

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, April 25, 2019***

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

#### **A long-awaited offensive eruption carries Red Sox past Tigers**

Alex Speier

For most of the first 24 games and seven innings of the 2019 season, the Red Sox lineup had the feel of a volcano that had gone dormant. The Vesuvian displays of a year ago had gone missing, but in the last five games, manager Alex Cora thought he'd finally started to see signs of smoldering magma nearing the surface.

Despite a relatively modest 22 runs over the previous five games — three wins in Tampa Bay, two losses at home to the Tigers on Tuesday — Cora had seen sustained pressure being exerted against pitching staffs that suggested possibility.

Finally, on Wednesday night, the eruption occurred. It was inelegant, reflecting heavily on the woeful command of Tigers relievers Jose Fernandez and Drew VerHagen, who issued a combined five walks and hit a batter and allowed a pair of hits, leading to seven runs in the eighth inning. But for the Red Sox, the bottom line of their biggest inning of the year and a season-high run output in an 11-4 victory over the Tigers was celebrated as a long-awaited and much-anticipated reminder of potential.

“We haven’t been able to do that that much this year. That feeling is what we had all last year where we feed off each other. We did it there, whether it be walks, hits, hit by pitch,” said Andrew Benintendi. “It’s just nice to get it rolling.”

It was a noteworthy offensive night for a number of reasons. The Red Sox continued to show evidence of a lineup that is forcing pitchers to work inside the strike zone, with their 10 walks representing a season high. All nine Red Sox in the starting lineup reached base multiple times, the first time they had achieved such a relentless top-to-bottom attack since Sept. 9, 2016.

“The line is moving,” said Cora.

It was moving with particular efficiency atop the lineup. Benintendi (1 for 4 with a double, walk, two runs, and an RBI), Mookie Betts (2 for 4 with a double, walk, two runs, and an RBI), and J.D. Martinez (3 for 5 with a double, run, and RBI) all smashed pitches for extra-base hits, with Martinez ripping a grounder with such force down the left field line that it lodged in the jamb of the garage door under the grandstand. The glimpse of potential should all three hitters take flight simultaneously tantalized Cora.

“Last year I don’t think it happened, the three of them at the same time getting hot,” suggested Cora. “It’s cool to see the three swinging that well. We’ll see where it takes us.”

That said, the late-game offensive explosion was merely the finale that celebrated an outstanding outing by Eduardo Rodriguez and relievers Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes when the outcome remained undecided. Rodriguez, long the baby of the Red Sox rotation, continued to give indications that he’s ready to challenge the pecking order of the starting five.

Rodriguez proved dominant over six innings, allowing just one run on two hits while walking three and punching out seven. His pitch mix was overpowering, with hitters swinging and missing or making consistently feeble contact.

The Tigers swung and missed against 18 of his 90 pitches, baffled by his array of four- and two-seam fastballs, cutters, changeups, and sliders. His heavy use of the slider — a pitch that Rodriguez had employed infrequently through his first four starts — was noteworthy for two reasons.

He threw more of them (16) than in any outing since 2017, and he employed a new grip to which he'd been introduced just days earlier by noted slider-throwing expert Dustin Pedroia.

Dustin Pedroia?

“He said, ‘Do you want to see a nasty breaking ball?’ ” Rodriguez recounted. “He just told me that he was throwing that when he was in school. He told me how to throw it. I’ve got to say thank you to him.”

The rest of the Red Sox expressed their thanks to Rodriguez. The Tigers became yet the latest team to struggle against the lefthander. Over his last three starts, all Red Sox wins, Rodriguez has a 3.00 ERA while striking out 21 and walking four in 18 innings.

While Rodriguez dominated, the Red Sox offense applied sustained pressure against Tigers starter Tyson Ross, who labored through five innings while allowing four runs on seven hits and three walks, and had to work through numerous high pitch-count at-bats.

The Red Sox claimed a 2-0 lead in the second inning in no small part due to an unusually aggressive approach on the bases. Martinez singled and took off for second on a full count, thus allowing him to reach second safely on what might have been a double-play ball. Martinez then came around to score on a Rafael Devers single under the glove of second baseman Gordon Beckham.

Though Devers was wiped out trying to steal second, Michael Chavis coaxed a two-out walk and advanced to third when Jackie Bradley Jr.’s soft liner to right found turf. Bradley then took off for second and, with Beckham covering the bag, Christian Vazquez bounced a single through the vacated right side for a second run.

The Red Sox followed a slightly more traditional path to two additional runs against a tiring Ross in the fifth. Betts — who’d struck out looking at cutters in his first two at-bats — enthusiastically greeted a first-pitch fastball by smashing a run-scoring double high off the Wall in left-center. After a walk to Mitch Moreland, Martinez ripped a run-scoring single to left to increase Boston’s lead to a comfortable 4-0.

After the Tigers clawed for their lone run against Rodriguez in the sixth, they asserted themselves once more when down, 4-1, in the eighth. With Red Sox fireman Matt Barnes in the game to face the top of the order, the Tigers loaded the bases on a pair of two-out singles sandwiched around a walk. But Barnes recovered to strike out Ronny Rodriguez on three straight curveballs. The Sox then erupted for seven runs in the eighth for an unusually comfortable victory.

“We hadn’t had a night like that this season,” said Martinez. “For us to do that tonight, I think, is a good sign.”

### **Will Eduardo Rodriguez throw the next no-hitter for the Sox?**

Peter Abraham

Xander Bogaerts looked up at the scoreboard in the fifth inning on Wednesday night and noticed for the first time that Eduardo Rodriguez had yet to allow a hit against the Detroit Tigers.

“Eddie kind of sneaks up on you,” Bogaerts said. “A guy like [Chris] Sale, he strikes everybody out. But Eddie is quiet. Then you realize the other team doesn’t have any hits.”

Rodriguez finally gave up a hit with one out in the fifth inning, a single by Gordon Beckham. He cruised through six innings, giving up one run on two hits in a game the Sox went on to win, 11-4.

The Red Sox have not had a no-hitter since May 19, 2008, when 24-year-old Jon Lester diced up the Kansas City Royals at Fenway Park. Don't be surprised when Rodriguez throws the next one. It's coming.

This is no hot sports take; it's based on evidence. Rodriguez threw five pitches that produced swinging strikes against the Tigers, 18 of them in all. He leaned on his fastball but liberally worked in his slider and changeup along with a few cutters and sinkers.

Rodriguez has so many good options that on a given night, anything is possible.

"If he keeps his pitch count down, I can see it," Bogaerts said. "He makes it look easy sometimes."

Rodriguez carried a no-hitter against Oakland for  $7\frac{2}{3}$  innings on Sept. 4, 2016. It was broken up when Marcus Semien hit a ball off his right foot that went for an infield single.

Earlier that season, on Aug. 16 in Baltimore, Rodriguez no-hit the Orioles for four innings before a sore hamstring ended his night. He looked untouchable in that game.

It's true that Rodriguez has yet to throw more than eight innings in a game. But that was the case for Lester before he no-hit the Royals.

"I've always said anything is possible for him," catcher Christian Vazquez said. "The way he pitched [Wednesday] was great. That slider was amazing."

The slider was a pitch Rodriguez started to tinker with during spring training. But it wasn't until a few days ago that he gained more confidence in the pitch when Dustin Pedroia showed him a different grip.

"I was sitting on the bench with him and he told me, 'Hey, you want to see a nasty breaking ball?' I said, 'Yeah,' " Rodriguez said.

Pedroia showed Rodriguez a grip he used in high school and Rodriguez worked on it with bullpen catcher Mani Martinez for a few days. He tried it with the first batter of the game, Jeimer Candelario, and got a foul ball.

Rodriguez threw the new pitch 16 times in all. It wasn't a pitch that overwhelmed the Tigers but it had them on the defensive.

"I have to say thank you to [Pedroia]," Rodriguez said. "It went right where I wanted."

Detroit used seven righthanded hitters and two switch-hitters against Rodriguez. That's why the slider made sense.

"Everybody's looking for the fastball and changeup on the outside part of the plate," manager Alex Cora said. "For him to be able to expand the [strike] zone down and in to righties, it was a good pitch for him."

In a rotation that features Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, and Nathan Eovaldi, Rodriguez is the little brother who trails along. He has never been an All-Star, won any awards, and gets sent to the bullpen for the playoffs.

Rodriguez has been more promise than production since he was acquired from the Baltimore Orioles in 2014. Then nights like Wednesday pop up and remind you what the scouts saw.

"I'm hard on him. But everybody is because we know how good he can be," Cora said.

Rodriguez, like all of the Sox starters outside of Price, started the season poorly. But he has allowed six earned runs over 18 innings in his last three starts and struck out 21.

The Sox are 3-2 in the games he has started and one of the losses was by one run.

“Stuff-wise, really good. In command of the situation, getting people out in the strike zone, mixing up his pitches, location. He’s been good for us,” Cora said. “He’s good. We know the stuff; everybody knows it.”

Rodriguez admitted he has always believed he could throw a no-hitter. But the only time he thought it was possible was that game in Oakland.

“Maybe someday,” he said. “We just need to games right now any way we can. But in the back of my mind, I know I can do it. Every pitcher wants to do it, even if they don’t say it. I’ll admit it, I think I could someday.”

### **A glimmer of hope as Jackie Bradley Jr. adjusts his swing**

Alex Speier

For Jackie Bradley Jr., Wednesday marked a long-awaited night of hope. The Red Sox center fielder collected a pair of hits — just his second multi-hit game of the year — and drove in a pair of runs, while also hammering a ball to the track in left-center for a loud out, perhaps a sign that he may be awakening from a nightmarish start.

Of course, the real test comes in whether those glimmers of promise remain visible moving forward.

The Era of Launch has produced numerous success stories, players who became stars by overhauling their swings to drive the ball in the air with increased frequency. J.D. Martinez, Justin Turner, and Daniel Murphy are examples of players who redirected their careers by reconfiguring their swings and reconceiving of what they wanted to do at the plate.

Less publicized are the examples of players whose careers were set back by such adjustments. But the stories of players who endured worse performances after tinkering with their swings are numerous.

“There’s a lot of risk,” acknowledged Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers. “It’s risk versus reward.”

To this point in the season, Bradley has offered evidence of the risk of such an adjustment.

After a winter in which he worked diligently with Craig Wallenbrock, the same California hitting guru who helped Martinez overhaul his career, Bradley has gotten off to a dreadful offensive start.

Among players with at least 50 plate appearances, Bradley entered Wednesday with the third-lowest average (.134) and OPS (.367).

He’d swung and missed at 18.1 percent of all pitches he’d seen, the fourth-highest rate in the big leagues.

“It’s a result-oriented game. It’s time for the results to start showing,” said Bradley. “You don’t ever want to accept your struggles. You continue to work. [But] I get frustrated because I’m not showing what I’m capable of doing. I’m not stressing. I’m not worried. I’m more frustrated than anything.”

Bradley’s challenge may be amplified by the magnitude of the adjustments he’s trying to implement. After he went from a struggle in the first half of 2018 to a tremendous second half in part due to in-season adjustments, Bradley went further in order to solidify an approach intended to drive the ball in the air.

Yet he’s been searching both for the right mechanics — he’s working to eliminate a toe-tap timing mechanism, trying to take a more direct stride to get his foot down earlier so that he has fewer moving parts — as well as the right offensive approach. To date, he’s struggled to attack fastballs in the zone and he’s been vulnerable to chasing breaking balls out of the zone.

“I just think the swing, the approach, and the mental side just haven’t matched up for him yet,” said Hyers. “He’s trying to manage his timing, manage finding that swing plane, and going from there. It’s been a struggle for him for the first part of the season.”

The Red Sox and Bradley can take some solace in the fact that he’s come back from massive struggles before, whether his breakout in 2015 that allowed him to put behind an awful 2014, or his reversal from the first half to the second half last year.

“That proves that his character, that he’s going to keep working, keep grinding, and not give up,” said Hyers. “He’s run into failure before and he’s come out of it.”

That said, while Bradley — who is working with Hyers and assistant coach Andy Barkett while also consulting by phone with Wallenbrock — remains confident that he will emerge from his funk, he’s also getting impatient.

“I don’t do doubt. My talent hasn’t changed. I’m talented enough to do anything on this field — I can run, I can field, I can throw, I can hit for average, and I can hit for power,” said Bradley. “[But] I’ve got to go out there and do it. I don’t like talking about it because actions speak a lot louder than words.”

#### Second chance

Despite injuries to their top three second basemen — Dustin Pedroia, Brock Holt, and Eduardo Nunez — when the Red Sox called up Michael Chavis last week it was not with the expectation that he’d play second given his limited exposure to the position. But his potential offensive impact and his initial comfort at the position forced the team to reconsider. On Wednesday night against the Tigers, Chavis was in the starting lineup at second for the third time in four games.

“I don’t want to get ahead of myself. I’ve got to see him more. There are a few people that feel [at the infield corners] he’s going to be fine,” said manager Alex Cora. “But you see him at second base. He’s making plays.”

It remains to be seen how much he remains at second, particularly once the Red Sox start getting their primary second basemen back, but the immediate offensive potential shown by the 23-year-old has led the team to think creatively.

“One thing for sure,” said Cora, “he’s going to be a good offensive player.”

#### Making progress

Pedroia (left knee), Nunez (back), and Holt (cornea) took batting practice on the field against a pitching machine working at high velocity and ran the bases. Cora said that “there’s a pretty good chance” that Holt goes on a weekend rehab assignment and that Nunez might do likewise soon . . . The Red Sox have yet to announce a starter for Friday’s series opener against the Rays. David Price is scheduled to start on Saturday, and Chris Sale is slated to pitch the series finale on Sunday . . . Brian Johnson continues to make progress in his throwing program. The lefthander, on the injured list with elbow inflammation, is throwing from 90 feet.

#### Role reversal

With assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister visiting with affiliates, minor league pitching coordinator Dave Bush is working with the big league team.

“That was one of the goals, to expose me to this and let [Bannister] work with minor leaguers again,” said Bush. “It’s beneficial to both of us, and for coaches and players to hear some different voices.”

Bush was pursued by multiple organizations during the offseason, including an offer by the Brewers (one of his former teams) to serve as bullpen coach, but Bush declined, both because of the enjoyment he’s gotten out of his role with the Sox and because he can live at home year-round in Southern Maine.

Run of bad luck

Three years ago, Anderson Espinoza looked like the top Red Sox pitching prospect in years, with Pedro Martinez saying that the slight righthander compared favorably to him at a similar career stage. But the Sox traded Espinoza in the middle of 2016 for Drew Pomeranz, and since then the Padres have barely seen him on the mound.

Espinoza suffered an elbow injury in 2017 and required Tommy John surgery that season, wiping out his 2017 and 2018 campaigns. He returned this spring but this week was diagnosed yet again with a torn ulnar collateral ligament that will require a second Tommy John. Espinoza will be out until at least 2020.

“That’s so sad. He’s so gifted,” said Chavis, Espinoza’s teammate at Single A Greenville in 2015 and 2016. “He’s special. I remember one night where he sat at 96 miles per hour starting, this little, skinny kid blowing it right by everyone. I really hope it works out for him.”

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

### **Red Sox bats come to life in 11-4 rout of Tigers**

Steve Hewitt

The way the Red Sox had been looking offensively since last weekend in Tampa Bay, Alex Cora knew it was just a matter of time before they broke out.

J.D. Martinez, too, knew it had to be coming. Their collection of hitters are too talented to keep them down this long.

At long last, the league-leading offense from a season ago that led the Red Sox to a championship showed up Wednesday night at Fenway Park. After failing to live up to its potential through the first three weeks of the season, the Red Sox erupted for a season-high 11 runs, and behind another strong performance from Eduardo Rodriguez, cruised to an 11-4 win over the Detroit Tigers.

“We know what we’re capable of, it’s just a matter of doing it,” Mookie Betts said. “Maybe the first time we’ve done it this year, but hopefully first of many.”

The Red Sox did not hit any home runs Wednesday night, but instead produced with a combination of aggressiveness on the bases and patience at the plate. They drew 10 walks — including three consecutive with the bases loaded as part of a seven-run eighth inning — and had 12 hits.

A night after they didn’t capitalize with runners in scoring position, the Red Sox got timely hitting. Their offensive stars — Martinez, Betts and Andrew Benintendi — combined to go 6-for-13 with three RBI and five runs scored, and the Sox earned contributions from the bottom of the lineup, with Jackie Bradley Jr. and Christian Vazquez combining to go 4-for-9 with four RBI.

Finally, the Red Sox looked like themselves.

“Like I said earlier today, the line is moving,” Cora said. “It’s been moving since Tampa offensively. We’re walking more, we’re controlling the zone, it’s just a matter of getting that big hit, and today, we grinded, but you could see, everybody got on base, more than once I think it was. We walked 10 times, we put good at-bats. ... From top to bottom, it was a good effort.”

The Red Sox’ offense got going thanks to some small ball in the second inning. Martinez opened the frame with a single, then advanced into scoring position on a hit-and-run groundout from Xander Bogaerts. Rafael Devers followed with a sharp grounder that scooted past Gordon Beckham at second to score Martinez for the game’s first run.

Devers was then caught stealing on another apparent hit-and-run attempt, but with two outs, the Red Sox weren't done. Michael Chavis and Bradley Jr. hit back-to-back singles to put runners on first and third for Vazquez. With Bradley running, Vazquez chopped a grounder that found the vacated right side as Beckham covered second, allowing Chavis to easily score.

After striking out in his first two at-bats, Betts sparked the offense in the sixth when he jumped on a first-pitch fastball from Tyson Ross and hit it off the Green Monster for an RBI double. Martinez later drove him in with a single to left to give the Sox a 4-1 advantage.

The Red Sox sealed it in the eighth with their seven-run explosion, which was aided by Tigers reliever Drew VerHagen. After Chavis was hit by a pitch and stole second, Vazquez drove him in with an RBI single, and Benintendi followed with an RBI double. After Betts and Mitch Moreland were walked, VerHagen was summoned to clean up the bases-loaded mess.

He looked to be on his way after striking out Martinez, but then he ran into disaster. VerHagen lost the strike zone completely as he walked Bogaerts, Devers and Chavis consecutively to make it 9-1. He was then replaced by Buck Farmer, who proceeded to give up a two-run single to Bradley.

The Red Sox certainly felt some relief to put some runs on the board.

“We were kind of talking about it, joking about it today in the cage or whatever you want to call that,” Martinez said. “We were like, ‘This is the first night we’ve actually had it like this. Last year, it felt like we had a lot like these.’ This is the first one. It’s good.”

Rodriguez certainly helped the cause with his third straight strong effort. He tossed six innings and gave up just two hits, struck out seven to pick up his second win of the season.

In his last three starts, Rodriguez has been lights out. In 18 innings, he’s posted a 2.50 ERA, struck out 21 and produced 57 swings and misses. It’s the type of play from Rodriguez that Cora was looking for when he challenged him to be better and more efficient during spring training.

“I’m hard on him, but everybody is because we know how good he can be. It’s good to see him compete at this level this way,” Cora said. “We expect him to do that every time he goes out there, go deep into games and dominate.”

### **Eduardo Rodriguez reveals new pitching guru: Dustin Pedroia**

Michael Silverman

Never mind very good, but this also has not been a particularly strange and quirky baseball season for the Red Sox.

Until Wednesday night’s 11-4 victory – historians one day will call it “The Night Dustin Pedroia Became a Pitching Guru and Saved the Season” — most of the preceding 24 game analyses, especially the 15 losses, were more like grim-faced autopsy reports filed after a morbid performance and then a morgue-like clubhouse.

But a couple of things happened Wednesday night that were weird, fluky and happily-ever-after enough to maybe, just maybe, possibly flip the early season script and the Red Sox’ fortunes as well.

That third-inning J.D. Martinez’ line drive down the left field foul line got wedged into the gap between the garage door and the still-standing concrete door frame for a ground was one of those only-in-Fenway type of moments that we all like to see. It wasn’t a ladder ball, but it was close enough.

Then there was the fact that the Red Sox piled on seven runs in the eighth inning, three of them scoring courtesy of bases-loaded walks – gruesome for the Tigers’ sake, high comedy from the Red Sox’ perspective.

The seven-run margin of victory – it should have, could have been 10 runs if not for another hard-hit outing from Tyler Thornburg, who gave up three runs on two walks and two hits in the ninth – was the cushiest of the season, considering the total margin of victory in the first nine victories was a combined 16 runs.

But the goofiest part of the evening came after Eduardo Rodriguez’ mostly dominating and highly encouraging start – six innings, two hits, one run allowed, with three walks and seven strikeouts.

He was giving his standard post-start press conference when he got asked about his particularly effective slider that he had used.

And he surprised us all.

“It’s funny, because four days ago, I was talking with Pedey in the dugout and he told me, ‘Hey, do you want to throw a really good breaking ball?’ I was like, ‘Yeah, bro, I’ve been battling to throw a breaking ball since I got here in the big leagues, since I was in the minor leagues,’” Rodriguez said. “He told me throw the ball like ‘this’ and hold it like ‘that,’ and two days ago I started throwing it with my knee over there, and it’s funny, because the first time I threw that kind of breaking ball was today and it was working. So, I’ve just got to say thanks to him.”

Now, the slider is not – check that, has not – been a go-to third pitch for Rodriguez through the years. He’s been mainly a fastball-changeup type, with a cut fastball his most common third pitch the last couple of years. His slider usage has been on the decline the last four seasons – it was 16 percent in 2016, then 11, then 9 and then just 3.5 percent this season.

Rodriguez’ development has been a major target of Red Sox organizational resources. Much time and energy has been spent on seeing him reach his potential, and he has been enigmatic — a left-handed Clay Buchholz, if you will. His last three starts now have been awfully good – 2-0, 3.00 ERA with a 0.89 WHIP – as good as anybody else on the team. He is pitching like an ace.

And he’s taking pitching tips from a second baseman – pitching tips that worked after Rodriguez began fiddling with them 48 hours before his start?

Well, why not?

“I told him, ‘Bro, I’m going to throw that today, and you tell me how it is,’ and I think it worked pretty good,” Rodriguez said.

What in the world does Pedroia know about pitching? (Hint – Rodriguez is the wrong guy to ask, but Pedroia wasn’t around.)

“I don’t know — he just told me that he was throwing that when he was in school,” Rodriguez said. “Just sitting on the bench with him, he said, ‘Do you want to see a nasty breaking ball?’ I said ‘Yeah.’ ‘Just hold the ball like this and throw it.’ The next day I got the ball and I throw the first one, ‘Oh, this is moving pretty good.’ I threw it in the bullpen and I threw it in the game today and it was working.”

So, it was a slider, huh?

“I don’t know — whatever you want to call it,” Rodriguez said. “Just something that went right where I wanted.”

Of course, if Rick Porcello goes out Thursday night and somehow relapses from the Porcello who had his best start his last start, or if the offense flattens out or if the ball doesn’t carom off any random angles and



the Red Sox manage to lose their third game in four tries to a not really good Tigers team, then this Pedroia pitching angle is going to look like pretty foofy.

But if the Red Sox and Porcello and the offense and not Thornburg roll again, then the magic gyroball Pedroia taught Rodriguez is going to turn into a legend – and turn a season around.

### **Rick Porcello's last start bodes well for his next one**

Michael Silverman

When it comes to Red Sox starters turning a corner this season, let's just say some have been waiting in line a bit longer than others.

David Price has more or less breezed through his start to the season, and Wednesday night's starter Eduardo Rodriguez seemed to take his game to a new level in his third start. Nathan Eovaldi had a magnificent Game 4 start against the Yankees — and then he had surgery.

Chris Sale?

Until he starts pitching deep into games, he's stuck in line. And then there's Rick Porcello, who starts the finale to this four-game set against the Tigers Thursday night.

His first three starts were a horror story told in three parts. Part 1 lasted just 2 2/3 innings. The next one lasted 4 2/3 innings but he allowed seven runs. Part 3 featured five walks in four innings.

With the exception of the batters who faced him, the less said about those first three Porcello starts the better.

But in his fourth start, Porcello pitched well. He reached the sixth inning (a first this season), allowed just two runs (his best) and walked just one batter (his low).

While he was one out shy of completing the sixth inning and earning a quality start, Porcello's outing looked particularly promising for a starter whose importance to the ballclub is sometimes lost in the shadows of Sale and Price.

The most burning question any player faces when he reverses a concerning trend or slump is can he continue?

Porcello is 30 years old and in his 11th season.

To his manager, the fact that he is a veteran might give him an edge over a younger starter when it comes to trusting his improvement is going to last.

"I think so," said manager Alex Cora. "They understand themselves better than a young kid and that's part of the minor league process. You get 'X' amount of innings to understand who you are. It's not only your stuff, it's your delivery and making adjustments. Yeah, you've got pitching coaches and pitching coordinators but at the end you feel what you're supposed to do to be consistent on a daily basis, delivery-wise, and that's a process."

That process can be different, as in, sped up, especially for a young hitter.

"Now, hitters are getting called up right away," said Cora. "Back in the day they always said, what, 1,000 at-bats for a hitter so he understood who he was, and I think that's part of development."

And as far as Porcello's 2019 development goes, Cora believes we can trust that Start No. 4 bodes well for Start No. 5.

"I think his fastball is good," said Cora. "The last one, he was able to spot it and that's a good start. I'm OK with him. I think he's going to be fine."

### **Michael Chavis continues to make strong first impression**

Steve Hewitt

One day later, Michael Chavis certainly wasn't letting the biggest moment of his young major league career get to his head.

As the Red Sox returned to Fenway Park on Wednesday, a night after the rookie hit his first career home run — a titanic blast in their 4-2 loss to the Tigers — Chavis was continuing to yearn for more knowledge as he met with his coaches.

"I actually told him this. Today was probably one of the best conversations I've had with a young player that's come up here in the two years I've been here," Red Sox assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett said. "Just the questions he was asking, things he was wanting to know about it. It was really neat to hear his advanced thought process for a young player coming to the big leagues for the first time."

In the week since Chavis' call-up, that seems to be a common theme.

After Tuesday night's game, Alex Cora raved about Chavis' understanding of the game and the lengths he's going to learn and prepare for his at-bats, which the manager said has been fun to watch. It's a rare trait for a 23-year-old that's not going unnoticed.

"They're wanting to come here and put up numbers and produce and so forth, and obviously we all know there's a process involved in that," Barkett said in general of young hitters being freshly called up. "Some players can lose that in translation a little bit, but (Chavis) is totally in tune with our process and what we do."

It has translated to some strong results so far. In his first big league at-bat last Saturday in Tampa, Chavis' late double helped spark the Red Sox to a win. Then Tuesday night he hammered a 2-2 pitch in the eighth inning that cleared the Monster seats and went out of the ballpark for his first career homer, which went an estimated 441 feet.

Barkett said Chavis is "pretty advanced" when it comes to his approach, and he's showing so far that the enhanced spotlight doesn't faze him.

"The thing that's impressed me the most is his calmness in being in the big leagues and playing for the world champions and being able to maintain stillness in his attitude and approach to it all," Barkett said.

Cora noted Wednesday he was expecting Chavis "to be out of control" at the plate after hearing a lot about his swings and misses in the minors last season, but that hasn't been the case. The manager said Chavis is looking for pitches and eventually will develop into using the opposite field.

It's been a week, but clearly the Red Sox are enamored with his offensive potential. They have been struggling offensively, and Barkett made it simple with how Chavis can help.

"Just keep doing what he's doing and have good at-bats," Barkett said. "Scare the other team by his presence and ability to hit the ball 440 feet, and hopefully be able to hit pitches in the zone and not swing at ones out of the zone."

“He’s got a lot of ability,” Barkett continued. “It’s one day at a time. It’s a long season and the league’s going to make adjustments to him, he’s going to have to make adjustments, and it’s just like any other young player, you just see how they adjust to the league once they get up here. He’s shown the ability so far, but it’s a brief few days, so we’ll just go one day at a time like everybody else.”

BJB looks for breakthrough

Like last season, the Red Sox are hoping Jackie Bradley Jr. can try to find some success at the plate. Entering Wednesday, he was batting just .134 with no home runs through 21 games.

Cora certainly is not lacking faith in Bradley figuring it out, especially after his turnaround last season that culminated in him being named ALCS MVP. The manager is hoping hitting the ball the other way can get the center fielder going.

“We trust the player. I trust him,” Cora said. “It’s just a matter of making a few adjustments. Like I said, I think hitting today out there is going to help him out, hit a few balls the other way to left-center. I think that’s a good feeling for him. Last year it started that way, a few balls through the shortstop hole in the shift. A few balls the other way and then everything up and out. That’s what we are hoping for, for him to hit a few balls the other way. And he can stay on fastballs that way, hit it hard that way and then whatever they throw soft in the zone he can get to it and be on time and hit out of the ballpark.”

Injury updates

Cora said Brock Holt (eye) took batting practice again Wednesday and there’s a “pretty good chance” he’ll begin a rehab assignment this weekend.

“He feels good,” Cora said. “I think one more day of BP here is gonna get him to the point that he’s comfortable with what’s going on and we’ll send him to a rehab assignment.”

Dustin Pedroia (knee) also took batting practice outside Wednesday and Cora said they’ll see how he reacts before deciding his next step. Cora said Eduardo Nunez (back) feels good after taking about 300 swings during Tuesday’s doubleheader, and could be in line for a rehab assignment soon.

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

### **Red Sox 11, Tigers 4: Boston enjoys rare stroll to victory**

Bill Koch

BOSTON --- There haven’t been many nights yet this season where the Red Sox have recorded such an easy victory.

Eduardo Rodriguez produced a fine starting pitching performance. Three members of the bullpen took care of business behind him. The offense was opportunistic and managed a steady stream of grinding, quality at-bats.

The result was a site all too rare to date at Fenway Park. Boston sauntered to an 11-4 win over the Tigers, a club that looked somewhat outclassed by what was expected to be one of the best teams in baseball.

That’s not how it’s played out to this point, but the Red Sox have enough talent to make you believe their fortunes could turn on a dime. The bottom of the order helped spark a pair of rallies, the top of the order produced some mid-game insurance and the projected No. 4 starter in Boston’s rotation resembled a young ace at times. Detroit was unable to produce a real reply and is a loss away from splitting the four-game set on Thursday.

“I felt like last year we had a lot like these,” said J.D. Martinez, who collected three hits, a run scored and an RBI. “This is the first one. It’s good.”

Rodriguez came out dealing for the second time in as many home starts this season. He set down the first 14 men he faced in a 6-4 win over the Orioles on April 12 and carried a no-hitter into the top of the fifth inning on Wednesday. Rodriguez allowed two hits in all and struck out seven over six strong innings, departing with a 4-1 lead.

“You guys know I’m hard on him,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Everybody is, because we know how good he can be. It’s good to see him compete at this level this way.”

The left-hander zipped through the first four innings until issuing a leadoff walk to Brandon Dixon in the fifth. Gordon Beckham’s one-out single put two men on before Rodriguez struck out Grayson Greiner and JaCoby Jones to escape his first real trouble spot. Rodriguez went to the fastball and changeup respectively, two pitches on which he notched a combined 13 of his 18 swings-and-misses.

“I’m thinking I always have good confidence when I go out there and try to do my job,” Rodriguez said. “Location with my pitches – I think that’s what’s been working for me. I want to keep doing it.”

There was another threat to come in the sixth, and it was here where Rodriguez finally saw his shutout bid broken up. Jeimer Candelario smoked a leadoff double up the gap in left center and Niko Goodrum’s sacrifice fly to right put the Tigers on the board. Dixon’s foul pop to first came on Rodriguez’s 90th pitch of the night, the last of his 54 strikes.

“He’s in command of the situation,” Cora said. “Getting people out in the strike zone. Mixing up his pitches. Location. He’s been good for us.”

The Red Sox staked Rodriguez to a 2-0 lead in the second thanks in part to their legs. Martinez was running when Xander Bogaerts grounded to short, avoiding a 6-4-3 double play. Martinez later scored on an RBI single to right by Rafael Devers and Christian Vazquez grounded another run-scoring single through the right side to chase in Jackie Bradley Jr.

Boston went a bit more conventional in the fifth to double its lead. Mookie Betts lashed an RBI double off the Green Monster and Martinez picked up his third hit on a run-scoring single to left. The Red Sox forced Detroit starter Tyson Ross to the showers after recording just 15 outs on 98 pitches.

“We know what we’re capable of,” Betts said. “It’s just a matter of doing it. This may be the first time we’ve done it this year, but hopefully the first of many.”

Boston added on in the eighth after Matt Barnes escaped a mess of his own making by striking out Ronny Rodriguez. Vazquez lined an RBI single to left, Andrew Benintendi smoked an RBI double to left and bases-loaded walks by Bogaerts, Devers and Chavis all forced in runs. Bradley grounded a two-run single through the right side to complete the uprising and Tyler Thornburg scuffled through the game’s final three outs despite allowing three runs in the ninth.

### **Impressive start for power-hitting Michael Chavis**

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Michael Chavis doesn’t do quiet and understated.

The top position player prospect for the Red Sox is as outgoing as the day is long. His game does plenty of talking as well, and it might not be silenced for a while considering Boston’s current situation at second base.

Dustin Pedroia (left knee), Eduardo Nunez (back) and Brock Holt (right eye) are all ailing and on the injured list. The door has opened for Chavis to make his first impression in the big leagues, and the 23-year-old has wasted no time. His latest highlight came on a monster solo home run late in Tuesday's 4-2 loss to the Tigers, a disappointing finish to a day-night doubleheader sweep at Fenway Park.

"I've seen a couple videos of guys hitting their first home runs and they sprinted because they were so excited," Chavis said. "I kind of tried to act like I've hit a home run before and stayed calm. It was special for sure."

Chavis ran into a changeup from Victor Alcantara in the bottom of the eighth inning and launched it in the general direction of Lansdowne Street. The ball crashed to the cement 441 feet away and was retrieved by a pair of generous patrons who returned the souvenir to the rookie. Chavis handed the keepsake to his mother, Dorothy Nugent, with the hopes that she could find a safe place to store it away.

"He's a guy who's going to understand that he can drive the ball to right center," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "Whenever they hang something soft like they did yesterday it's going to put him on time and he can hit it over the wall or off the wall. I think he has a pretty good idea of who he is as a hitter and what he wants to do."

Chavis compiled a .954 OPS with Triple-A Pawtucket in limited duty before his call to the Red Sox on Friday. He joined the club in Tampa Bay and smoked a double to deep center in his first at-bat against Jose Alvarado, the flame-throwing left-handed reliever for the Rays who has carved through most opponents in the early going. It was a rather auspicious start even for a player who was selected 26th overall in the 2014 draft and signed to a bonus of more than \$1.87 million.

"That first hit was next level," Chavis said. "The moment in the game and me not really being aware and getting up there, it was just wild. (The home run) just a notch below that one, but it's still a lifelong memory for sure."

Such production, if it continues, will force Cora to keep Chavis in the lineup. He made his third start at second base on Wednesday and appears to be blocked at each corner infield spot, with Boston committed to 22-year-old Rafael Devers as its third baseman of the future. The veteran duo of Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce is likely to platoon at first base for at least one more year.

"He's a good athlete," Cora said. "He was a shortstop. If you were a shortstop whenever you signed, you have a pretty good idea of how to play the field."

Cora was primarily used as a middle infielder during his 14-year career, playing 616 of his 1,208 games at shortstop and 530 at second base. Rule changes have lessened the danger for inexperienced defenders attempting to avoid sliding baserunners acting like heat-seeking missiles to break up double plays. Analytics have led to frequent shifts and more specific placement of fielders relating to each batter.

"There was a ball they hit in Tampa to his left — it went by and he dove for it," Cora said. "It was actually a good jump. Where I was, I was like, 'Oh, that was good. That's a good sign.' We'll see."

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

### **Boston Red Sox bats come alive behind Eduardo Rodriguez in 11-4 win vs. Tigers**

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox got a quality start from their starter and big hits from their best offensive players in a 11-4 win over the Tigers on Wednesday night.

Easy enough, right?

Eduardo Rodriguez pitched well for the third straight outing, allowing just one run on two hits in six innings while striking out seven. He now leads the team in quality starts with two after improving to 2-2 and lowering his ERA to 5.88.

Boston's lineup recorded 12 hits, with four players-- Mookie Betts, J.D. Martinez, Christian Vazquez and Jackie Bradley Jr. each having multi-hit games. It was the second time all season (and first since Opening Day) that Betts and Martinez recorded multiple hits in the same game.

Boston hit four singles in a two-run second inning against Detroit starter Tyson Ross, with Rafael Devers and Vazquez each driving in runs to make it 2-0. A Betts RBI double and Martinez RBI single made it 4-0 after five.

Detroit left fielder Niko Goodrum hit a sacrifice fly in the sixth, plating the Tigers' first run on a night when the Tigers had just four hits through eight innings. Red Sox pitchers set a new season-high for strikeouts in a nine-inning game by fanning 14 hitters.

Brandon Workman threw a scoreless seventh inning and handed it over to Matt Barnes in the eighth. After Barnes struck out the first two batters he faced, Detroit loaded the bases with two singles and a walk. Ronny Rodriguez came to the plate as the go-ahead run, but Barnes struck him out on three pitches to escape the jam.

Boston broke things open by scoring seven in the eighth inning, with Vazquez and Andrew Benintendi hitting back-to-back RBI doubles to start the inning. Tigers relievers Jose Fernandez and Drew VerHagen then walked five out of six hitters (including three by VerHagen with the bases loaded) before Jackie Bradley Jr. hit a two-run single to make it 11-1.

Nicholas Castellanos and Dustin Peterson had RBI hits off Tyler Thornburg in the ninth.

Boston who improved to 10-15 and will have a chance to split its four-game series against the Tigers on Thursday night. Righty Rick Porcello will face his former team opposite righty Jordan Zimmermann in the series finale, which begins at 7:10 p.m. ET.

Martinez gets double after ball gets stuck in garage door

Fenway Park is usually good to hitters, but one of its quirks might have hurt Martinez in the third inning Wednesday. Martinez hit a double down the left-field line that got caught in a crack next to the garage door in foul territory.

Martinez raced around the bases when no throw from Goodrum came but was sent back to second after the umpires ruled a dead ball. It was Martinez's sixth double of the season.

Cabrera records 2,700th hit

Miguel Cabrera's single in the eighth inning was a milestone hit, as he reached 2,700 hits for his career. He did it in front of former teammates (and friends) Porcello, Martinez and David Price.

Chavis' first career steal comes on second try

Michael Chavis, who was 0-for-1 but reached base four times (three walks and a hit-by pitch), was thrown out trying to steal second on a hit-and-run attempt in the sixth. He made up for it two innings later, recording his first career steal in the eighth.

Chavis had just 22 steals in 413 minor-league games and just four stolen base attempts in all of 2018. It appears the Sox want to turn him into a threat on the basepaths in the majors.

## **Dustin Pedroia asked Boston Red Sox's Eduardo Rodriguez, 'You want to see a nasty breaking ball?' He then taught him to throw it**

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Eduardo Rodriguez and Dustin Pedroia were chatting in the dugout during a game about four days ago when the second baseman asked the pitcher, "You want to see a nasty breaking ball?"

"Yeah, bro," Rodriguez replied.

"He told me to hold the ball like this and throw it like that," Rodriguez recalled. "Two days ago I started throwing it with (bullpen catcher) Mani (Martinez)."

The Red Sox lefty used the new breaking ball grip during his start here Wednesday. Rodriguez hurled 6 innings, allowing just one run, two hits and three walks while striking out seven. The Red Sox won 11-4 over the Tigers at Fenway Park.

"I told him, 'Bro, I'm going to throw that today and you tell me how it is,'" Rodriguez said. "And I think it worked pretty good."

Rodriguez isn't sure whether to classify the pitch as a slider or curveball.

"I don't know. Whatever you want to call it."

Why would he trust Pedroia, a position player, to show him a breaking ball grip?

"Everything he's been doing. I mean, MVP, Rookie of the Year. A lot of things he's been winning already. All the time he's got in the big leagues, I mean, I've got to believe him. And I did it and it worked."

## **Marcus Walden watched 2018 Boston Red Sox in World Series on iPad coaching travel ball, now has chance to be this year's Ryan Brasier**

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Marcus Walden unexpectedly made the 2018 Red Sox Opening Day roster after he arrived at spring training camp as a non-roster invitee.

But the right-handed pitcher spent only 23 days on the big league roster last year. He didn't receive a promotion in September when rosters expanded to 40.

The 30-year-old watched the Red Sox's World Series run back home in Fresno, Calif., where he co-owns DIB Baseball Academy. He watched every game.

"We were having a travel ball tournament (during the World Series)," Walden said. "We were in the championship game at the same time the Red Sox were in their game. So I was on my iPad just watching it and loved every minute of it, honestly."

Walden didn't make the Opening Day roster this year. He began the season with Triple-A Pawtucket. But he has been one of the Red Sox's top relievers since they recalled him. He could stick here this time.

He has a 2.38 ERA (11.1 innings, three earned runs), 2.94 FIP and 0.97 WHIP in eight outings so far. Manager Alex Cora used him in two high-leverage situations this past weekend in Tampa Bay.

Walden understands why the Red Sox didn't promote him last September. He spent from May 31 until July 25 on Pawtucket's injured list with right forearm inflammation.

“I wasn’t really myself until about Aug. 20,” Walden said. “I started throwing the ball better around the back end of August. Honestly to me, it was a blessing in disguise. I was home. I got to see my second daughter get born in September. I was able to rest my arm. And that was the biggest thing. I’ve played three years of winter ball previously. No offseasons.”

Walden said he had his lengthiest offseason since 2013.

“It really helped my arm get ready for this season,” he said.

Cora talked during spring training about a reliever potentially emerging in 2019 the way Ryan Brasier did last year. Brasier, who hadn’t pitched in the majors since 2013 and spent 2017 in Japan, became one of Boston’s top three relievers with Craig Kimbrel and Matt Barnes.

Walden perhaps will emerge as the 2019 Ryan Brasier.

“Obviously that would be a goal: to be a guy that walks in, doesn’t make the team out of camp, and walks in and is able to throw the seventh or eighth inning and let Barnes and Brasier do the back end of it,” Walden said. “At the end of the day, it’s whenever the situation arises. I think I’m a better pitcher coming in with guys on base and trying to get a ground ball. And that’s kind of my game. It’s always been since I was a starter. But whatever situation Cora wants to put me in, I’m going to try to thrive.”

Walden owns his baseball academy with two close friends, Drew Mattos and Brian Oliver. They have travel ball teams age 10-18.

“I’m there four months a year, whatever,” Walden said. “Brian does a lot of the on-field coaching stuff. I like being in the dugout. I like doing the instructional stuff. I like talking to kids one-on-one more than managing the game. That’s what Brian does. I really enjoy being out there with the kids.”

‘Brother, If you can throw 94, 95 (mph), you’ll stay in the game’

Walden features a four-seam fastball, sinker, slider and cutter. He throws hard. His fastball has averaged 94.6 mph and his sinker has averaged 94.5 mph this season, per Baseball Savant.

The righty wasn’t always a hard thrower though.

“When I was a starter with the Blue Jays (organization), I was 88, 90 (mph),” Walden said. “They wanted me to throw a lot of sinkers. They wanted me to keep the ball down, get a ground ball. They wanted me to pitch a lot like Roy Halladay. Which, if you can throw like him, it’s going to work out really good.”

Walden signed a minor league contract with the Reds on Nov. 30, 2014, but they released him during the first month of the 2015 season.

He remembers talking with friends after the Reds released him. His buddy Sean Halton, who played 42 games for the Brewers during 2013, suggested he work to add velocity to his fastball.

“He’s like, ‘Brother, If you can throw 94, 95 (mph), you’ll stay in the game. You’ll get another job. You’ll get another chance.’ I really started working on my velocity again,” Walden said. “I was 94-96 when I was 18. So now trying to get back to that was something I really worked hard to do pretty much once I got released.”

He pitched in Independent League baseball for the remainder of 2015. He posted a 2.95 ERA in 48 outings (three starts) for Lancaster of the Atlantic League.

“That’s where I really started to get some big velocity jumps,” he said. “Going from being a starter to a one-inning reliever, you tend to do that a little bit more. That was my first time really going to the bullpen and throwing one inning at a time.”



He worked hard to increase velocity. It didn't happen simply by transitioning from a starter to a reliever.

"Honestly for me, it was throwing hard," he said. "Sprinters don't jog. When they're training, they're sprinting. They're doing powerlifting stuff. Same thing with throwing the baseball hard. You can't try to throw it nice and easy every day playing catching and expect to throw 97, 98. It's just not going to happen. So the harder you throw on your throwing program and building your shoulder up will definitely help you."

'It's been a really good ride'

Walden admitted he has "been through the wringer" during his baseball career.

A Blue Jays 2007 ninth-round draft pick, Walden blew out his elbow April 28, 2009. He underwent a nerve transposition Aug. 9, 2009.

He returned for 2010 spring training camp, but he re-injured his arm. He underwent Tommy John surgery March 21, 2010.

"My first game back, April 28, 2011, was two years to the day when I actually blew my elbow out," he said. "So it was a long road."

Walden was "one of very few big league phantom players" as he described it, before making his major league debut last year for Boston. He spent five days (four games) on Toronto's 25-man roster in 2014, but he never pitched. He never even warmed up in the bullpen before being optioned to Triple-A Buffalo.

The Blue Jays designated him for assignment six days later and the Athletics claimed him.

"Honestly, the most difficult part was getting released by the Reds and not having a job for 10 days (before signing in Independent Ball)," Walden said. "Thinking (how) I was in the big leagues the year before. I had decent numbers in Double A the year before that. I should be able to get a job."

Walden feels blessed though. He met his wife Nichole in Fresno while rehabbing from Tommy John surgery.

"So a lot of these things have been huge blessings in disguises," he said. "You've got to wait it out and see what God has planned for us. It's been a really good ride."

'It's a different ballgame'

Walden and his wife Nichole welcomed their second daughter, Palmer, in September. Oldest daughter Sutton is 3.

Walden enjoyed hanging out with both daughters and helping his wife take care of them during his lengthy offseason.

"I got to spend a lot more time with my older daughter, who I honestly haven't been around a whole lot for" because of pro ball and winter ball, Walden said. "This was the longest time me and my wife had been together since we've been married. Probably since we've been dating in the last 10 years. We got to spend five months together."

Walden described raising two girls as "a different ballgame for sure."

"It was me and my brother growing up," he said. "That's all we had. Never really was raised around girls. Raising them myself is a little bit different. I'm glad my wife is really good and stays at home with the girls."

Walden signed a lease for a place in Pawtucket when the Red Sox optioned him to Triple A during spring training. He has stayed in a hotel in Boston since the Red Sox recalled him.

“At least I have a place to sleep. Trying to figure all that out, it’s something that’s been a little difficult, especially with my wife and two girls.”

Walden has many excited friends and family members back home, including older brother Robert and Walden’s sister-in-law, who’s a teacher.

“She had her whole class watching (Opening Day at Fenway),” Walden said. “They’re back in California. So while we’re playing that day game, it’s right in the middle of her school schedule. She was watching on the laptop ... and everybody’s watching the game, which is pretty cool.”

### **Brock Holt injury: Red Sox infielder nearing rehab assignment after facing Northeastern pitchers**

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox utility player Brock Holt will likely resume his rehab assignment at some point over the weekend.

Holt, who has been out since April 6 with a scratched cornea in his right eye, practiced with the Northeastern baseball team Wednesday, facing live pitching for the first time in about a week. He also took ground balls at Fenway Park.

“He feels good. I think (he needs) one more day of (batting practice) here,” manager Alex Cora said. “He’s getting to a point that he’s comfortable with what’s going on and we’ll send him to a rehab assignment.”

Holt played one rehab game for Pawtucket last Tuesday but didn’t feel like his vision was good enough to continue. He was returned from his rehab assignment Saturday and has been working out in Boston over the last few days.

Holt tried a few different types of contact lenses to improve his vision but couldn’t find anything that worked. He is instead trying to let the eye heal on its own without any extra eyewear.

Holt is one of three Sox second basemen who are currently on the injured list, along with Dustin Pedroia and Eduardo Nunez. If all goes well in the minors this weekend, he’ll likely be the first of those three to return to the active roster.

### **Dustin Pedroia injury: Boston Red Sox second baseman ran, hit, took grounders; Eduardo Nunez nearing rehab assignment**

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Red Sox’s Dustin Pedroia ran the bases, hit during early batting practice and took ground balls Wednesday here at Fenway Park.

“He looked OK,” manager Alex Cora said. “Yesterday he ran, too.”

Pedroia also turned double plays Wednesday. The Red Sox placed the second baseman on the 10-day injured list last Thursday because of irritation in his surgically-repaired knee.

“We’ll see how he reacts with that (taking ground balls) and we’ll talk about it obviously tonight and tomorrow to see what’s the next step,” Cora said.

Pedroia has played only nine games since the start of the 2018 season after undergoing a left knee cartilage restoration procedure Oct. 25, 2017.

Nunez nearing rehab assignment

Eduardo Nunez is nearing a rehab assignment. The Red Sox placed the utility infielder on the injured list Friday because of mid-back strain (retroactive to April 18).

“He took like 300 swings yesterday during the doubleheader so that’s a good sign,” Cora said. “And then today he was out there swinging with velocity. So he feels better. He feels better. He took ground balls, too. So it wouldn’t surprise me if in the upcoming days he’ll go and play a few games, too, on a rehab assignment.”

## **\* *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

**Alex Cora explains which pitching stats are worth paying attention to**

Chris Mason

BOSTON — Before Matthew Boyd threw his first pitch on Tuesday afternoon, Alex Cora knew his team would have their hands full with the Tigers starter.

“You start looking at his numbers — the real numbers,” Cora clarified.

Boyd’s conventional stats were sound, the lefty was 1-1 with a 2.96 ERA in his first four starts, but those aren’t the ones Cora was referring to.

So what are the real numbers the new-school manager values the most?

It’s clear that pitcher wins matter little to him — just ask Brian Johnson — but in an age where we’ve never had more information available, which pitching stats does Cora prefer?

“Weak contact in the strike zone,” Cora began. “That’s very important. I think there’s guys that when they stay within the zone, they get mashed. There’s others that can induce the opposition to weak contact. I think we’ve got one of those with Eduardo (Rodriguez).”

A quick visit to [BaseballSavant.com](http://BaseballSavant.com) affirms any eye test in that regard.

In 2018, Rick Porcello was hit with the most solid contact in the strike zone of any Sox starter, while Chris Sale offered the least.

“Also swings and misses,” Cora said. “We live in an era that pitching to contact is — we like swings and misses and pop ups. We avoid contact, especially in certain situations. So that’s something very important.”

Boyd had averaged 15 whiffs in his first four starts, and that trend continued against the Red Sox. Though they only struck out three times, Sox hitters waved at 14 of his pitches in the loss.

As far as Boston’s pitching goes, it’s no surprise that Sale had far and away the most whiffs in 2018. His 399 were over 100 more than anyone else. Rodriguez’s 11.2 percent swing-and-miss rate was the second highest on the team, while David Price led the Sox with 45 pop ups.

And of course with swings and misses yielding strikeouts, it’s one mainstream stat that Cora holds in high regard.

“It’s just something that it’s the nature of the sport,” Cora said. “Swings and, I honestly feel that the stuff we see on a nightly basis is better than — sorry (Dennis Eckersley) — but it’s better than any other moment in the history of the game.”

“You have guys throwing 95 (mph), cutting the ball, spinning the ball, they used to be sinker ball pitchers and now they throw cutters and there’s so much stuff that goes on to shape pitches and so much information about hitters,” Cora concluded. “I think the pitching side of it, analytic-wise is ahead of the hitting side of it.”

AC stays cool

As the Red Sox have underachieved in April, Alex Cora has remained remarkably even-keeled.

Whether it’s wisecracking with Rafael Devers before batting practice or ragging on reporters for goofy questions, Cora’s demeanor has been the same as it was when the Sox were in first place at this time a year ago.

“I’m not positive because it’s my job. I’m positive because that’s who I am,” Cora explained. “I know other people, they see the glass half-empty. I don’t. I learned that a few years ago. It’s not because of what happened last year or what’s going on right now. It’s who I am.

“Somebody asked me about rookie managers this year, what’s your best advice?” he continued. “Be yourself. I’m not going to change. I’m the same guy that went into that interview room in New York when Dave (Dombrowski) and everybody was there. They asked me questions. It’s the same guy, whether you’re 20 games over or 20 games under. That’s who I am.”

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

### **Red Sox's offense arrives in droves**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- For the Red Sox, the ability to finally breathe easy in the late stages of a game was every bit as enjoyable as the steady stream of clutch hits and relentless at-bats that led to Wednesday night’s 11-4 romp over the Tigers.

At last, the defending World Series champions could smile a little in the late stages of a game.

This is because the offense was at full throttle, which had been a rarity in recent weeks.

The margin of victory was easily the largest all season for the 10-15 Sox, who moved to six games behind the Rays in the American League East. Prior to this one, a 4-0 win over the Orioles on April 14 was the only win Boston had by more than three runs.

“For us to do that tonight I think is a good sign,” said star slugger J.D. Martinez, who aided the cause with three hits.

It couldn’t have come at a better time. Things had been getting a little stressful for a team that won a franchise-record 108 games last year, only to have everything feel like a struggle early in 2019.

“Yeah, definitely,” said Martinez. “We were kind of talking about it, joking about it today in the [indoor] cage. We were like, ‘This is the first night we’ve actually had it like this. Last year, it felt like we had a lot like these.’ This is the first one. It’s good.”

A seven-spot in the bottom of the eighth put the game out of reach -- which was a sweet feeling a day after getting swept by these same Tigers in a day-night doubleheader.

Manager Alex Cora had seen signs in recent days. But it felt a lot better to actually see full-fledged results.

"It feels great. Like I said earlier today, the line is moving, it's been moving since Tampa Bay [last weekend] offensively," Cora said. "We've been walking more, we've been controlling the zone, it's just a matter of getting that big hit. Today, you know, we grinded."

All nine Boston starters reached base. The Sox notched a season high in runs and walks (10) while tying a season high in hits (12).

"Yeah. I mean, like I said, we know what we're capable of," said right fielder Mookie Betts, last year's MVP in the AL. "It's just a matter of doing it. Maybe the first time we've done it this year. But hopefully the first of many."

It was no coincidence that the outburst happened on a night Betts scored twice and had two hits, including a double that came a couple of feet from clearing the Monster. Betts is the engine for the Red Sox.

Andrew Benintendi (RBI double) and Martinez, the other key cogs in the upper portion of the batting order, also made important contributions.

"Last year, it seemed like we never got all three of them hot at the same time," said Cora. "It seemed like it was only two at a time. So it's cool to see the three swinging that well and we'll see where it takes us."

But it isn't just the top. No. 8 hitter Jackie Bradley Jr. had struggled more than anyone coming into Wednesday's game. But the center fielder stroked two hits and had two RBIs. He also hit a bullet to center that was flagged down in front of the wall by Tigers center fielder JaCoby Jones.

As anyone who watched last year's AL Championship Series can tell you, the Red Sox are tough to stop when Bradley is hitting.

"We're continuing to make adjustments and we keep trying to push runs across the plate," said Bradley. "We'll get better at it."

And for the first time in a while, there was tangible proof that the offense is ready to start ticking again.

### **E-Rod credits ... pitching guru Pedroia?**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Not long after his dominant performance in an 11-4 win against the Tigers on Wednesday night was complete, Red Sox lefty Eduardo Rodriguez had someone to thank.

It turns out that in his spare time, Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia -- who is currently on the injured list with recurring left knee issues -- gives pitching tips.

A few days ago in the dugout at Tropicana Field, Pedroia showed Rodriguez a new grip for his new pitch.

Rodriguez had been tinkering since Spring Training with a slider. And finally, after some help from Pedroia, it clicked.

"It's funny," said Rodriguez. "Because four days ago, I was talking with Pedey in the dugout and he told me, 'Hey, do you want to throw a really good breaking ball?' I was like, 'Yeah, bro, I've been battling to throw a breaking ball since I got here in the big leagues, since I was in the Minor Leagues.'

"He told me throw the ball like this and hold it like that, and two days ago I started throwing it with my knee over there, and it's funny, because the first time I threw that kind of breaking ball was today and it was working."

Wait, so how does Pedroia know so much about pitching?

"I don't know," Rodriguez said. "He just told me that he was throwing that when he was in school. He just told me how to throw it and I've got to say thank you to him."

Before unleashing it against the Tigers, Rodriguez first tested out Pedroia's grip on the side.

"The grip, he showed me the grip, and I started doing it two days ago, and I told him, 'Bro, I'm going to throw that today, and you tell me how it is', and I think it worked pretty good," Rodriguez said.

The Tigers weren't in any position to disagree.

Of Rodriguez's 90 pitches against the Tigers, 16 were sliders. Of the 16, he generated one swing and miss, two called strikes, three foul balls and two outs.

And having the slider as a weapon made his other pitches more dangerous. Rodriguez induced 18 swings and misses, which means the Tigers whiffed at one of every five pitches he threw.

The mix was a thing of beauty for Rodriguez, as he also threw 52 fastballs, nine cutters and 13 changeups.

Rodriguez allowed just two hits and a run while walking three and striking out seven in six innings. The Tigers could barely touch him.

"That kid's got a great arm," credited Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire. "He's good. His ball jumps out of his hand. He pitches down in the zone. He's got a cutter that goes backdoor. He's got good stuff. We've watched enough video of him to know it was going to be a tough day for us. He's been throwing good. He made it really tough on us. Give credit to where credit's due."

And for this one start, at least some of the credit went to an unlikely source of pitching knowledge -- Pedroia.

How did a pitcher know he could trust a position player? After all, it's not like Rodriguez is going to give Pedroia hitting tips when he returns from the injured list.

"Everything he's done," Rodriguez said. "MVP, Rookie of the Year, all the winning he's done. All the time he's got in the big leagues, I've got to believe him. And I did it and it worked."

### **Garage door gobbles up J.D.'s homer bid**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- Oh, the quirks of Fenway Park.

In the bottom of the third inning of Wednesday night's 11-4 win over the Tigers, Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez hit a hard grounder into the corner in left that got stuck.

Stuck on what? Make that stuck in what.

The baseball got crammed into the lower shelf of the garage door that resides just to the left of the Green Monster.

As Tigers left fielder Niko Goodrum went to retrieve it, there was a slight problem. He couldn't pry it loose.

"It's stuck all right," said NESN analyst Dennis Eckersley, who has attended countless games at Fenway as a player and an announcer. "Boy, you don't see that. That's how hard he hit it. That ball was crushed down the line. This ball was scalded."

Martinez did what you are taught to do. He just kept running all the way around the bases. But that obviously was too good to be true.

After third-base umpire Dan Bellino ran over to survey the situation, he signaled for a ground-rule double.

It was humorous to see Bellino and Goodrum continue to try to get the ball loose. Finally, Goodrum kicked it out with his cleat.

Martinez didn't end up scoring. The Red Sox had a 2-0 lead at the time.

"It kind of happened to me [with] Houston when I first came up," said Martinez. "We were in Wrigley, the ball went into the ivy, I put my hands up, the guy kept running, and the umpire came out and said, 'Nope, you can get it.' I said, 'It's in there. I've got to reach in there.' He said, 'Reach in there.' The guy got a home run."

On Wednesday, Martinez hoped there was a way he could get a goofy homer at the expense of an outfielder.

"I remember saying to myself, 'Just keep running. Keep running till they send you back.' It was a weird situation," Martinez said.

Tigers third baseman Jeimer Candelario was just glad that Martinez's wicked grounder -- which sped by him at an exit velocity of 103.5 mph -- didn't take his head off.

"It just got stuck there. It's kind of weird. Niko was [waving his arms] like this and the umpire had to go all the way to see that," Candelario said. "If the umpire doesn't call that a double, that's a home run. It's difficult to read that. I don't know what's going on with that, but it's weird."

Had Candelario ever seen anything like it before?

"I think in Minnesota one time when somebody hit a line drive and it was stuck in between the thing," said Candelario. "But nothing like today. Today was weird."

### **Injured Red Sox players hitting, improving**

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- The Red Sox are getting healthier in the infield, as manager Alex Cora provided encouraging reports on all three players -- Brock Holt, Eduardo Núñez and Dustin Pedroia -- who are currently on the 10-day injured list.

Holt, after finding a contact lens that fits better, at last seems to be over the scratched cornea in his right eye that has sidelined him since April 6.

"Brock, he hit earlier today," said Cora. "There's a pretty good chance he's going to go on a rehab assignment this weekend. He feels good. Actually he was taking ground balls live when Nunez and Dustin were swinging today. So he feels good. I think one more day of BP here is going to get him to the point that he's comfortable with what's going on and we'll send him to a rehab assignment."

Nunez, who was placed on the injured list Thursday with a mid-back strain, is clearly champing at the bit to return.

"And Eduardo, he took like 300 swings yesterday during the doubleheader, so that's a good sign," said Cora. "Then today he was out there swinging with velocity. So he feels better. He feels better. He took

ground balls, too, so it wouldn't surprise me if in the upcoming days he'll go and play a few games on a rehab assignment."

And what about Pedroia, who felt a pop in his surgically repaired left knee on April 17, leading to a trip back to the injured list the next day?

"Dustin, today he hit outside. He looked OK," Cora said. "Yesterday he ran, too. I think he was going to take ground balls. We'll see how he reacts with that and we'll talk about it obviously tonight and tomorrow and see what's next."

Chavis proving to be versatile

Everyone knows that top prospect Michael Chavis can hit. He reinforced that notion when his first Major League homer was a 441-foot blast over the Green Monster on Tuesday night.

But what about his defense?

Though Chavis has mainly been a third baseman in the Minor Leagues, Cora is comfortable with him at second base, where he started again Wednesday night.

Chavis could also be used at first, though the Sox are well covered there with Mitch Moreland and Steve Pearce.

"He's a good athlete," Cora said. "He was a shortstop. If you were a shortstop when you signed, you have a pretty good idea how to play the game. His internal clock is better than what we saw in Spring Training. Now he's staying back and making the plays. I don't want to get ahead of myself. I've got to see him more. There are a few people that feel in the corners he's going to be fine. But you see him at second base. He's making plays."

As for the bat, Cora is impressed by more than just the power.

"We talk about him during Spring Training and the offensive upside is there," Cora said. "He understands a lot of things about hitting, his moves and what he needs to do to be successful. He's looking for pitches and he understands what they're trying to do against him and he's a good hitter."

## **\* *WEEI.com***

### **Dustin Pedroia taught Eduardo Rodriguez a new pitch (and it worked)**

Rob Bradford

Alex Cora noticed the difference: Eduardo Rodriguez was throwing a whole lot of sliders.

"He's good. We know the stuff, everybody knows it. Velocity, location, the change-up. He actually threw a lot of sliders early in the game," said the Red Sox manager after his team's 11-4 win over the Tigers. "He's in command. You guys know, I'm hard on him but everybody is because we know how good he can be. It's good to see him compete at this level this way and we expect him to do that every time he goes out there, to go deep into games, and dominate."

When you get 13 outs before giving up a single hit you know you're doing something right, and that was the case with Rodriguez Wednesday night. Allowing one run on two hits over six innings the lefty utilized the aforementioned slider in fine fashion, tossing it 16 times.

So, what made Rodriguez throw the pitch with such confidence this time around? Consider it a gift from Dustin Pedroia.



"To see the movement, and to see it was located pretty good right where I wanted. It's funny because four days ago, I was talking with Pedey in the dugout and he told me, 'Hey, do you want to throw a really good breaking ball?' I was like, 'Yeah, bro, I've been battling to throw a breaking ball since I got here in the big leagues, since I was in the minor leagues,'" Rodriguez explained. "He told me, 'Throw the ball like this and hold it like that,' and two days ago I started throwing it with my knee over there, and it's funny because the first time I threw that kind of breaking ball was today and it was working. So I've just got to say thanks to him."

What?!

"The grip, he showed me the grip, and I started doing it two days ago," the Sox starter reiterated. "I told him, 'Bro, I'm going to throw that today, and you tell me how it is,' and I think it worked pretty good. ... I don't know. He just told me that he was throwing that when he was in school. He just told me how to throw it and I've got to say thank you to him."

The pitch was a difference-maker for Rodriguez, who still relied mostly on a mid-90's fastball that he utilized on 47 of his 90 pitches. Along with a changeup he threw 14 times the starter was able to keep a right-handed-hitting-heavy Detroit lineup at bay.

The pitch made a huge difference for Rodriguez, and Rodriguez -- who has now turned in three straight solid outings -- is making a huge difference for the Red Sox, who have now won each of the pitcher's last three starts.

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

**Red Sox did something for first time this year in win over Tigers that could hold key to their entire season**

John Tomase

BOSTON - If the Red Sox need a team song, Ringo Starr's "It Don't Come Easy" wouldn't be a bad choice.

They're singing the blues AND paying their dues, and their 2019 season sure as bleep hasn't come easy.

On Wednesday, they cruised past the Tigers in a game that was harder than it looked. They took command behind an outstanding start from left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez and early offense from Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez.

Still, given the opportunity to blow things open early, they instead did what they've done all year, which is grind like a millstone. When Matt Barnes loaded the bases with two outs in the eighth, the Tigers even brought the go-ahead run to the plate.

Barnes escaped and the offense finally exploded in the bottom of the frame. The scorebook will show a safe 11-4 victory.

Reality tells a slightly different story, one that has repeated itself throughout this vexing young season.

A year after going 38-17 in blowouts decided by at least five runs, the Red Sox are now 1-5.

"I feel like we hadn't had a night like that this season," Martinez said. "For us to do that tonight I think is a good sign. We were kind of talking about it, joking about it today in the cage. We were like, 'This is the first night we've actually had it like this.' Last year, it felt like we had a lot like these. This is the first one. It's good."

He's not exaggerating. It's actually instructive and borderline amazing to break down their previous nine wins.

How many of these sound easy?

They trailed 6-2 in the eighth inning of their first victory, vs. Seattle on March 29, before Mitch Moreland's pinch three-run homer won it in the ninth.

Tied at 3 in the ninth with Oakland five days later, Mookie Betts squibbed a double off the third base bag that allowed the Red Sox to escape.

Their only other victory on the season-opening road trip came in Arizona, where Moreland's solo homer in the seventh provided the margin in a 1-0 victory.

A day after dropping their home opener, the Red Sox trailed the Blue Jays 6-5 in the ninth. They loaded the bases vs. closer Ken Giles and Rafael Devers won it with a chopper over a drawn-in infield.

A pair of victories over the woeful Orioles didn't even qualify as stress-free. On April 12, the Red Sox led 3-2 in the seventh before pulling away in a 6-4 victory that still required closer Ryan Brasier to finish things off after Tyler Thornburg served up a two-run homer in the ninth.

Two days later, the Red Sox found themselves clinging to a 1-0 lead in the eighth before Xander Bogaerts blasted an insurance three-run homer that provided the final margin in a 4-0 victory.

And finally, here's all you need to know about the weekend sweep in Tampa: all three games were tied in the eighth inning. The Red Sox won them by a combined total of four runs.

Nothing stresses a team like close games, and that's about all the Red Sox seem able to play. Just as a manager will pull a pitcher after a particularly taxing inning despite a relatively low pitch count, teams need a breather, too. If every game is a grind, the mental toll will accumulate.

We tend to focus on close wins, but easy ones help players survive a season.

"It's very important," Betts said. "Sometimes, you just want to sit back and chill and coast and know it's one of those things where you don't necessarily want to do it, but then it's also one of those things where sometimes you want to just coast through a win and today was one of those times. We'll see what happens tomorrow."

That's how the Red Sox went about their business in 2018. They followed brutal losses with easy wins. The most notable example came in the Division Series. They dropped a tense Game 2 vs. the Yankees and followed with a 16-1 drubbing in Game 3 that featured the first postseason cycle in history from Brock Holt.

Stress? What stress? The Red Sox could use many more nights like Wednesday, the kind that end with that peaceful, easy feeling, to quote some other '70s rockers.

**Eduardo Rodriguez unveils new slider and has an unlikely pitching coach to thank -- Dustin Pedroia**

John Tomase

BOSTON - Eduardo Rodriguez spent spring training under the watchful eye of his rotation-mates, including Cy Young Award winners Rick Porcello and David Price, as well as perennial contender Chris Sale. They spent mornings on back fields honing E-Rod's new pitch, a slider he hoped to incorporate into his repertoire as a complement to his fastball and changeup.

Sale owns the best slider in the game. Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez even got in the fun, offering pointers on how he might grip it.

"If it works, I'll throw it," Rodriguez said in February. "It's spring training. Doesn't hurt the numbers on the back of your baseball card."

Fast-forward two months to Wednesday night, and suddenly Rodriguez's slider was no longer a theoretical offering, but a legitimate one. He threw 16 in an 11-4 victory over the Tigers, only two of which ended up in play. The pitch featured good action down and in to right-handed hitters and gave the Tigers something else to ponder as E-Rod carried a no-hitter into the fifth before settling for six innings of two-hit, one-run ball. He struck out seven and walked three.

So, who gets the credit for this new pitch? Sale? Price? Pedro?

Try Dustin Pedroia.

It sounds crazy, but Rodriguez recounted a conversation the two had in the dugout over the weekend in Tampa.

"Hey, do you want to throw a really nasty breaking ball?" Pedroia asked.

"Yeah, bro," Rodriguez replied. "I've been battling to throw a breaking ball since I got here in the big leagues, since I was in the minor leagues."

Rodriguez laughed while relaying the exchange.

"He told me to throw the ball like this and hold it like that, and two days ago I started throwing it with my knee over there, and it's funny, because the first time I threw that kind of breaking ball was today and it was working," Rodriguez said. "So I've just got to say thanks to him."

This begs so many questions. Did Pedroia actually teach him the grip?

"The grip, he showed me the grip, and I started doing it two days ago, and I told him, bro, I'm going to throw that today, and you tell me how it is, and I think it worked pretty good," Rodriguez said.

How does Pedroia know how to throw a slider?

"I don't know," Rodriguez said. "He just told me that he was throwing that when he was in school. He just told me how to throw it and I've got to say thank you to him."

Is it a slider or a curveball?

"I don't know," Rodriguez said. "Whatever you want to call it. Just something that goes right where I wanted."

This is the Rodriguez the Red Sox have been waiting to see. They've won his past three starts, and even though his ERA remains an unsightly 5.88, that's seven runs lower than it stood after his first two starts, losses to Seattle and Oakland that saw him surrender 12 runs in eight innings.

"You guys know I'm hard on him, but everybody is because we know how good he can be," said manager Alex Cora. "It's good to see him compete at this level this way and we expect him to do that every time he goes out there, to go deep into games, and dominate."

Who knew? All it took to put him over the hump was an assist from an unlikely pitching guru.

**Dallas Keuchel isn't the answer for Red Sox, as Alex Cora just explained by accident**

John Tomase

BOSTON - Want to know why Dallas Keuchel is a bad fit for the Red Sox? Alex Cora's answer to a totally unrelated question tells the story.

Speaking to reporters before the game Wednesday vs. the Tigers, the Red Sox manager was asked about the evolution of baseball to a swing-and-miss league, with more strikeouts than hits across the game for the first time ever last year.

"I honestly feel that the stuff we see on a nightly basis...is better than any other moment in the history of the game," Cora said. "You have guys throwing 95, cutting the ball, spinning the ball, they used to be sinkerball pitchers and now they throw cutters and there's so much stuff that goes on to shape pitches and so much information about hitters. I think the pitching side of it, analytics-wise is ahead of the hitting side of it. Now there's no 88 [mph], sinker, and a slider, now a guy pitching the fifth inning or sixth inning is throwing 97, 98, so I think that has a lot to do with what's going on."

How does this relate to Keuchel? The free agent left-hander remains unsigned, joining a purgatory that includes ex-Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel. With Nathan Eovaldi out for one month and possibly two following elbow surgery, the Red Sox could be in a market for a starter, which has led some to identify Keuchel as a ready-made option, even though signing him before June would cost the team a draft pick.

Think again. Keuchel is basically the antithesis of the hard thrower Cora described above, and the Red Sox put a premium on pure stuff, not just in terms of velocity, but spin rate, too.

With the launch angle craze turning low-ball hitters into home run hitters, pitching up in the zone has become a must. It's turning sinkerballers like Keuchel into dinosaurs, which is why Red Sox starter Rick Porcello has remade himself from a Derek Lowe clone into someone who attacks the upper part of the zone with a four-seam fastball.

Keuchel checks none of those boxes. He has spent his career pecking away at the knees in the 89-90 mph range. Per CBS Sports, <https://www.cbssports.com/mlb/news/why-are-teams-still-staying-away-from-dallas-keuchel-here-are-three-reasons-including-the-leftys-pitching-style/> 93 percent of pitchers threw harder fastballs last year, and 81 percent featured better spin rates. Keuchel also ranked 254th out of 268 pitchers in average pitch height, which means he's staying low when everyone else is going high.

Does this sound like someone the Red Sox would value for the \$18 million he still hopes to command annually? Consider Cora's answer when asked what pitching metrics he values.

"Weak contact in the strike zone," Cora said. "That's very important. I think there's guys that when they stay within the zone, they get mashed. There's others that can induce the opposition to weak contact. I think we've got one of those with Eduardo [Rodriguez]. Eduardo is that way, I think. Also swings and misses. We live in an era that pitching to contact is -- we like swings and misses and pop-ups. We avoid contact, especially in certain situations. So that's something very important."

That's not Keuchel. His lifetime slugging percentage allowed on pitches in the strike zone is .520. That's higher than every member of the Red Sox rotation, from Chris Sale (.448) to David Price (.455) to Eovaldi (.464) to E-Rod (.512). Even Porcello, who spent more than half his career throwing sinkers, is at .507.

Cora spent a year with Keuchel in Houston and knows what the former Cy Young Award winner (2015) can do. Unfortunately, his skills don't fit Boston's model.

**\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

**Finally, a one-sided win for the Red Sox**

Sean McAdam

You can count the 2019 wins on two hands so far, and because there have been so (relatively) few of them, they're fairly easy to recall.

Until Wednesday night, seven of the nine victories have been decided by one or two runs, including one (Sunday) in extra innings. Over the weekend, when they swept the Tampa Bay Rays, two of the wins came in the team's final inning and a third was determined in the eighth.

That's how most of them had been. Late, close and tight.

That path might be good for a team in September as it readies for the postseason, but for the grind of a long regular season, some one-sided, never-break-a-sweat win here or there can relax a team.

On Tuesday, Alex Cora had lamented the Red Sox hadn't had that luxury, a game in which the issue was decided early and the drama was absent.

Perhaps Wednesday doesn't qualify either, since the Sox had, for most of the night, rather modest leads: a two-run edge for three innings; a four-run lead for a half-inning; and a three-run lead until the eighth. That's when the combination of a patient Red Sox lineup and an erratic Tigers bullpen conspired to give the Red Sox a seven-run inning to open things nice and wide for an 11-4 win.

It wasn't in the bag from, say, the second inning or anything. But since they didn't have to sweat out the last few innings and Cora got a chance to get a couple of regulars off their feet in the top of the ninth, the Sox gladly took it.

"I feel like we haven't had a night like that this season," said J.D. Martinez.

As previously documented, it wasn't Martinez's imagination. Every night had been a grind, which can take a toll of its own on a team.

Part of the issue stemmed from the brutal 11-game, season-opening road trip in which the Sox often found themselves on the business end of routs when their starting pitchers failed miserably in keeping them in games.

Of late, an inconsistent run by the offense led to games being closer than they should, or, as was the case in Tuesday's nightcap, a frustrating loss in which the Sox marooned 13 baserunners.

They were better Wednesday. When Martinez led off the second with a single, the Sox managed to get him in and when Tigers starter Tyson Ross committed the unpardonable sin of issuing a walk with two outs and the bases empty. The Sox made sure that hitter — Michael Chavis — scored, too.

In the fifth, it was more of the same. With one out, the first four hitters in the Red Sox order reached and two scored.

From then, it was a cruise.

"It feels great," said Cora. "The line has been moving since Tampa, offensively. We're talking more, we're controlling the zone. It's just a matter of getting that big hit. Today, we grinded. We put up good at-bats."

"It felt great," said Mookie Betts of a night in which the Sox could afford to breathe a bit. "Getting the win is the most important thing. We know what we're capable of. It's just a matter of doing it. This is maybe the first time we've done it this year. Hopefully, (it's) the first of many."

“It’s very important (to have a few easy ones). Sometimes you just want to sit back and chill, kind of coast.”

Cora noted that the Big Three in the lineup — Martinez, Betts and Andrew Benintendi — haven’t, until recently, all been hot at the same time. But Wednesday night, they combined to get on base eight times and scored five runs collectively.

It seemed like it was only a matter of time before a night like this happened. And yet, it somehow took 25 games.

“We were kind of joking about it today in the cage,” said Martinez. “Last year, it felt like we had a lot like these and this is the first one (this year). So, it’s good.”

A year ago, the Red Sox led all of baseball in virtually every significant offensive category except homers: batting average, runs scored, OPS, slugging percentage, extra-base hits.

But too often, it’s been a struggle to outscore the opposition this season. If Wednesday night represented the start of an offensive awakening, the Red Sox will surely welcome more of it.

### **BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 11, Tigers 4 – Sox work 10 walks to rout Tigers**

Sean McAdam

#### HEADLINES

**ERod dominates:** Eduardo Rodriguez turned in his third straight good start, allowing just one run on three hits over six innings while fanning seven and walking three. Rodriguez didn’t allow his first hit until one out in the fifth when Gordon Beckham lined a single to left. A lengthy sixth inning, in which Rodriguez was forced to throw 22 pitches, shortened his outing by an inning, but he was nonetheless impressive. “Outstanding, outstanding,” remarked Alex Cora. “Stuff-wise, he was really good. He commanded the situation, got people out in the strike zone, mixed up his pitches, (good) location. He’s been good for us. I’m hard on him — everybody is — because we know how good he can be. It’s good to see him compete at this level, this way. We expect him to do that every time he goes out there — take us deep into games and dominate.” Rodriguez flashed a good slider and noted, almost off-handedly, that it was Dustin Pedroia who showed him the new grip.

**Bullpen misses bats:** Until Tyler Thornburg stumbled (two walks, two hits, three runs allowed) in the ninth despite a 10-run lead, the Red Sox bullpen was dominant in relief of Rodriguez. Brandon Workman walked one batter but got all three of his outs in the seventh on swinging strikeouts. In the eighth, Matt Barnes picked up right where Workman left off, fanning the first two batter he faced. He then loaded the bases with two singles sandwiched around a walk before getting out of the jam by striking out Ronny Rodriguez. Workman and Barnes got six outs in the seventh and eighth and every one came via strikeout. For the season, Barnes has struck out 22 of the 43 batters he faced, a percentage of 51.2 percent while issuing just three walks. He’s recorded two or more strikeouts in each of his last 11 appearances, the second-longest streak ever for a Red Sox believer, behind only Calvin Schiraldi (12 straight) in 1986.

**Patience is a virtue:** Before the game, Cora pointed to the fact that the Sox had worked six walks in Tuesday’s loss as proof that Red Sox hitters were starting to control the strike zone and weren’t chasing pitches — a good sign. As it turned out, the Sox were just getting started when it came to working walks. On Wednesday, they drew a season-high of 10 walks, including five in the eighth inning alone, including three straight with the bases loaded, forcing in runs as the Sox opened the game up. “We’re walking more,” said Cora. “It’s just a matter of getting that big hit.” Of the nine members of the original starting lineup, seven of the nine walked at least once.

#### TURNING POINT

In the fifth inning, with the Red Sox clinging to a modest 2-0 lead, Rodriguez issued a leadoff walk, and one out later, gave up his first hit, giving the Tigers an opening with runners on first and second and just one out. But Rodriguez dug in and struck out the next two batters to freeze the baserunners and escape the inning without any damage. In the bottom of the inning, the Sox scored twice more to double their lead.

#### TWO UP:

Jackie Bradley Jr.: Bradley came into the game with just two hits in his last 20 at-bats and a batting average down to .134. But he collected two hits and twice hit the ball hard — one on a lineout to right, and another well-struck ball on which center fielder JaCoby Jones robbed him of extra bases.

Christian Vazquez: The catcher continued to have better at-bats, taking part in a hit-and-run in the second inning, working a walk in the sixth and adding a run-scoring single in the seven-run eighth inning.

#### ONE DOWN:

Mitch Moreland: The first baseman was the only member of the Boston lineup to not collect a hit (0-for-3) though he did have two walks.

#### QUOTE OF NOTE

“I feel like we haven’t had a night like that this season.” J.D. Martinez.

#### STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

Red Sox pitching recorded 14 strikeouts, a season-high for a nine-inning game for them this season. Christian Vazquez moved to first base in the top of the ninth and has now played three positions this year. Michael Chavis stole his first base of his major league career. J.D. Martinez has hit safely in 23 of his 25 games this season.

#### UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Tigers conclude their series Thursday at 7:10 p.m. with RHP Rick Porcello (0-3, 8.47) vs. RHP Jordan Zimmermann (0-3, 4.94)

## **\* *The Detroit Free Press***

### **Detroit Tigers observations: Tyson Ross battered in 11-4 loss to Red Sox**

Anthony Fenech

BOSTON — The defending World Series champions woke up.

After getting swept by the Detroit Tigers in a doubleheader on Tuesday, the Boston Red Sox responded with a 11-4 win Wednesday night at Fenway Park.

The Red Sox did damage against right-hander Tyson Ross, putting 10 runners on base in five innings, scoring four times. Ross was unable to pitch effectively without the slider at his disposal.

He walked three batters and struck out five.

The Tigers could not continue their offensive progress from a night before, totaling six hits. Boston lefty Eduardo Rodriguez kept their lineup at bay and didn’t allow a hit until Gordon Beckham singled with one out in the fifth inning.

They threatened to come back in the top of the eighth, loading the bases with two outs, but Matt Barnes struck out Ronny Rodriguez swinging.

The game got out of hand in the eighth inning, when the Red Sox scored seven runs. In that frame, manager Ron Gardenhire made two pitching changes. Drew VerHagen walked home three batters.

The Tigers scored three runs with two outs in the ninth.

With the loss, the Tigers are 12-11.

Here are three observations from the Tigers' loss:

Ross was off

Though the Tigers limited the Sox damage on Tuesday, Ross couldn't do the same Wednesday. He was victimized by not only a sharp slider that didn't show up, but also falling behind in counts. Boston scored twice in the second inning and then twice in the fifth, when Mookie Betts hit an RBI double and J.D. Martinez hit an RBI single for a 4-0 lead.

Martinez bounced back

After the Tigers kept him off the bases for the first time this season in the first game Tuesday, and held him to one single in the night cap, Martinez went 3-for-5 with the rarest of doubles. In the second, he hit a ground ball down the left field line, lodging it in a garage door in the corner. The play was ruled a ground-rule double, and needed to be kicked loose by Niko Goodrum.

Hitting streak

Miguel Cabrera just missed a three-run home run earlier in the game, pounding a ball to the warning track in dead center field, but extended his hitting streak to 10 games with a single in the eighth. The hit was No. 2,700 of Cabrera's Major League career. He remains homerless on the season.

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

### **Martinez, Rodriguez lead Red Sox to 11-4 win over Tigers**

BOSTON -- The defending World Series champion Boston Red Sox hadn't had a lopsided victory yet this season. Their win over Detroit on Wednesday night gave them a chance to relax.

J.D. Martinez had three hits, Eduardo Rodriguez pitched six strong innings and the Red Sox rebounded from a doubleheader sweep by Detroit with a seven-run outburst in the eighth inning in an 11-4 win over the Tigers.

"We were kind of joking about it that this is the first night we've had like this," Martinez said. "Last year, it felt like we had a lot of them."

The Red Sox (10-15) avoided their fourth losing streak of three games or more. They had only four losing streaks of three games each last season while piling up a club record 108 victories.

It's the first time the Red Sox scored double-digit runs. Their previous largest margin of victory was four runs.

Martinez hit two singles, a double and drove in a run, and Christian Vazquez had two RBI singles.

"It felt great," reigning AL MVP Mookie Betts said of the lopsided victory. "But getting a win is the most important thing."



Nicholas Castellanos had an RBI single for the Tigers, a day after their first doubleheader sweep in Boston since 1965.

"As I told those guys out there, `Listen, we've won two out of three in Boston and have a chance to win three out of four," Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire said.

Rodriguez (2-2) gave up a run on two hits, striking out seven and walking three. He improved to 12-0 since the start of 2017 when getting at least three runs of support.

He took a no-hitter into the fifth inning before Gordon Beckham lined a one-out single to left field. Rodriguez closed the inning by striking out the next two batters.

Tyson Ross (1-3) allowed four runs in five innings.

The Red Sox used two hit-and-run at-bats in the second to build a 2-0 lead. Running on the pitch, Martinez reached second easily on a bouncer to short by Xander Bogaerts. Rafael Devers followed with an RBI single.

Vazquez's first RBI single bounced into right through the vacated hole when second baseman Beckham went to cover as Jackie Bradley Jr. broke for second with runners on the corners.

Betts hit an RBI double off the Green Monster, and Martinez added a run-scoring single to make it 4-0.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Tigers: INF Josh Harrison had the night off after playing both games of Tuesday's DH. "It wasn't tough at all," manager Ron Gardenhire said of sitting him. "You should have seen him walk in here. I said, `See you in the training room.' He's a little sore. I told him (on Tuesday) my thought process is probably a day and he said that's probably the right thing."

Red Sox; 2B Dustin Pedroia (IL, left knee irritation) hit on the field and took grounders with INF Eduardo Nunez (IL, mid-back strain). "He looked OK," manager Alex Cora said of Pedroia. "We'll talk about it, to see what's the next step." . Cora said Nunez "was out there swinging with velocity. He looks good." . Utility player Brock Holt (scratched right cornea) could be going on a rehab assignment this weekend.

#### WALK AWAY

Tigers RHP Drew VerHagen walked three straight batters with the bases loaded in Boston's seven-run eighth that broke it open. Bradley added a two-run single.

"It was just one of those long innings that happen every now and then," Detroit catcher Grayson Greiner said. "Hopefully it doesn't happen for a while."

#### K-POWER

Boston relievers Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes each had three strikeouts in their one inning of work, with Barnes getting Ronny Rodriguez to end the eighth with the bases loaded.

#### DOORWAY DOUBLE

Martinez hit a groundball down the left-field line that got jammed in a small opening of a garage door along a side wall in foul territory. It was ruled a ground-rule double even though he reached second easily.

The door is used to move batting cages, screens and equipment by the ground's crew onto the field.

"It was weird," Martinez said.

## MINOR NO-NO

Detroit's Double-A affiliate, the Erie SeaWolves, had a combined no-hitter Wednesday in a 4-0 win over the Bowie Baysox.

The SeaWolves' Alex Faedo and Drew Carlton combined to shut down the Baysox. Faedo retired the first 11 batters he faced and struck out five and walked one in seven innings. Carlton struck out two and walked one in two innings.

It was the third no-hitter in franchise history, with the previous two thrown by Thad Weber on August 22, 2009, and Elvin Hernandez in 1995.

## UP NEXT

Detroit RHP Jordan Zimmerman (0-3, 4.94 ERA) is slated to face Boston RHP Rick Porcello (0-3, 8.47) in the series finale Thursday night.