with MLB’s best starting rotation and the best closer in the game, but the Red Sox put up five runs on Charlie Morton and scored the first run of the year off Jose Alvarado in the ninth inning of a 6-5 win on Saturday. They scored another on Alvarado in the 11th on Sunday, thanks in part to a perfect sacrifice bunt by Jackie Bradley Jr.

“Last year we did a good job against bullpens, seems like we put good at-bats in the last third of the game. And we did it this weekend,” Cora said. “Seems like something we haven’t done in the first 20 games. This weekend we did a good job grinding out at-bats. It looks a lot different offensively. It feels good to see them playing that way.”

Sunday’s starter Tyler Glasnow entered with a 1.13 ERA, best in the league, having thrown at least six innings in all four outings. The Sox held him to just 5- $\frac{1}{3}$  innings, put seven runners on base and scored twice before the Rays’ bullpen took over.

It could’ve been worse for the Rays, but rookie Michael Chavis couldn’t come through with the bases loaded and one out against Chaz Roe. His two-seam with sinking action caused Chavis to misfire on a fastball over the plate. He boinked it into the ground for an easy inning-ending double play as the Sox took a 3-2 lead into the eighth.

Matt Barnes, pitching for the third consecutive day for the first time this season, went to his signature curveball for a first-pitch strike on Tommy Pham, then tried to throw the same pitch high in the zone on a 1-2 count, but Pham hammered it over the fence for the game-tying homer.

Barnes then struck out two to end the frame and has struck out at least two batters in all nine appearances this year. He’s fanned 19 overall in 9- $\frac{1}{2}$  innings and has the highest strikeout percentage in the majors.

The bullpen may still be a reliever short, and time will tell if Dave Dombrowski waited too long to add a quality reliever or if this group is deep enough, but Marcus Walden is starting to look like a weapon with a wipeout slider and high-90s fastball. He saved the game with two big outs on Saturday and threw two more scoreless innings on Sunday.

And the Red Sox starting pitching is finally starting to come around.

They were 0-8 with an 8.79 ERA in the first 13 games of the season, but have a 3.21 ERA over the last nine games.

This weekend, Eduardo Rodriguez was a routine double play botched by Rafael Devers short of a quality start, but still threw 5- $\frac{1}{3}$  innings allowing three earned runs. Rick Porcello had his best start of the year, 5- $\frac{2}{3}$  innings and two runs allowed. And Price was strong, albeit inefficient, on Sunday, allowing just two runs in five innings.

The reigning MVP is starting to look alive, too. Mookie Betts was on base eight times in 14 plate appearances.

J.D. Martinez, hitting .350, extended his hitting streak to 12 games and has reached safely in all 22 games this year.

Mitch Moreland is still hot and has seven homers already.

Chavis clearly has bat speed. The rookie had a tough game Sunday but should be given a chance to prove himself before Dustin Pedroia is ready to return.

Questions will be asked about the bullpen (what's new?) but the Red Sox played their best series of the year against the best team in baseball.

"Did a good job over the weekend but now we've got to go home and keep getting better," Cora said. "That's what we got to do. If we keep doing that we will be in good shape."

Maybe Cora was right; they're getting close.

### **Dustin Pedroia helping as Red Sox look to improve Rafael Devers' defense at third base**

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Early Saturday, hours before gametime, injured second baseman Dustin Pedroia was on the field at third base, giving instructions to Rafael Devers.

Devers, in his third big league season, leads all third baseman with six errors to start the year.

Pedroia had some ideas.

"We're trying actually, it seems like the errors, he's getting that in-between hop a lot," manager Alex Cora said. "It might be us, as far as positioning. Push him back, move him forward, just put him in a comfortable spot. He's making all those great plays, the double play and all that. It's that last hop, it's in-between.

"Pedey talked to some guys around the league, watched some video and had some ideas. We talked about it and we're just trying to avoid that. Seems like the Arenados, Machados, they always get that short hop, never get that long one. It's more about where he's comfortable, depth-wise, and go from there."

Devers continues to impress on difficult plays. He makes on-the-run plays look easy. He can charge and bare-hand a ball as well as most at the hot corner. But he often can't handle the most routine plays.



The Sox hope better positioning will help him.

“When we went to Oakland, he really paid attention to Matt Chapman,” Cora said. “We saw what he did and what he’s trying to, not do it like him because he plays way deep, but stay quiet and go down. He’s been very consistent with it. We’ve been getting a lot of slow rollers, it seems like he never gets a routine ground ball. It’s either a slow roller or one hop in between.”

On the bright side, the Sox think Devers’ throwing arm is getting better. Half of his 24 errors last season were throwing errors. This year, only two of his six errors are throwing errors.

“Better footwork,” Cora said. “Very consistent. The ball is carrying to first. When he came to spring training he had it down. Credit to him. There’s more rhythm, more momentum going toward the base, even to second base on double plays. He’s very consistent.

“One thing about Raffy, he’s very hard on himself. He makes an error, you have to stay on him the whole game. He wants to show everybody he can play. We keep telling him, relax, you’re a good player. He has some tough errors. There are some of them the league didn’t change but there are some tough ones there.”

### **Michael Chavis gets a shot at second base**

Jason Mastrodonato

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — It’s worth wondering what the presence of a prospect suddenly thrust into a team full of veterans can do.

But Alex Cora doesn’t buy into that theory.

Michael Chavis “doesn’t lack confidence,” the manager said after the rookie provided a much-needed spark with a missile off Rays’ ace reliever Jose Alvarado to key a ninth-inning rally on Saturday night.

With the Red Sox ranking last in almost every category at production at second base this year, and getting little out of third baseman Rafael Devers (six errors, .670 OPS), can Chavis presence motivate some guys?

“I don’t believe in stuff like that,” Cora said Sunday before the Sox finished a sweep of the Rays with a 4-3 win. “If you’re not motivated enough playing in the big leagues, you’re playing the wrong sport, in the wrong business. On a daily basis you should be motivated.”

Sunday morning, Chavis was out on the field early taking a crash course at second base with infield instructor and former big league second baseman Carlos Febles.

And while both Cora and Dave Dombrowski said on Friday that Chavis wouldn’t play much second base, and Dombrowski said the 23-year-old was unlikely to stick around in the majors long, there was Chavis in the starting lineup, batting seventh and playing second as the Sox look for a sweep over the first-place Rays.

He went 0-for-4 with a walk and a strikeout in his first career big league start. At second base, he turned a double play and looked comfortable.

“He can make the routine play, we saw it in spring training,” Cora said. “We have some good coaches here that are going to help him out, put him in the right spot. It’s not that I’m uncomfortable but he hasn’t played the position. He should be fine.”

Eduardo Nunez, Dustin Pedroia and Tzu-Wei Lin haven’t offered much with the bat this year. Chavis is an offensive-first player, a natural shortstop who has played the corner infield spots in the minors. He has only five games of experience at second base.

But the position isn't as demanding as it once was. With analytics helping defenders to be better-positioned, and the new rules preventing much contact on double play attempts at second base, defensive ability isn't being prioritized at second.

Former Red Sox third baseman Travis Shaw played some second base in Milwaukee, and the Brewers are now using third baseman Mike Moustakas as their primary second baseman. Max Muncy, a career corner infielder in the minors, is now the Dodgers' primary second baseman.

Chavis deserves a shot.

"There are a lot of things that are different at second base," Cora said. "You still have to make the plays. Defensively they put you in spots where the ball is going to be hit. It's not like a tough play, you know? They put you in spots most likely it'll come right at you as a routine play. You see teams around the league doing it with Muncy, Travis, Moustakas, nobody expected those guys to play second base.

"The way defense is now, and the rules at second base, it's a lot different. I hate saying back in the day because I'm not that old, but when I played I took pride in turning a double play and not getting hit. That's a skill. Now it's, get there on time, catch it and throw it. If they hit you, you're out."

Devers gets new teacher

Early Saturday, hours before game time, Pedroia was on the field standing at third base, giving instructions to Devers.

Devers, in his third big league season, leads all third basemen with six errors to start the year.

Pedroia had some ideas.

"We're trying actually, it seems like the errors, he's getting that in-between hop a lot," Cora said. "It might be us, as far as positioning. Push him back, move him forward, just put him in a comfortable spot. He's making all those great plays, the double play and all that. It's that last hop, it's in-between.

"Pedey talked to some guys around the league, watched some video and had some ideas. We talked about it and we're just trying to avoid that. Seems like the Arenados, Machados, they always get that short hop, never get that long one. It's more about where he's comfortable, depth-wise, and go from there."

The Sox think Devers' throwing arm is getting better. Half of his 24 errors last season were throwing errors. This year, only two of his six errors are throwing errors.

"Better footwork," Cora said. "Very consistent. The ball is carrying to first."

Vazquez takes charge

Christian Vazquez' pickoff of Tommy Pham to end Saturday's game showed the Red Sox that he's willing to step up and take ownership in the Sox' success this year.

"That's why we talk about paying attention to details," Cora said. "You pay attention to details, the watched what was going on and took a shot. Good for him. He's been good. I don't know, maybe what happened last week (with Blake Swihart getting traded), it's like, 'hey, let's go, it's you.' It's good to see him that way.

"That's a message that even before we traded Swihart, I talked to him about it, like, 'we go with the pitching. I know you guys care about the hitting but right now I can care less what you do offensively. You have to take ownership.'"

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

**Boston Red Sox sweep Rays behind Marcus Walden's 2 scoreless innings, Christian Vazquez's sac fly, David Price's 10 K's**

Christopher Smith

For the second straight game, Matt Barnes allowed a solo home run in the eighth to surrender the lead. Tommy Pham, who Christian Vazquez picked off first base to end Saturday's game, connected on a curveball and sent it 388 feet to right field to tie the game 3-3.

But for the second straight game, the Red Sox offense rallied late against Rays closer José Alvarado.

Rafael Devers singled against Alvarado to begin the 11th. Michael Chavis walked on five pitches. Jackie Bradley Jr. bunted both runners into scoring position.

Then, Christian Vazquez connected on a 97.8 mph sinker and launched it 375 feet to center field for a sacrifice fly.

The Red Sox won 4-3.

Boston swept the Rays and improved to 9-13.

Marcus Walden hurled a scoreless ninth and 10th inning. He allowed just one single and struck out two. Walden (2.53 ERA) also struck out both batters he faced Saturday when he entered with two outs, a runner at third base and the Red Sox leading by only one run in the seventh.

Cash removes Glasnow too soon?

Rays manager Kevin Cash removed starter Tyler Glasnow (1.53 ERA, five starts) with one out in the sixth inning at just 76 pitches and Tampa leading 2-1.

Not a smart decision by Cash.

Glasnow left one runner on base. He allowed a single to Mookie Betts right before exiting.

Reliever Adam Kolarek walked Steve Pearce, the only batter he faced. Reliever Chaz Roe walked J.D. Martinez to load the bases, then allowed an RBI single to Xander Bogaerts. The Red Sox took a 3-2 lead.

Price K's 10

David Price struck out 10. He pitched well again but he lasted only 5 innings with his pitch count at 100.

Price averaged 92.3 mph and topped out at 94 mph with his two-seam fastball, per Baseball Savant. He threw 27 two-seamers and got four swings-and-misses with it. He also recorded five swings-and-misses with his four-seamer, three with his changeup and two with his curveball.

The Rays took a 2-0 lead in the third inning vs. Price when David Robertson ripped a two-run double with two outs.

Mitch Moreland cut the deficit to 2-1 in the fourth when he blasted a 108.7-mph, 407-foot home run to right-center field. He connected on a 97 mph four-seam fastball from Tyler Glasnow.

**Boston Red Sox roster moves: Erasmo Ramirez outrighted to Triple-A Pawtucket, salary counts toward CBT**

Christopher Smith

Erasmus Ramirez has cleared waivers after the Red Sox designated him for assignment Thursday. Boston outrighted him to Triple-A Pawtucket.

Ramirez's big league salary will continue to count toward the Red Sox's Competitive Balance Tax for the remainder of the season despite him pitching just one game for Boston.

Any player's salary continues to count toward the CBT after he is outrighted.

The Red Sox are trying to stay under the CBT third threshold of \$246 million. This doesn't help. The Red Sox had other minor league pitchers with options who wouldn't have counted toward the CBT when they were optioned back to Pawtucket.

Ramirez allowed four runs, four hits (two homers) and one walk while striking out just one in 3 innings in Boston's 8-0 loss at Yankee Stadium on Tuesday. He also hit a batter.

**Nathan Eovaldi replacement: Boston Red Sox plan to use Hector Velazquez, other internal options with Eovaldi on injured list**

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox will have their starting pitching depth tested early this season, with righty Nathan Eovaldi likely to miss at least a few weeks with loose bodies in his right elbow. Though nothing is set yet, manager Alex Cora told reporters Saturday that righty Hector Velazquez is the leading candidate to slot into Eovaldi's spot starting Tuesday against the Tigers.

"We've got (Marcus Walden) and we've got Hector (Velazquez) who can give us length," Cora said. "Hector has thrown the ball well. He just struggled with command in the last one (against the Orioles). The way he threw in Arizona, the stuff is a lot better. We'll see how it goes today and tomorrow and we'll make a decision."

Velazquez has made two starts for Boston so far, going three innings in each game while serving as a sixth starter to give the team's rotation an extra day of rest. He's now the top candidate to assume one of those five spots, at least through the next four turns through the rotation.

With Brian Johnson out indefinitely due to elbow inflammation, Velazquez and Walden are the only members of the active roster who are capable of starting. Mike Shawaryn, Chandler Shepherd and Erasmo Ramirez (if he clears waivers) are the top candidates at Pawtucket with top prospect Darwinson Hernandez unlikely to be summoned from Portland.

Cora downplayed the idea of Boston using a "bullpen day" in Eovaldi's spot until he returns, citing how taxing games like that can be for the team's relievers.

"We would like to have somebody that can go five," Cora said. "Obviously, we have to see where we're at. It's not easy."

Boston is two games into a 20-game stretch without an off day, so Cora won't have the luxury of re-setting his rotation until May 9. Eovaldi's spot will come up four times before the next off day-- Tuesday against Detroit, next Sunday against Tampa Bay, May 3 against the White Sox and May 8 against Baltimore.

The spot will likely belong to Velazquez, though Cora could get creative and turn to an unexpected option. The manager is comfortable with the organization's depth at this point.

"We'll figure it out," Cora said. "We'll find ways."

## \* **RedSox.com**

### **4 takeaways from Boston's sweep of the Rays**

Dawn Klemish

ST. PETERSBURG -- On Friday, the Red Sox limped into Tampa Bay under a cloud of frustration and uncertainty. They'll head back north toting a three-game win streak and their first series sweep of the season after a 4-3, 11-inning win on Sunday against the Rays at Tropicana Field.

Gaining three games on the American League East-leading Rays on their home turf could be just the confidence-builder Boston needs to overcome an early-season funk and get back to their winning ways.

"We'll figure some things out," left fielder Andrew Benintendi said. "Once we hit our stride, it'll be a lot more fun, and I'm sure everybody else will be happy, too."

"If we keep playing the way we know we're capable of playing, we'll be OK."

With that in mind, here are four things we learned during the Red Sox's trip to St. Petersburg:

**Hard-fought wins are an extra feather in the cap**

It goes without saying that any wins are good wins, but the Rays really made Boston earn their W's this weekend, forcing a tie in the seventh inning or later in all three games despite the Red Sox leading early in two of them.

"[The Rays] are feeling good right now," starter David Price said. "They are playing good baseball, and that was a big three wins for us."

The highlight of the series was decidedly the final game, when a late Rays home run forced extra innings, really testing Boston's will. The score was deadlocked until the 11th, when Rafael Devers got the final rally started with a leadoff single, then moved to second on a Michael Chavis walk.

Jackie Bradley Jr. advanced the pair with a sacrifice bunt, leaving Christian Vázquez to boost the eventual game-winning sacrifice fly to deep center field and score Devers from third.

Price said showing late-game moxie is a great early measuring stick for how a team responds to pressure: In Boston's case, by elevating its game.

"We aren't worried about outside of this clubhouse," Price added. "We know the type of team we have inside of this clubhouse, and I think we showed that these last three days."

**The starters have turned a corner**

Price fanned a season-high 10 batters over five innings Sunday and held the Rays to a pair of runs on five hits. The left-hander owns a 1.32 ERA over his last six games at Tropicana Field and has allowed two runs or fewer in eight of his last nine starts against his former team.

Eduardo Rodriguez (Friday's starter) and Rick Porcello (Saturday's) similarly limited Tampa Bay's damage and put their team in the best position to take late control of the game. It's great news for the Red Sox, who were plagued by rotation issues early on, but appear to be settling in despite losing Nathan Eovaldi to the 10-day injured list on Saturday.

The difference is remarkable: The starting corps are 2-3 with a 3.21 ERA over the past nine games compared to an 8.79 ERA in their first 13.

**The kid can hold his own**

It's not likely Chavis will be with the Major League club for an extended period, but Boston's No. 1 prospect according to MLB Pipeline sure gave the Red Sox reason to remember his name.

In his Major League debut Saturday, Chavis provided the ninth-inning spark that put the winning run at third, crushing a pinch-hit double to the wall in center field. With the knock, Chavis became the first Red Sox player to record an extra-base hit in his first Major League plate appearance since Bryce Brentz (2014).

The fact that it came against the Rays' José Alvarado, widely recognized as one of the league's top closers, wasn't lost on the 23-year-old.

"[Alvarado] has good stuff; I think everybody knows that," said Chavis, who started at second base in Sunday's finale and helped turn a slick double play. "I guess, personally, it's kind of a reassurance I belong. ... It's my first hit, it's obviously a big deal in a very big moment but being in that situation and off of that quality of a pitcher was very special."

It takes a village

From Dustin Pedroia to Eovaldi to Brock Holt, it seems like no part of the roster has been immune to injury lately. The good news? The rest of the crew has stepped up.

Mitch Moreland left Saturday's game early with back spasms but returned Sunday to club his team-leading seventh home run in the fourth inning. He finished the series 3-for-8 with a pair of RBIs on two homers. J.D. Martinez is heading back to Boston with an 11-game hitting streak. Other series standouts include Mookie Betts (6-for-12, RBI, HR, 2 BB) and Benintendi (grand slam, five RBIs).

"We did a good job over the weekend," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "But now we've got to go home and keep getting better. If we keep doing that, we're going to be in good shape."

### **Vazquez's all-around hot start keeps Sox afloat**

Dawn Klemish

ST. PETERSBURG -- As the Red Sox battle injuries and inconsistency, Christian Vázquez has fought just as hard as anyone to keep the team afloat.

Last week, he played second base in a pinch and certainly didn't look like he was doing so for the first time in his career. His bat has been the main talking point early, with three home runs in his last seven games and seven of his 11 hits this season going for extra bases. In Sunday's 4-3 win over the Rays, Vazquez's sacrifice fly in the top of the 11th inning plated the winning run.

Vazquez's pickoff of the Rays' Tommy Pham at first base to end Saturday's game and secure the win added another dimension to his hot start. It bears mentioning that he entered as a defensive replacement in the bottom of the ninth.

According to Elias, Saturday marked the first Boston victory in the Expansion Era (1961-present) that ended with a catcher's pickoff. It was also the first catcher's pickoff to end a game since the Giants' Buster Posey caught Justin Turner on April 24, 2017.

"[Vazquez] paid attention to detail, he watched what was going on and he took a shot. Good for him," Boston manager Alex Cora said Sunday. "He's been good. It's good to see him that way."

The 28-year-old had nine career pickoffs this season entering Sunday, the most by a Red Sox catcher since Rich Gedman's 14 (1980-90). The most recent one might have been Vazquez's favorite, as he didn't hesitate when asked if he remembered the last time he'd ended a game in that fashion.

"Triple-A. '16. Syracuse. I remember that," Vazquez said. "It's my job to help my team behind the plate, and if I hit, it's a plus. [Saturday] was a great moment."

One-of-a-kind experiences up for grabs

Baseball fans have an opportunity to bid on unique baseball experiences and memorabilia during the annual UMPS CARE Charities Online Auction, which runs through 10 p.m. ET April 29.

Red Sox fans can win a package that includes watching pregame batting practice on the field at Fenway Park and game tickets for four. Also up for bid are a 16-inch Red Sox dome pub light, a Mookie Betts jersey and more. There are many items up for grabs in addition to those Boston-centric treats, such as a VIP tour of the Baseball Hall of Fame, lunch with a Major League umpire and tickets for two to a live taping of Pardon the Interruption.

All proceeds from the online auction support UMPS CARE Charities youth programs, which connect children and families in the communities in which the umpires work all season through the game they love. UMPS CARE provides once-in-a-lifetime Major League Baseball experiences for critically ill kids, at-risk youth and military families, Build-A-Bear Workshop® experiences for children battling serious illnesses at more than 15 pediatric hospitals in the United States and Canada, college scholarships for deserving young adults who were adopted as children and financial assistance for families in the baseball community in need. UMPS CARE Charities is the official charity of Major League Baseball umpires.

## **\* ESPN.com**

### **Red Sox sweep away concerns -- at least for now**

Joon Lee

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- On Friday in the Boston Red Sox clubhouse, Mookie Betts spoke to the media after getting Boston's biggest hit of the young season, a go-ahead homer that not only sparked a 6-4 series-opening win over the Tampa Bay Rays, but also awakened the MVP-winning outfielder. The level-headed star, who rarely displays emotion on the field, continuously pumped his fist while circling the bases.

As Betts spoke after the game, recapping the evening's festivities, shortstop Xander Bogaerts peeked into the scrum, crossed his arms and spread a big smile across his face. Betts smirked. The Boston clubhouse had its swag back, energy that the Red Sox hadn't shown frequently through the first two weeks of the season, as the team hobbled to a 6-13 record entering a quick Florida trip to play the first-place team of the American League East.

The three-game sweep of the Rays marked the first time this season the defending world champs have looked like, well, the defending world champs rather than the team treading water at the bottom of the division standings. Moment after moment, the Red Sox delivered in spots they had failed in through the first two weeks of the season.

If you trade with the Rays, you won't win

Turning castoffs into key contributors is a crucial part of first-place Tampa Bay's success. Bradford DoolittleInsider

Most importantly, it provided the perfect blueprint for what the Red Sox need to do to continue their arduous climb up the standings.

"We have to go home and keep getting better," manager Alex Cora said. "That's what we have to do."

The Red Sox came into the weekend series needing to course correct as they ranked 18th in baseball in total offense and 30th in team ERA. Through 19 games, the Red Sox had the worst run differential ever for a defending World Series champion. Boston didn't do much to cut into that run differential -- they're still

minus-38 on the season -- but they're no longer in last place, one game above the Baltimore Orioles, and are five games out of the division lead, still held by Tampa Bay.

With Nathan Eovaldi on the injured list, out with loose bodies in his right throwing elbow, the Red Sox rotation will need to step up to fill the void left by the flame-throwing righty. This weekend, Eduardo Rodriguez, Rick Porcello and David Price all did their part, giving the Red Sox's offense an opportunity to outscore the Rays, allowing a total of seven earned runs in the three starts. Tampa Bay entered the weekend with the best run differential in baseball.

"It was big for us after we lost two games in New York," Price said. "And then to come here against one of the best two teams in the American League right now and to win three in a row, that was big for us."

Coming off a series where the offense struggled whenever the team needed a run, the Red Sox came through in a series sweep in which just four runs separated the teams over three games.

Betts and Mitch Moreland hit long, go-ahead homers in the eighth inning of the series-opening 6-4 win, marking the first signs of life for the offense. Michael Chavis' long double (and first major league hit) with a runner on first set up Andrew Benintendi's sacrifice fly, which scored the go-ahead run in Saturday's 6-5 victory. Christian Vazquez's go-ahead sacrifice fly in the 11th inning followed a Rafael Devers single, a Chavis walk and a Jackie Bradley Jr. sacrifice bunt that helped set up a 4-3 victory in the series finale.

Boston capitalized twice against Rays reliever Jose Alvarado, who entered the series with 16 strikeouts in 9½ scoreless innings this season, knocking in the winning runs against the stud bullpen arm in the second and third games of the series.

"They have a really good pitcher on the mound in Alvarado, so runs are at a premium," Bradley said. "You want to do everything you possibly can to make it tough and difficult on him."

It's still just April and there are 140 games left in the Red Sox season. Boston has now won seven of its past 12 games after starting the season 2-8. It's why especially in the early part of the season, the team hasn't paid attention to the headlines, some of which have fans inching closer to the panic button.

That panic didn't reach the Red Sox.

"We aren't worried about outside of this clubhouse," Price said. "We know the type of team we have inside of this clubhouse, and I think we showed that the last three days."

**\* *WEEI.com***

**Is Christian Vazquez ready to become catcher Red Sox truly need?**

Rob Bradford

When Blake Swihart was designated for assignment we were distracted from what really mattered.

The first focus immediately shifted on Swihart, the former first-round pick who many believed simply wasn't given the kind of chance he deserved.

Then there was the conversation regarding Sandy Leon, whose presence was going to help alter the Red Sox' pitchers' fortunes in a manner that Swihart couldn't.

Both shouldn't have been prioritized. This is really all about Christian Vazquez.

"I want to be considered one of the great ones."



That's what Vazquez told WEEI.com in spring training. It was an exhibition season where the 28-year-old was clearly locked into accomplishing that goal, seeing the opportunity to grab the starting catching reins. Sure, he only hit .208 (although with 4 homers) in Grapefruit League action, but the intensity and focus were noticeable.

And from the Red Sox' perspective, the hope was that the lessons learned throughout 2018 were going to take root in 2019. It was an education that started in the first series of last season and continued through October when Vazquez was the chosen one to guide most of the postseason pitchers.

"I do feel that series in Tampa right away put him in a bad spot," Cora said in spring training, remembering the Sox' season-opening series at Tropicana Field in 2018. "He hit like three or four balls that previous years, they were base hits. But teams made adjustments and they were actually shifting him away. He had three or four line drives that series right away, then he started chasing hits. Behind the plate, I think he did a good job. The whole thing about Sandy catching Chris (Sale), whatever, I didn't see a difference with Christian. He was doing a good job. The guy on the mound he's pretty good too. You put a number, he throws a pitch with conviction regardless. I do feel offensively he was chasing hits at one point. We saw the 0-for-whatever. He wanted to prove probably to everybody that he can hit. That's the part it's, no, don't chase hits. I think September, October when he realized, he put great at-bats. Forget the homer, there were two at-bats, the (Justin) Verlander one, 12 pitches and he made an out I think. That was a great at-bat, set the tempo for that game, yeah, we're here. Then against (Clayton) Kershaw the last game, he put great swings on him the whole day. He faced quality pitching and he put good at-bats and that's what we're looking for."

Flash forward to life after Swihart and Vazquez seemingly is embracing this new opportunity.

He started three of the five games on the recent road trip, coming through with home runs in two of them while supplying one of the most pivotal plays of the weekend in the game he didn't start. That, of course, was when Vazquez teamed with first baseman Steve Pearce to end Saturday night's game with a pickoff of Tommy Pham. He also threw out the only runner trying to steal on him against a Tampa Bay team that came into the series totaling the third-most stolen bases in baseball.

Vazquez punctuated the post-Swihart run with Sunday afternoon's game-winner, a sacrifice fly managed against Tampa Bay closer Jose Alvarado's 98 mph sinker.

Leon will play. But make no mistake about it, this is Vazquez' big chance. That run in October was nice, but this one actually might mean a bit more when it comes to the catcher's career.

### **In case you missed it, J.D. Martinez is still really good**

Rob Bradford

First impressions were a powerful thing when it came to J.D. Martinez last season.

After 22 games it had become clear what the Red Sox' had in the middle of their lineup -- the kind of presence David Ortiz left behind two seasons before.

Martinez kicked off his Sox' career well enough, hitting .306 with a .916 OPS and five homers through April 26. He wasn't quite where he wanted to be, still hitting the ball on the ground 45 percent but it was far from a disappointing introduction.

What we're seeing now -- through the same number of games -- is better. The team, not so much? But the player ...

Perhaps the perception isn't as powerful because of everyone else in this lineup. Until Mookie Betts' recent resurgence, and Mitch Moreland's first few weeks it was difficult to find bats besides Martinez that would make anyone dig into the weeds when it came to praising the Red Sox' offense. (Through 22 games last

season Martinez had the sixth-best batting average on the team.) That's fair. Nobody wants to hear how good somebody has been when it doesn't translate into wins.

But Martinez's existence should be noted because he is the one who has picked up where he left off.

The righty hitter has the sixth-best batting average in the American League (.350) to go along with four homers and a 1.003 OPS. He is putting the ball in the air far more than a year ago, carrying just a 38 percent ground ball percentage. The next highest batting average on the Red Sox is Andrew Benintendi (.282), with Moreland the other member of the batting order to carry an OPS north of .800.

He's striking out less and walking more while hitting the ball just as hard as a year ago. As BaseballSavant.com presents, it's a positive picture so far.

### **Red Sox Farm Report: Marco Hernandez sees first game action since 2017**

Nick Friar

Prior to the weekend, Red Sox infielder Marco Hernandez had been sidelined for nearly two seasons, playing his last game at the Major League level on May 3, 2017. Three shoulder surgeries later and he's finally back on the field, rehabbing with Class A Advanced Salem.

In his first appearance on Saturday, Hernandez went 1-for-4. He also turned a double play, fielded one groundout and committed a fielding error. He was the designated hitter on Sunday and finished 0-for-3.

Hernandez played in 61 games with the big league club between 2016 (40 games) and 2017 (21) before his series of shoulder surgeries. In that time, he batted .284 with four doubles and a home run.

Unfortunately for Hernandez, the organization has gone through quite a few changes since he last played. With the way things look in the infield, he will have a hard time earning any playing time at the big league level.

Shawaryn steady for PawSox

Right-handed starting pitcher Mike Shawaryn made his fourth start of the season for Triple-A Pawtucket on Sunday, surrendering three runs over five innings of work. Although it wasn't his best start, the 24-year-old still maintains a sub-4.00 ERA (3.63).

He has worked through five innings in each of his outings. In his two starts prior to Sunday, Shawaryn went a combined 12 innings, surrendering three runs on 12 hits and two walks while striking out 13. The 2016 fifth-round draft pick is currently ranked No. 13 among prospects in the Red Sox farm system by mlb.com, sixth among pitchers.

## **\* *NBC Sports Boston***

### **5 Takeaways from a weekend that might've finally turned around the Red Sox season**

John Tomase

There's an old proverb I made up when it looked like the Red Sox might lose Sunday's finale vs. the Rays: A starving man shouldn't demand dessert if he's just been fed shrimp cocktail and a porterhouse steak.

Thankfully, the Red Sox were feeling gluttonous.

A weekend series that already qualified as an unquestioned success became a smashing one following Sunday's 4-3 victory in 11 innings at the deflated birthday cake of a ballpark known as Tropicana Field.

After taking two hard-fought games to open the series, the Red Sox continued playing championship-caliber baseball in the finale, overcoming a 2-0 deficit and then maintaining their composure despite blowing an eighth-inning lead for the second straight day.

It's hard to overstate the significance of sweeping the first place Rays. Not only did the Red Sox draw within five games of Tampa, they finally looked like the team that won it all last year.

Highlights from the Red Sox 4-3 win over the Rays

There's so much to feel good about after the most entertaining weekend of the season, let's just dive right into the decadence as the Red Sox rediscovered their mojo.

### 1. They beat a good team that played well

The Red Sox did not catch Tampa in a valley. The Rays had won eight of 10 and they played like it. All three games were tied in the eighth inning, and the Red Sox managed to prevail against Tampa's imposing bullpen, twice denting overpowering closer Jose Alvarado. They won the three games by a total of four runs.

Sunday's contest provided a perfect example of the Red Sox executing in the clutch, from a diving stop by third baseman Rafael Devers to end the ninth, to a well-executed sacrifice bunt by Jackie Bradley Jr. and sacrifice fly by Christian Vazquez to lift them in the 11th.

Coming on the heels of Vazquez's gutsy pickoff to clinch Saturday's 6-5 nail-biter, and back-to-back homers in the eighth by Mookie Betts and Mitch Moreland to take the opener, the Red Sox played the kind of baseball that characterized their march to last year's championship.

It's about time.

### 2. Chavis brings energy

In a perfect world, Michael Chavis would be nowhere near the big leagues. The in-between power prospect -- what is his position, exactly? -- was summoned after injuries shelved Dustin Pedroia, Eduardo Nunez, and Brock Holt, but we were told he wouldn't necessarily play second base.

That lasted all of one day, after Chavis delivered a booming double off of a 99 mph Alvarado fastball on Saturday. He started at second on Sunday and worked Alvarado for the walk that put the winning run in scoring position.

With the Red Sox looking listless and lifeless, they needed a spark, and the exuberant Chavis has provided it. Who knows how much more he'll give or how much longer he'll be here, but he has supplied a badly needed infusion of energy.

### 3. Mookie is turning a corner

When Betts grounded out in the fourth on Friday, he saw his average drop to .197. That's inexcusable production for the defending MVP, but particularly one who hasn't even reached his prime. It felt like only a matter of time before he mattered again.

Eovaldi sent to Injured list with elbow issue

Two and a half games later, Betts has lifted his average to .244 and his OPS nearly to .800. He recorded multiple hits in all three games, a feat he had only managed twice all season.

He also struck the biggest blow of his 2019 by smashing a 97 mph fastball to dead center for the go-ahead homer in the opener. As we noted after the game, it was amazing to see him smile again. Maybe he can finally exhale and put this rough start behind him.

4. It looks like we have a closer

While it will probably still fluctuate depending on the matchups, a pecking order is emerging in the bullpen: Matt Barnes in the eighth, Ryan Brasier in the ninth.

The former struggled this weekend, allowing game-tying homers in back-to-back games. But the latter was outstanding, saving all three games and bouncing back perfectly from the go-ahead grand slam he allowed in Yankee Stadium on Wednesday.

Relievers have spent the last 25 years telling us they prefer defined roles, and the Red Sox seem to be finding them.

5. A series win!

It's impossible to defend a championship without winning any series, and the Red Sox finally accomplished that elusive goal by handing the hosts their first series defeat of the year. Losing can snowball in Boston, and taking care of business this weekend will keep the wolves at bay while reminding the roster what it's capable of doing.

With Tampa and New York out of the way, the Red Sox can turn their attention to the Tigers for four games before the Rays visit next weekend. Perhaps they're finally about to start rolling, where they can gorge on as many confections as they'd like.

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

### **Signs of life shown by Red Sox in weekend sweep of Rays**

Sean McAdam

No one should be celebrating a 9-13 record through the first three and a half weeks, nor feeling proud about being in fourth place in the American League East, just a game and a half in front of the wretched Baltimore Orioles.

But compared to where the Red Sox were when they left New York late Wednesday night, things have improved considerably.

As early as it is in the season, the Red Sox faced the real prospect of running themselves into the basement and out of contention had they been swept by the Tampa Bay Rays. Losing two-of-three would have been nearly as damning.

Instead, the Red Sox pulled off a sweep themselves, finishing off the Rays with a 4-3 win in 11th innings. All three wins were close, decided by one or two runs. All three came late, with the Sox scoring the go-ahead runs in the eighth, ninth and 11th innings. Twice, they went ahead to stay in their final at-bats.

That was a hallmark of the 2018 team, which never seemed to be out of games and played with a brashness and confidence that had them fighting until the 27th out.

And these wins did not come against a doormat. The Rays began the weekend at 14-5, the best record of any team in the league, having not lost a series all year. (Conversely, the Red Sox had yet to win one when the weekend began).

The Sox used an obvious formula in all three — strong starting pitching, improved offensive approach and a propensity to take advantage of their opponents' mistakes.

It's not complicated, but watching the Red Sox through their first 19 games of the season, it would have been easy to forget that.

Each time, the starting pitcher gave the Sox a chance. In 16.1 innings provided by the rotation, the Sox allowed just three unearned runs, continuing a trend that began halfway through their first homestand. In their first 13 games, Boston starting pitchers had an atrocious 8.79 ERA and averaged less than 4.5 innings per start; in the last eight, that ERA sits at 3.21 while their starts have averaged 5.3 innings.

There's been improvement at the plate, though the Red Sox stranded baserunners left and right in Sunday's win, leaving 15 on while going just 2-for-9 with runners in scoring position. But the quality of the at-bats has generally improved.

"We're swinging at more strikes," said Christian Vazquez, who delivered the game-winning sacrifice fly in the top of the 11th off Tampa Bay's Jose Alvarado.

But perhaps a more accurate summation is the Red Sox are swinging at better strikes. Instead of helping out the opposing pitcher by flailing at pitches at the edges of the strike zones, designed to induce weak contact, the Sox are squaring up pitches over the heart of the plate and — 2018 alert again — doing damage.

They succeeded, too, in putting pressure back on opponents. In the top of the 11th, a bloop single from Rafael Devers and a walk from Michael Chavis, with the rookie exhibiting some good takes against Alvarado, set the stage. Then came a perfectly executed bunt from Jackie Bradley— incredibly, just his third in 690 games — to push both baserunners in scoring position. Finally, there was Vazquez.

Earlier in the week, the catching debate swirled around Sandy Leon, recalled from Pawtucket, and Blake Swihart, designated for assignment and eventually traded to Arizona. While that talk went on, Vazquez put his stamp on all three games.

He supplied a two-run homer in the fifth inning Friday and threw out a baserunner attempting to steal in the seventh. On Saturday, he entered as a defensive replacement in the bottom of the ninth and recorded the game's final out by picking off Tommy Pham at first. And Sunday, he delivered the game-winning run in the 11th.

Granted, there are issues still to be fixed. The bullpen blew saves in three of the last four games and Matt Barnes, for the second straight game, allowed a game-tying solo homer in the eighth inning, a pattern that can't continue if he's to be the team's most-trusted high-leverage reliever.

And having executed a three-game winning streak for the first time this year, the Red Sox would need four more wins in a row and another sweep of Detroit this week at Fenway just to hail themselves back to .500, from where the real work would have to begin.

But faced with the prospect of falling hopelessly behind in the division, the Sox didn't blink, and moved themselves to within five games of front-running Tampa Bay. More to the point, they played their best baseball to date at a time when they needed it most.

"We know the type of team we have in this clubhouse," said Price, "and I think we showed that the last three days."

That won't win them anything yet. But it does give them something that they couldn't necessarily claim when they arrived in Florida: hope.

**BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 4, Rays 3 (11) – Sox go to extras to complete sweep**

Sean McAdam

The little things mean a lot: With the game tied in the top of the 11th, the Red Sox pulled this one out with good execution. After Rafael Devers dumped a single into center to lead off the inning, Michael Chavis worked a walk, giving the Sox two on and no out. Jackie Bradley Jr. then put down a near-perfect bunt just up the third base line, forcing pitcher Jose Alvarado to come off the mound and make a strong throw to first, just nipping Bradley, as both baserunners advanced. From there, it was up to Christian Vazquez, who hung in against the hard-throwing Alvarado, driving a fly ball deep enough to right to deliver Devers with the go-ahead run as Chavis tagged and took third. The Sox couldn't plate an insurance run with two outs as Andrew Benintendi rolled out to second for the third out, but they had taken the lead, then held on.

Bullpen (mostly) does the job: With David Price through after just five innings thanks to a climbing pitch count (100), the Red Sox once asked a lot from their relievers, and for the most part, that trust was answered. Brandon Workman turned in a perfect sixth and Colten Brewer did the same in the seventh. Matt Barnes hit a speed bump in the eighth when he left a curveball at the top of the zone, which Tommy Pham hit out — just barely — to right to tie the game. But Marcus Walden stepped in with two strong innings, allowing just one infield single while getting four outs on the ground and two strikeouts. For the last two games, Walden faced nine hitters and allowed just one to reach while striking out four. Finally, there was Ryan Brasier, who set down the side in order in the 11th to pick up the same. The homer allowed by Barnes forced extra innings for the team, but overall, the bullpen gave the Sox six innings with just one run allowed on only two hits — a performance the Sox will take every time.

Price delivers: From the beginning of the season, David Price has been the most consistent starter the Sox have had. In the early going, he didn't nosedive when the others did — his “lesser” outings at least kept the team in the game and gave them a chance. And over his last two outings, Price has now pitched 12 innings and allowed only two runs. The only issue for him Sunday was a lack of economy — he needed 20 or more pitches to get through three different innings, and those 100 pitches over five frames resulted in an early exit. Still, while Price was in, he was dominant, racking up 10 strikeouts, with a 94 mph fastball and a strong changeup. He only walked two and the only ball hit hard against him was a two-out double to Daniel Robertson, which resulted in two runs scoring.

## SECOND GUESS

As big as this game was for the Sox, you could certainly take issue with Alex Cora going to Barnes for a third straight game. Barnes seemed tired, too, relying more on his curveball than his fastball — and it was the curveball that Pham hit out for a game-tying homer in the eighth.

## TWO UP

Xander Bogaerts: The shortstop put the Sox ahead 3-2 in the sixth when he drilled a line single to center, scoring two baserunners.

Marcus Walden: Walden turned in his second straight strong performance, giving the Sox two scoreless innings, allowing just an infield single while fanning two.

## ONE DOWN

Matt Barnes: Barnes was charged with his second straight blown save, giving up the game-tying homer to Pham in the eighth.

## QUOTE OF NOTE

“We know the type of team we have in this clubhouse and I think we showed that these last three days.” – David Price

## STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

J.D. Martinez extended his hitting streak to 11 straight games and has reached base in 21 of 22 games this season.

Mookie Betts has his fourth straight multi-hit game.

Mitch Moreland continued to improve a personal best with his seventh homer of the year before May.

Ryan Brasier earned his fifth save of the year.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox return home for a 10-game homestand, as LHP Chris Sale (0-4, 8.50) vs. LHP Matthew Boyd (1-1, 2.96) at 7:10 p.m.

## **\* *The Athletic***

### **One week that changed the Red Sox season – for better or worse**

Chad Jennings

It's been less than a week, but the Red Sox team returning to Fenway Park on Monday night is considerably different from the one that left six days ago. If the Patriots Day loss to the Orioles proved a bridge too far, and you had to look away for a little while, we don't blame you. But you missed a real soap opera of anything-goes drama while the team was away.

In the past six days, the Red Sox have completed 16 roster moves. They've been swept by the Yankees, and they've swept the Rays. They've fallen as low as 8 1/2 games out of first place and pulled back within five. They've whittled down to their fourth- and fifth-string second basemen. Chris Sale has improved his velocity but not his results. Christian Vazquez has become a kind-of hero. Maybe Marcus Walden, too. Mookie Betts has three consecutive multi-hit games, more than doubling his season total.

As this 10-game homestand begins, the Red Sox have their first bit of momentum, a few fresh nametags to hang in the clubhouse and a whole new set of problems to figure out. They couldn't get much worse, and it's hard to say whether they've gotten any better, but they're certainly different.

Sandy Leon is back to fix the pitching staff

More precisely, it seems Leon is back to fix Sale and Rick Porcello, and in that regard, he's 1-for-2?

Sale's last start was Tuesday in New York, which was Leon's first game back behind the plate. The raw stuff was better – fastball velocity averaging 96 mph – but he lasted just five innings, allowed four runs, took his fourth straight loss, and called himself an embarrassment to his family. Sale gets the ball again in the homestand opener.

As of one turn through the rotation, the only other game Leon caught was Porcello's start on Saturday. It was easily Porcello's best start of the year. Not exactly reminiscent of when he won an AL Cy Young award while throwing to Leon in 2016, but it was good and it was a Red Sox win.

Chances are, Leon will be back behind the plate for this homestand opener when Sale makes his fifth start. The Red Sox gave up on Blake Swihart – designated him for assignment and traded him to Arizona — because they trust Leon's ability to work with the staff. His top priority is to get Sale and Porcello back on track. It says a lot about the importance of the Red Sox rotation that they would make such a drastic move and add a career .225 hitter just because of his work behind the plate. They didn't think they needed him out of spring training, and within three weeks, they were rushing Leon onto the roster. This team needs to pitch well, and they figured Leon was their best chance to do that.

Nathan Eovaldi has become another hurdle to overcome

Leon was not behind the plate last Wednesday when Eovaldi delivered his best start of the year: Six innings, no earned runs, six strikeouts and – it turns out – loose bodies in his elbow.

Remember all that stuff from a minute ago about the rotation being so important the Red Sox brought back Leon to work primarily with two starting pitchers? Well, the Red Sox need all five starters to be anywhere near full strength, and now they'll be without Eovaldi – already a two-time Tommy John surgery veteran – for an uncertain amount of time.

If he needs surgery, it should be similar to the procedure that cost Eovaldi two months at the start of 2018. For now, it seems the Red Sox will try to weather the storm with Hector Velazquez, who will go from spot starter to full-time starter. It's helpful that Walden has pitched so well as a replacement long man. (He didn't even make the Opening Day roster, but Walden has a third of the team's wins.)

At this point, David Price is the only Red Sox starting pitcher who's performing at anywhere near his potential. It was a pretty dire situation even with Eovaldi in the mix. It's become even more difficult since he went down.

Second base is a real pick-your-poison situation

The Red Sox were supposed to have three second basemen on their roster, but Dustin Pedroia aggravated his knee, Eduardo Nunez hurt his back and Brock Holt's son scratched his eye. So now they're down to two Triple-A call-ups, each with specific strengths and weaknesses.

Tzu-Wei Lin is the defender. He's a slick fielder who can play just about anywhere, but he's never hit much. Not a total waste at the plate, but clearly a bottom-of-the-order guy.

Michael Chavis is the slugger. Arguably the top prospect in the Red Sox minor-league system, he was called up after Pedroia and Nunez went down, and he delivered a key ninth-inning double in his first big-league at-bat. But he hasn't played much second base. He'd been working on it, but he's been mostly a corner infielder in the minors, and the Red Sox would have preferred he had a little more time to learn the position in the minors.

But, at least he can hit. More than half of the current Red Sox position players are batting below .250 and a third of them have an OPS below .400. Some good news: Betts showed signs of life this weekend, and Vazquez has made the most of his .208 average by hitting four home runs and driving in 11 runs. Some bad news: Jackie Bradley Jr. is still just as bad as he was a week ago. His OPS is still a dismal .372.

There's something to feel good about for once

Last time the Red Sox could feel especially good about this season might have been the second game of the year, when they came from behind in the ninth inning to beat Seattle and put an Opening Day loss quickly behind them. It turned out to be a momentary diversion.

Now the Red Sox have something potentially more meaningful to dream about. Their three-game sweep against division-leading Tampa Bay came via two straight one-run victories. One of them required an Andrew Benintendi grand slam to keep the Red Sox in it, and a Vazquez pickoff at first base to end it, but those were three good wins. If the Red Sox come home feeling better than their 9-13 record, perhaps they've earned that. The Rays were playing very well, and the Red Sox beat them.

It's still hard to say who other than Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Brandon Workman can be really trusted in the bullpen. It's still hard to know what to make of the rotation beyond Price. There's still a significant lack of offense at the bottom of the order. Some things haven't changed.

But with roster adjustments and a little winning streak, perhaps it's safe to pay attention to them again.

**\* *TampaBay.com***

**For Rays, one proves to be a lonely number**



Ernest Hooper

ST. PETERSBURG — The Rays, a team built on pitching, defense and timely hitting, decidedly will be in need of late-inning heroics to pull out narrow victories this season.

However, Tampa Bay's search for success in closely contested games continues after Boston's 4-3 win in 11 innings Sunday. It's still early, but the Rays find themselves 0-4 in one-run games — the past two to the Red Sox — and 0-3 in extra-inning games.

More troubling, Boston extended Tampa Bay's losing streak to four games before 18,740 at Tropicana Field. The Rays (14-8) are left with a big question: Does keeping it close stand as a positive, or does the inability to yield clutch plays represent a troubling trend that could haunt them throughout the year?

"It's hard to point out the positives because we're here to win ball games, and we haven't done that the last four days," centerfielder Kevin Kiermaier said. "Today was another tough one, but they got the big hit. Once again, that's kind of been the story line of these last four days. When we've had our opportunities, we're just not capitalizing in big moments."

The Red Sox did. They completely manufactured the winning run, parlaying a single, a walk, a sacrifice bunt and a sacrifice fly to take the lead in the 11th, but that's what great teams do: find a way. Catcher Christian Vazquez provided the winning RBI with a sacrifice fly that brought home Rafael Devers from third.

Boston's late-game effort overshadowed bounce-back efforts from three Rays who have endured recent struggles: Tommy Pham, Diego Castillo and Daniel Robertson.

Pham took an eraser to memories of Saturday's ninth-inning baserunning error that ended a comeback bid by driving a Matt Barnes pitch over the right-centerfield wall in the eighth, tying the score. But the Rays still needed more heroics.

They got it from Castillo, who shut down the Red Sox in the ninth and 10th, striking out five of the eight batters he faced. The performance came after he took losses in both of his past two outings, including back-to-back homers Friday in Boston's 6-4 victory.

Robertson, who entered the game 2-for-27, staked the Rays to an early lead with an RBI double in the third. In the end, however, the Rays could not complete the comeback, leaving lingering questions about their hot start to the season, as well as manager Kevin Cash's decision to pull starter Tyler Glasnow with one out, one on and a 2-1 lead in the sixth after only 76 pitches.

The Rays' beleaguered bullpen — they brought up extra arms from Triple-A Durham the past three days to help — seemingly increased the demand for Glasnow to go deep into the game. He appeared capable, coming in with a 4-0 record and an AL-leading 1.13 ERA.

And while Glasnow might not have been as sharp Sunday — walking three after issuing the same number through 24 innings to start the season — the hard-throwing right-hander held his own, other than giving up a solo homer to Mitch Moreland.

Glasnow limited the Red Sox to one run through 5½ innings. Cash, however, turned to the bullpen after Mookie Betts reached on a two-strike single.

"He had thrown the ball well," Cash said. "It was really a tough decision on my end. Went ahead and thought to get aggressive right there. We had a lead. We had a chance to get to our best matchups going forward, and it just didn't work."

It didn't work at all. The hope was that Kolarek would induce Moreland into an inning-ending double play. But Red Sox manager Alex Cora lifted Moreland for Steve Pearce, who was walked by Kolarek. And after reliever Chaz Roe walked J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts hit a two-run single to erase Tampa Bay's 2-1 advantage.

Glasnow could only pull his jersey over his intense gaze as he looked on from the dugout.

Cash said he understood his pitcher's frustration. To his credit, Glasnow said after the game that his disappointment came only from the moment and he continues to believe in Cash's calls.

"We have such a good bullpen, I respect any decision Cash makes," Glasnow said. "Those guys have gone out and closed the door for me multiple times. That's kind of how baseball is."

But the Rays — still the AL East leaders, 2½ ahead of the Yankees — won't be able to hide their disappointment if they don't start winning the close games. It's a prerequisite of their strategic style of play.

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

### **Red Sox beat AL East-leading Rays 4-3 in 11 to finish sweep**

ST PETERSBURG, Fla. -- A manufactured run in extra innings capped off a resurgent weekend for the defending World Series champion Boston Red Sox.

Christian Vazquez hit a sacrifice fly in the 11th inning and the Red Sox completed an uplifting three-game sweep of the AL East-leading Tampa Bay Rays with a 4-3 victory Sunday.

"That was a big three wins," said Boston starter David Price, who struck out 10 over five innings. "We know the type of team we have in this clubhouse, and I think we showed that these last three days."

Rafael Devers singled off Jose Alvarado (0-2) to start the 11th and went to second when Michael Chavis walked.

Both runners moved up a base on Jackie Bradley's sacrifice bunt and Vazquez followed with his fly that Kevin Kiermaier ran down in center field.

"A really good pitcher on the mound, Alvarado, so runs are at a premium," Bradley said. "You want to do everything you possibly can to make it tough on him, difficult on him."

Marcus Walden (3-0) allowed an infield hit over two scoreless innings and Ryan Brasier worked the 11th to get his sixth save.

After starting the season by losing eight of 10, the Red Sox are 7-5 over the last 12 games and went from eight to five games behind the Rays.

"Played good baseball," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "We've got to keep getting better, that's what we've got to do."

Tampa Bay has dropped four in a row, with back of the bullpen anchors Alvarado and Diego Castillo both losing twice.

"We got knocked down," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "We're capable of getting back up. We were in every ballgame, which ultimately is not good enough. We've got to get back to finding ways to win games."

Tommy Pham, picked off first base by catcher Vazquez to end Saturday night's 6-5 loss to the Red Sox, got the Rays even at 3-all on his eighth-inning solo homer off Matt Barnes.

Boston went ahead 3-2 on Xander Bogaerts two-run single off Chaz Roe during the sixth.

Rays starter Tyler Glasnow, bidding to open the season with five consecutive wins, was pulled after Mookie Betts singled with one out in the sixth.

After Adam Kolarek walked the only batter he faced, Roe entered and walked J.D. Martinez before Bogaerts lined a first-pitch single to right center.

Glasnow, who entered with an AL-best 1.13 ERA, allowed two runs and three hits in 5 1/3 innings. The 6-foot-8 right-hander was frustrated by the decision to take him out after a season-low 76 pitches.

"It doesn't matter if I agree or disagree with it, that's how the Rays do it," Glasnow said.

Daniel Robertson put the Rays up 2-0 on a two-out, two-run double off Price in the third. It was just his third hit in 28 at-bats.

Price, the one-time Tampa Bay ace gave up two runs, five hits and walked two during an 100-pitch outing.

Boston pulled within 2-1 on Mitch Moreland's team-leading seventh homer in the fourth.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: Moreland was in the lineup after leaving Saturday's game with back spasms.

Rays: RF Austin Meadows went on the 10-day injured list with a strained right thumb. ... Ace Blake Snell (fractured right fourth toe) is expected to have his second bullpen session Tuesday.

#### MARTINEZ MAGIC

Martinez had an infield single in the first inning, giving him a hit in 21 of 22 games this season, including an active 11-game streak. The slugger joined Eddie Bressoud in 1964 as the only Red Sox players to have a hit in at least 21 of the team's first 22 games. Martinez also swiped second for his 23rd stolen base in 944 career games.

#### RARE OCCURANCE

Vazquez's pickoff Saturday night was the first in a Red Sox victory during the expansion era (1961-present) by a catcher to end a game, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

#### UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Chris Sale (0-4) will face Detroit LHP Matthew Boyd (1-1) when Boston begins a 10-game homestand on Monday night. Sale has allowed 17 runs and 23 hits over 18 innings in his four starts this season.

Rays: RHP Yonny Chirinos (3-0) will go against Kansas City RHP Brad Keller (2-1) on Monday night. Tampa Bay went 7-0 against the Royals last season.