

The Boston Red Sox Sunday, April 28, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox stumble against Rays

Julian Benbow

It was barely a week ago the Red Sox were dragging the American League's worst record with them into Tampa Bay to face the first-place Rays and David Price was emphasizing the need for some early-season urgency.

The Sox responded with a three-game series sweep that appeared to inject some life into the team and spark a 5-2 run over seven games.

With the Rays in Boston on Saturday, Price's urgency was still visible as he gave the Sox six strong innings while holding the Rays to two runs on four hits with seven strikeouts. But the Sox bats fell silent in a 2-1 loss.

"When you look up, there was a lot of at-bats with men on, we just couldn't get a big hit," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora.

With J.D. Martinez out of the lineup, a late scratch due to back spasms, the Sox offense sputtered. After scoring 18 runs in their previous two games, the Sox mustered just five hits. They went 0 for 8 with runners in scoring position and left 11 runners on base.

Rays starter Charlie Morton threw six shutout innings with five strikeouts and four walks. The Red Sox didn't get on the board until the eighth inning when Mookie Betts, who went 2 for 5, launched a 1-0 cutter to center field for a solo homer, his fifth of the year.

The Sox went on to load the bases in the inning, but couldn't capitalize. Xander Bogaerts worked a one-out walk and Rafael Devers singled to right, but Michael Chavis struck out with runners at the corners.

"I just messed up, honestly," Chavis said. "I should've hit the first-pitch fastball, especially in that situation. I've got to at least hit a pop up in the outfield, see if we can score that run, and tie the ballgame up. Got a hittable pitch, first pitch fastball. Definitely should've hit that.

"I think it's a situation where the job should get done and it's something that I've done in the past with no problem," Chavis added. "It's something I take pride in. A big part of my game is RBIs and I need to get that one for sure."

Steve Pearce walked to load the bases. But Jackie Bradley Jr. struck out to end the inning, pulling the plug on the late rally.

"The line was moving, but we didn't get the big hit," Cora said.

Hitting cleanup for the fifth time this season, Xander Bogaerts went 1 for 3. Rafael Devers went 1 for 3.

Sox starter David Price kept the Sox within striking distance with six strong innings.

"We'll take that any night and take our chances," Cora said.

Price was stung early by Diaz's leadoff homer. Price left a 0-and-1 fastball in Diaz's wheelhouse and the Rays first baseman swatted it to center field for his seventh homer of the season.

Price walked the next batter, Tommy Pham, but after getting Daniel Robertson to ground into a double play, Price settled into a groove and retired the next seven batters.

Price worked himself into a tight situation in the fourth inning, but wiggled out of it. After giving up a leadoff double to Pham, then issuing a walk to Daniel Robertson to make it first and second with no outs, Price leaned on his fastball to strike out Avisail Garcia for the first out of the inning.

But Price was tagged by Mike Zunino's RBI single to left that scored Pham for a 2-0 Rays lead. After Kevin Kiermaier's ground ball single through the left side of the infield loaded the bases, pitching coach Dana LeVangie took a trip to the mound. Price used his changeup to strike out the next batter, Guillermo Heredia, then got Willy Adames to ground out to third to end the inning.

The damage was minimal, but after throwing 100 pitches in just five innings in his last outing, Price's pitch count was up to 71 after just four frames.

"Whenever you throw that many pitches in one inning, that's pretty taxing," Price said. "But it could've been a lot worse. Just damage control, kept us in the game right there, and kept us in reaching distance."

Since August 2016, 31 of the 51 games between the Sox and Rays have been decided by either one or two runs. Eleven of the past 24 have been decided by one run, including each of the past three.

Price was confident the Sox bats would be heard from again.

"Our offense is too good," Price said. "They've carried me for three years since I've been here, so they'll get back to it."

Through the early-season turbulence, Price has been a stabilizer in the rotation. In 11 games since April 14, Sox starters have a 3.27 ERA.

"First couple weeks were tough," Price said. "We've definitely, as a group, thrown the ball better our last couple turns through the rotation. So that's a good sign."

"It's going to take a lot of pressure off of our offense, and we'll get back to clicking on all cylinders like we need to be."

'There's no quit' in Dustin Pedroia

Peter Abraham

As he fouled off a pitch on April 17 at Yankee Stadium, the popping noise in his left knee was so loud that Dustin Pedroia heard it over the crowd.

"Well, maybe that's it," he thought.

Pedroia stayed at the plate, hit a fly ball to right field, then came out of the game. He went back to the clubhouse, threw up because he felt sick, and went back to the team hotel wondering if his career was over.

On Saturday morning, only 10 days later, Pedroia went through a full workout on the field before the Red Sox played the Tampa Bay Rays. He took batting practice, went through defensive drills at second base, then ran the bases.

There was a new custom-made brace on his knee. It arrived on Friday and Pedroia is confident that it will enable him to play in minor league games sometime soon.

“I have to be able to play every day,” Pedroia said. “The restriction they put me on before when I was playing was hard. It was hard for me; it was hard for our team.”

By every day, Pedroia means five of every seven games at least.

“That’s what we’re trying to do. We have to find out if my knee can handle it,” he said.

If you’re waiting for Pedroia to give up, better pull up a comfortable chair.

“There’s no quit,” he said. “What example am I setting for my children if I quit? Or the kids I meet at the park who say I’m their favorite player?”

Yet doubters persist. A percentage of Red Sox fans, and that’s probably not the right word to describe these bitter souls, would like to see Pedroia step aside. He knows they’re out there.

“I think there’s a lot more who don’t,” Pedroia said. “It’s OK. I don’t think that’s the majority. Those are the people who call into radio shows, the people in comment sections.

“But when I’m going to the grocery store, people say they can’t wait to see me back out there and that I’m setting a good example for their kids. That’s why I’m doing it.”

Pedroia also is driven to be part of the solution after the Sox got off a slow start. He’s been a part of six playoff teams and knows what needs to happen.

“Absolutely. That’s a huge part of it,” he said. “It’s already frustrating enough as we’re trying to find the right brace, the right footwear, the right everything to be able to play.

“That’s why I say last year was the perfect situation when we won it. What I had to go through, if we didn’t do what we did, that would have crushed me. Now we’re struggling, I want to help fix that.

“I live and die by this. I got drafted by the Red Sox in 2004. It’s personal. The people who say the other things, that doesn’t bother me.”

The new knee brace will determine what comes next for the player who is arguably the best second baseman in franchise history.

The custom brace, Pedroia said, will allow him to “unload” properly when he swings.

“When I was playing defense and running, it was fine,” Pedroia said. “In the box, the movement, the brace was pulling me in a direction to not allow me to do that. It was restricting me.”

Pedroia is now using what’s called a double upright brace instead of a de-rotational brace. The first brace twisted his thigh one way and his shin the other, which helps explain why he was making contact but not getting much out of it. His legs weren’t part of his swing.

“I do feel in the end it’s getting to be back to normal,” Pedroia said. “My knee will let me know if I can do it.”

If he can’t, Pedroia has a good idea of what happens then.

He presented David Wright with a No. 5 from the left field scoreboard at Fenway Park last September when the Mets were in town.

Wright had decided to stop playing only a few days before after missing nearly three seasons with a back injury. He made a deal with the Mets to restructure how the remaining two years of his contract would be paid off once he was released.

Pedroia, 35, is signed through 2021 and has approximately \$37.5 million remaining on his contract. His agents, the same ones who represented Wright, may have to work out a similar agreement with the Sox

I asked Pedroia if he feared going through the same forced departure.

“No. If my knee can’t do it and I don’t play again, I don’t have one regret,” he said. “I never took one play off in my life. It’s unfortunate that I got hurt. But you can’t control that.”

Dylan Pedroia is 9, Cole Pedroia is 6, and Brooks Pedroia is 4. Their baseball memories should be of a packed house at Fenway Park cheering their dad, not ice packs and crutches.

“I want them to see me overcome this. That’s it,” Pedroia said. “They know I’m good. But they also know I had a really bad injury. They’ve seen the tough times and you guys haven’t. They’ve been with me through the worst of times. I want them to see me at the best of times.”

J.D. Martinez a late scratch from lineup

Julian Benbow

The Red Sox spent most of their 2-1 loss Saturday to the Tampa Bay Rays waiting for a clutch hit that never came.

It didn’t help that one of their most dangerous bats didn’t play for the first time this season.

Designated hitter J.D. Martinez was a late scratch due to back spasms, forcing manager Alex Cora to do some last-minute reshuffling of his lineup card.

Xander Bogaerts moved into the cleanup spot for the fifth time this season while Steve Pearce was plugged in as the DH.

Cora said Martinez was slightly ailing when he arrived Fenway Park on Saturday.

“When he got here, he felt like he was tight, so he tried to go to the cage and he tried to swing,” Cora said. “It didn’t make sense to push him to go out there.”

Martinez had appeared in every game this season before sitting out yesterday, recording at least one hit in 24 of 26 games and posting a team-best .340 batting average.

As the Sox tried to rally late in the game, Cora said he didn’t consider using Martinez as a pinch hitter.

Martinez’s status for Sunday is yet to be determined.

“He got treatment the whole day, so we’ll see how he feels in the morning,” Cora said.

Nunez, Holt progress

Red Sox infielder Eduardo Nunez, who’s been on the injured list since April 18 with a back strain, continues to progress and could be nearing a return.

“It feels that way,” said Cora.

Nunez was able to work out before Saturday’s game. Weather-willing, Cora hopes to have him do additional work Sunday.

“We’ll sit down and meet with him and see what’s the next step,” Cora said.

Getting Nunez back would add depth to a thin Sox infield. At the moment, Tzu-Wei Lin and Michael Chavis are the only two second basemen on the roster.

Nunez was hitting just .159 in 17 games before going on the injured list.

Brock Holt, on the injured list since April 6 with a scratched right cornea, went 1 for 3 with three walks in the second game of his rehab assignment with Pawtucket on Friday.

“That was pretty solid,” Cora said. “He said he saw the ball well. It’s only six at-bats. He didn’t play the field, he was a DH. But he felt good, he saw the ball well.”

Pearce seeing the ball

So far, the season has been a battle for Pearce. He came into Saturday with a .176 batting average, going 4 for 32 on the season with 15 strikeouts.

But, to Cora, the nine-pitch walk that Pearce worked in the eighth inning against Rays lefthander José Alvarado was a sign that things may be starting to snap into place.

“It’s good to see him see the ball and be able to slow the game down,” Cora said. “That was a good at-bat.”

Pearce fouled off three straight cutters on a full count before taking baking Ball 4 to load the bases, the highlight of an 0-for-3 day that dropped Pearce to .114.

“He’s been working on his timing, getting his foot down,” Cora said. “When you’re on time, you’re going to be able to see the ball. It seems there for a while that he wasn’t able to do that. He was thinking about his hands, his load and everything. But tonight, throughout the game, you could see he made a conscious effort to get his foot down early and the last at-bat, there was some pitches there that he fouled off, but he put some good swings.”

Price better vs. Rays

Red Sox starter David Price has turned his fortunes around against the Rays, the franchise he started his career with. After being traded by Tampa in 2014, Price went 1-3 with a 6.52 ERA in his first five starts against the Rays. In his last 11 outings against them (nine starts), he’s 4-2 with a 1.86 ERA . . . Lefthander Brian Johnson, who has missed 16 games this season after going on the injured list April 6 with left elbow inflammation, will throw a bullpen tomorrow. Cora said the plan will be to have him throw fastballs only . . . The Rays went 71 hours and 50 minutes between pitches. Their home game on Wednesday finished at 4:16 p.m. After a scheduled day off Thursday and a postponement on Friday, they finally played again on Saturday at 4:06 p.m. . . . The Sox were more than familiar with Rays starter Charlie Morton. This was the eighth time they’ve faced Morton since September 2014. Coming in, Morton was 3-1 against the Sox despite a 5.06 ERA, and held them to two hits in six innings . . . The Pawtucket Red Sox, who have dealt with six postponements this season (four at home, two on the road), had Saturday’s Triple A road game against the Rochester Red Wings postponed by snow and frigid 37 degree temperatures. The teams will play a makeup as part of a doubleheader on May 24 . . . The Red Sox honored Celtics legend John Havlicek, who died Thursday night at age 79, with a moment of silence prior to the game.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox fail to capitalize in 2-1 loss to Rays

Michael Silverman

If the Red Sox are going to dig out of their early-season hole, they must win tight, well-pitched games against the likes of the Yankees and Rays.

Last weekend in St. Petersburg, they were able to do just that in a three-game sweep which featured two one-run wins, the other a two-run victory.

In their first game against the first-place Rays at Fenway Park, the Sox had the tables turned on them, losing 2-1 in a taut game played in brisk October-like weather. The Red Sox (11-16) wasted a strong start from David Price (six innings, two runs earned) because they were unable to generate any offense. They left 11 runners on base and were 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position against the 17-9 Rays.

“I mean, those guys are pretty good, they make some pitches when they have to,” manager Alex Cora said. “When you looked up there were a lot of at bats, a lot of at-bats with men on, just couldn’t get a big hit.

“But one of those, the line was moving, but we didn’t get the big hit.”

Once the Red Sox got Rays starter Charlie Morton (six scoreless innings) out of the way, they stood a much better chance.

They finally broke out of their scoring drought when Mookie Betts led off the eighth with a solo blast onto the black tarp in center field off reliever Diego Castillo. After Castillo walked Xander Bogaerts, the tying run, the stadium woke up. In came reliever Jose Alvarado, who after whipping the chilly crowd into a low-key frenzy, had the last laugh. Alvarado allowed a single and then a two-out walk to Steve Pearce to load the bases. Jackie Bradley Jr. worked a 3-2 count before swinging and missing at a slider.

The Red Sox also put two runners on base in the ninth, but Angel Pagan closed out the game for the save.

Price, the stalwart in a shaky rotation, was philosophical about the lack of offense on a day when his effort was topped by the opposing starter.

“Absolutely, our offense is too good, they’ve carried me for three years since I’ve been here,” Price said. “They’ll get back to it. Sometimes you have to tip your cap. Those guys over there have a very good team. Morton threw the ball well, and the four relievers who came in after him, they made big pitches. They’ve got a good team.”

The Red Sox reached base at least once in each inning, but could never generate that clutch big hit at just the right time.

In the second inning, runners reached first and second base courtesy of a walk and fielder’s choice with just one out, but Morton struck out Bradley before inducing a groundout by Christian Vazquez. In the third, Betts reached third base with two outs, but Morton struck out Bogaerts with a 94.3 mph fastball down and in.

The other innings were variations on the same theme.

Rays leadoff hitter Yandy Diaz led off the game with a home run to deep center field, an 0-1 fastball that traveled 428 feet. Price walked the batter after Diaz but retired the next eight Rays.

He labored in the fourth, which began with a double by Tommy Pham. Price walked the next batter and struck out the next. A double play away from escaping the inning, Price, who needed 32 pitches for three outs that inning, allowed an RBI single to Mike Zunino for the 2-0 lead.

“When you throw that many pitches in one inning, that’s pretty taxing,” Price said. “It could have been a lot worse. Just damage control. Kept us in the game right there. Kept us within reaching distance.”

Price was all done after six innings, retiring seven of the last eight batters he faced. He struck out seven batters while walking three and allowing just four hits with his 93 pitches.

“Six innings, two runs — we’ll take that any night and we’ll take our chances,” Cora said. “The home run, a double, a changeup, but besides that he battled and gave us six. That’s what we ask for from them.”

And the Red Sox also ask for timely hits from their offense. They didn’t get any yesterday.

“That’s always frustrating,” Mitch Moreland said. “But if we continue to do that, we’re going to start to getting those. When we’re creating opportunities, that’s when we’re at our best.”

Back spasms force J.D. Martinez to bench

Michael Silverman

J.D. Martinez was scratched from the lineup a couple of hours before first pitch of Saturday’s game due to a recurrence of back spasms.

Steve Pearce replaced Martinez as the DH.

Martinez was a late scratch from a spring training game in mid-March, but was back in games soon after.

Martinez is listed as day-to-day. Manager Alex Cora could not say if he will be able to play in Sunday afternoon’s game.

“He got treatment the whole day so we’ll see how he feels (Sunday morning),” said Cora. “When he got here he felt it was tight and he tried to go to the cage and tried to swing and it didn’t make sense to push him to go back out there.”

The lineup change meant Xander Bogaerts was moved up from No. 5 to replace Martinez in the clean-up slot.

Martinez has been both consistent and productive at the plate this season, hitting safely in 24 of the team’s 26 games. He ranks among the league leaders in hits, batting average, on-base percentage and ties on base. His average exit velocity of 93.7 mph ranks 13th in the majors, according to Baseball Savant.

Before the national anthem, the Red Sox held a moment of silence for late, great Celtic John Havlicek, who passed away on Thursday.

Bright spot

Mookie Betts provided the sole spark for the offense in the 2-1 loss to the Rays Saturday with his eighth-inning home run. Over the last eight games, he has reached base in 19 of 37 plate appearances (.514 OBP) and has batted .419. He now has five home runs this season, two of them coming against Diego Castillo.

Brandon Workman struck out the first two batters he faced in the eighth and then issued two walks. Marcus Walden came in and got him out of the jam.

Matt Barnes pitched the ninth, a perfect inning: nine pitches, nine strikes, three outs.

The Red Sox bullpen held the Rays hitless over the final three innings.

Over their last 11 games, the Red Sox starters have posted a 3.27 ERA and have allowed three or fewer earned runs in 13 of their last 14 starts.

Feeling better

On the infielders' injury front, Eduardo Nunez (back) is "moving well," said Cora. Same with Dustin Pedroia (knee). Over the weekend, the Red Sox plan to meet to plot out rehab stints for the two of them.

They could likely find Brock Holt (scratched cornea) wherever they go. Holt resumed his rehab stint with Pawtucket (Triple A) Friday night. Holt walked three times, with a hit and two runs in the PawSox' 17-5 victory over Rochester. Rain, however, canceled Saturday's game.

"He said he saw the ball well," said Cora. "I guess they already canceled the game today. Weather's going to be a factor I guess here and everywhere in the Northeast. It was only six at-bats, he didn't play the field, he was the DH, but he felt good, he saw the ball a lot."

Brian Johnson (left elbow) "may throw a bullpen" on Sunday, said Cora. Johnson's return is on the local train. He will be allowed to throw only fastballs, no breaking balls.

Josh Smith, the spot starter called up from Pawtucket for Friday night's rainout, was available from the bullpen for Saturday's game.

In the 17-5 victory, Pawtucket's Josh Ockimey homered twice, while Rusney Castillo went 2-for-6 with three RBI.

In Single-A Salem action on Friday, center fielder Jarren Duran went 4-for-5 with a double in a 7-5 victory over Myrtle Beach.

Last year, the Rays were the only to sweep the Red Sox in a series, winning three in a row August 24-26.

Friday night's rainout will be made up as the second game of a doubleheader on Saturday, June 8, with a 6:05 start time.

Walk on by

Michael Chavis drew two walks, and has six in seven career games.

With his home run Thursday, Chavis became the sixth Red Sox to homer in at least two of their first six games in a Red Sox uniform. The others: Rafael Devers (2017), Will Middlebrooks (2012), Bill Selby (1996), Mo Vaughn (1991) and Sam Horn (1987).

Chavis feels at home hitting in Fenway.

"I think I'm going to enjoy it," said Chavis. "Just being in Fenway, the history in this ballpark. Honestly every time I put on the Red Sox jersey, it kind of blows me away, just thinking about who's worn that name on their chest and who's been in this locker room and on this field. That alone is unbelievable. But having played in Greenville and Portland with the Green Monster I'm somewhat accustomed to it and know how it plays. So, I'm looking forward to it."

Chavis said his new teammates have also made him feel at home.

"Oh, it's been huge," said Chavis. "Like I said earlier they've done such a good job of making me feel welcome. Being able to be comfortable and perform in some situations to help the team, that's what I'm here for. But it's also very comforting as well."

Hurting Red Sox infielders continue to make slow, steady progress

Michael Silverman

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*** *The Providence Journal***

Rays 2, Red Sox 1: Tampa Bay tames Boston's bats

Bill Koch

BOSTON — With Friday night's game washed out by rain and only Sunday's left to play, it's the Rays who are in position for a weekend sweep this time.

Tampa Bay is poised to turn the tables on the Red Sox, albeit in abbreviated fashion. Charlie Morton fronted a pitching staff that limited Boston to just five hits at Fenway Park on a sunny Saturday afternoon, as the visitors scraped to a 2-1 victory.

Nearly three full days had passed since the last time the Rays took the field on Wednesday, but their pitchers looked as sharp as could be expected for the American League East leaders. Jose Alvarado's strikeout of Jackie Bradley Jr. snuffed out the final real Red Sox chance in the bottom of the eighth inning, as Boston left the bases loaded.

"Those guys are pretty good," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "They made some pitches when they had to. When you look up, there were a lot of at-bats with men on and we just couldn't get the big hit."

Mookie Betts broke up the shutout bid leading off the eighth, sparking the 34,773 fans on hand to life by cranking a solo homer to the bleachers in center field. Diego Castillo was his victim for the second time in as many weekends and put the tying run aboard when he issued a one-out walk to Xander Bogaerts. On came Alvarado and Rafael Devers knocked a single to right field, winning the left-left matchup to put runners at the corners.

Alvarado staggered through his next two hitters, striking out Michael Chavis but losing a nine-pitch battle with Steve Pearce that ended in a walk. Bradley worked the count full at 3-and-2 before chasing a cut-fastball that started in the strike zone but slipped down and away. Emilio Pagan allowed a leadoff single to Christian Vazquez in the ninth but left pinch-runner Tzu-Wei Lin at first to finish it.

"That's always frustrating," said Mitch Moreland, who struck out swinging to end the game. "But, if we continue to do that, we're going to start getting those. When we're creating opportunities, that's when we're at our best."

It's the 31st time in the last 51 meetings between the two teams that a game has been decided by two runs or fewer. It's also the third straight game and the 11th in the last 24 in which Boston and Tampa Bay have

been separated by just one run. The Red Sox finished off their three-game blanking of the Rays last weekend with a 4-3 victory in 11 innings and pulled out a 6-5 triumph the previous night.

“Sometimes you’ve just got to tip your cap,” said Red Sox starter David Price, who absorbed the tough-luck loss. “Those guys over there have a very good team.”

Tampa Bay put the leadoff man on twice against Price and nicked the left-hander for a single run in each inning. Yandy Diaz drove a solo homer to left center in the first and Tommy Pham doubled to deep left before scoring in the fourth. That gave the Rays a 2-0 lead, a cushion that ultimately proved to be enough.

Diaz jumped on the second of Price’s 93 pitches in his outing, drilling a fastball to the Monster Seats out by the second light tower. The stiff breeze blowing out toward center field helped carry the Diaz blast 428 feet, putting Boston in an immediate hole it never escaped.

Pham added to the trouble in the fourth by knocking one against the wall in left. Mike Zunino sent a liner to the same spot two batters later, a ball hit so hard it went for just an RBI single. Price required 32 pitches to record three outs in the inning, but a strikeout of Guillermo Heredia limited the damage to a lone run.

“Six innings, two runs — we’ll take that any night,” Cora said. “We’ll take our chances. The home run, the double, the changeup — besides that, he battled.”

Price’s final line was a good one. His third consecutive quality start included just four hits allowed, three walks and seven strikeouts. The left-hander lowered his earned-run average to a rotation-best 3.60, but Price’s offense betrayed him on this chilly occasion in the Back Bay.

“Our offense is too good,” Price said. “They’ve carried me for three years since I’ve been here. They’ll get back to it.”

Red Sox Journal: Rehabbing Holt sees ball well with PawSox

Bill Koch

BOSTON — The offensive barrage produced by Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday night included a notable contribution from Brock Holt.

The rehabbing Red Sox utility man reached base four times in a 17-5 drubbing of Rochester. Holt singled and drew three walks as the PawSox scored eight times in both the first and second innings, building a 16-0 lead.

It’s a significant change from Holt’s first attempt at a minor league stint a little over a week ago. Holt managed just one game and three at-bats while battling a scratched cornea in his right eye, striking out twice and eventually returning to Boston without being activated off the injured list.

“He got what, six at-bats?” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “That’s pretty solid. He said he saw the ball well.”

Holt saw 31 pitches in six plate appearances while serving as the designated hitter and batting second. He walked on eight pitches in his first trip and dumped an RBI single into left field on his second. Holt went down 0-and-2 in his third at-bat before grinding out his second walk of the night.

“It’s only six at-bats, he didn’t play the field — he was the DH,” Cora said. “But he felt good. He saw the ball.”

Holt’s two strikeouts serve as a reminder that he’ll still need a few games to reestablish his timing at the plate. He hasn’t played for the Red Sox since April 5, and this was only his second start of any kind in the

last three weeks. The PawSox and Red Wings were snowed out on Saturday and were scheduled to finish their series on Sunday.

“It seems like everybody got a hit yesterday down there,” Cora said. “For yesterday, it was good.”

Martinez scratched

J.D. Martinez was a late scratch from the Boston lineup on Saturday.

The Red Sox listed Martinez as day-to-day due to back spasms. It’s the first game he’s missed this season after appearing in the first 26. Steve Pearce was penciled in as the designated hitter batting seventh, a move that pushed Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers and Michael Chavis up one spot apiece.

Martinez has hit safely in all but two games thus far, including a season-opening 10-game hitting streak and an 11-game hitting streak. Only Shea Hillenbrand (2001), Eddie Bressoud (1964) and Martinez have reached base safely in 24 of Boston’s first 26 games. Martinez’s on-base percentage of .423 ranks third in the American League and he’s tied for fifth with 33 hits.

Martinez proved durable in his first Red Sox campaign, appearing in 150 games. Three of his 12 days off came at National League parks, with Boston pitchers forced to bat for themselves absent the designated hitter.

Familiar foe

Cora’s familiarity with Tampa Bay’s starting pitcher on Saturday, Charlie Morton, dates back to their shared championship run with the Astros in 2017.

The right-hander was a stalwart in the rotation for Houston during the regular season and was also deployed out of the bullpen in the playoffs. Cora served as the club’s bench coach under manager A.J. Hinch and brought the idea of using starters as relievers with him to Boston in 2018, a strategy that helped the Red Sox capture their fourth title this century.

“There’s no secrets with Charlie,” Cora said. “It’s plus stuff all-out until he gets you or you get him. That’s the way it works with Charlie.”

Boston’s starting nine on Saturday was a combined 25-for-70 with four home runs against Morton. Second baseman Michael Chavis was the only member of the lineup yet to face Morton, who debuted with the Braves in 2008. His free-agent move to the Rays on a two-year deal includes an early shift in pitch mix — Morton is throwing his fastball 10.5 percent less and has more than doubled his cut-fastball usage to 13.4 percent.

Injury update

Saturday’s pregame sunshine allowed a pair of Boston’s injured infielders to get in some work on the field.

Dustin Pedroia (left knee) and Eduardo Nunez (back strain) both went through full workouts, hitting and taking ground balls. The tarp was in place to protect the playing surface from Friday’s heavy showers and thunderstorms, forcing Pedroia and Nunez to work inside. “We’ll sit down and meet with them and see what the next step is,” Cora said.

Brian Johnson (left elbow) is scheduled to throw a bullpen either Sunday or Monday. Johnson played catch from up to 90 feet on Thursday and will attempt only fastballs.

*** *MassLive.com***

David Price throws six strong innings, but Boston Red Sox offense quiet in 2-1 loss to Rays

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- David Price threw his third straight quality start for the Red Sox on Saturday, only this time Boston's offense didn't do enough for him in a 2-1 loss to the Rays.

Price worked around a Yandy Diaz leadoff home run and a 32-pitch fourth inning to give the Sox six strong innings, allowing two runs on four hits while striking out seven. He fell to 2-3 on the season with his first loss since April 6.

Rays starter Charlie Morton mowed the Red Sox, allowing just two hits in six scoreless frames. It was a much better performance than his last two outings against Boston, who tagged him for five runs in six innings a week ago and chased him after 2 1/3 innings in Game 4 of the ALCS last fall.

Tampa Bay had the lead for all but one pitch, as Diaz hit Price's second pitch of the game 428 feet into the Monster seats in left-center. Mike Zunino gave the Rays their other run, driving in Tommy Pham with an RBI single off the left-field wall in the fourth.

Price retired eight straight batters before getting into trouble in the fourth, allowing a leadoff double to Pham and walking Daniel Robertson before Zunino's RBI hit. Kevin Kiermaier hit a single to load the bases before Price escaped further damage by striking out Guillermo Heredia and getting Willy Adames to ground out to third.

Mookie Betts gave Boston its only run of the game with a solo homer off Diego Castillo in the eighth. The Sox loaded the bases with two walks and a single before Jose Alvarado struck out Jackie Bradley Jr. to end the inning.

Righty Emilio Pagan worked around a leadoff single by Christian Vazquez to record the save. Mitch Moreland struck out with a runner on first to end the game.

After tallying at least nine hits in each of their last three games, the Sox had just five in Saturday's loss. Boston fell to 11-16 and dropped 6 1/2 games behind the division-leading Rays.

Martinez unavailable after being scratched from lineup

J.D. Martinez was scratched from the lineup before the game with back spasms and was replaced at designated hitter by Steve Pearce. Though Boston had a couple spots in the eighth in which Martinez would have made sense as a pinch-hitter, he wasn't used.

Steve Pearce and Jackie Bradley Jr. both hit against Alvarado with the team trailing by one and runners on base in the eighth. Pearce walked and Bradley Jr. struck out.

Betts hits fifth homer of year

Betts' eighth-inning homer was his fifth of the season, moving him into sole position of second place on the team behind Mitch Moreland, who has seven. Three others-- Martinez, Xander Bogaerts and Vazquez-- have four.

Betts' blast came off the bat at 102.3 mph and traveled 406 feet.

Sale on tap in finale

Boston will turn to Chris Sale to salvage a quick sweep of the two-game series against the Rays on Sunday afternoon. He'll pitch opposite Tyler Glasnow with first pitch (weather-permitting) scheduled for 1:05 p.m.

J.D. Martinez injury: Boston Red Sox DH was unavailable to pinch-hit, day-to-day with back spasms

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox designated hitter J.D. Martinez was not available off the bench Saturday despite two obvious pinch-hitting opportunities in the eighth inning.

Martinez was scratched before the game with back spasms and spent the day receiving treatment. Manager Alex Cora didn't consider him as a pinch-hitter even with struggling hitters Steve Pearce and Jackie Bradley Jr. due up with runners in scoring position in a one-run game in the eighth.

Martinez was in the original starting lineup but began to feel tightness when he arrived at the ballpark Saturday afternoon.

"He tried to go to the cage and swing and it didn't make sense for us to push him to go out there," Cora said.

Martinez is day-to-day and could play in Sunday's series finale against the Rays. Cora said the team will see how he feels in the morning and decide on his status from there.

Boston Red Sox injuries: Eduardo Nunez, Dustin Pedroia could return soon; Brian Johnson will throw bullpen Sunday

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora provided updates on four injured players before Boston's game against the Rays on Saturday afternoon.

* Infielder Eduardo Nunez (mid-back strain) is feeling better and will complete a full workout at Fenway Park on Saturday. He's also scheduled to take batting practice if the weather cooperates Sunday.

Cora said both Nunez and second baseman Dustin Pedroia are scheduled to run this weekend as well. The team will sit down with both infielders tomorrow and map out the next steps in their rehab.

* Utility player Brock Holt (scratched cornea in right eye) was Pawtucket's designated hitter Friday night in his first game since resuming his rehab assignment. He had six plate appearances in the 17-5 win, going 1-for-3 with two strikeouts and three walks.

Pawtucket's game in Rochester was postponed Saturday. Cora thinks Holt will need to spend a few more days with the PawSox to get more at-bats and play the field.

"It's only six at-bats and he didn't play the field as the DH," Cora said. "He felt good. He saw the ball well."

* Lefty Brian Johnson (left elbow inflammation) will throw a fastball-only bullpen at Fenway Park on Sunday, weather-permitting.

*** *RedSox.com***

Chavis on late strikeout: 'I just messed up'

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- On the one-week anniversary of his first Major League at-bat, a booming double that helped lead to a game-winning rally for the Red Sox, Michael Chavis had a chance to be the hero against the very same pitcher in Rays reliever José Alvarado.

This time, the result was a strikeout in a tough, 2-1 loss at home for the Red Sox that dropped them 6 1/2 games behind the Rays in the AL East.

Chavis easily could have tipped the proverbial cap after the game, and nobody would have batted an eyelash. Instead, he did something impressive for a 23-year-old with seven Major League games under his belt and took complete accountability.

With runners at the corners, one out in the bottom of the eighth and the Red Sox down by a run, Chavis knew that his only job was to get the ball in the air and get at least the tying run home, if not more.

"I just messed up, honestly," said Chavis. "I should have hit the first-pitch fastball, especially in that situation. Bases were loaded, one out, I've got to at least hit a popup in the outfield so we can score that run and tie the ballgame up. I got a hittable pitch on the first pitch and definitely should have hit that."

The heater arrived at 98.3 mph, about belt-high and on the outer quadrant of the strike zone. Chavis didn't offer at it.

The pitch that followed was a cutter in the dirt for ball one. And then?

"He made a good pitch with the slider and that made it 1-2," Chavis said. "The 1-2 slider, I just swung over it. I thought I put a good swing on it, and just swung over it. But even on that pitch, I should have done a better job of just at least putting it in play and getting a popup so I could get at least one run in."

Boston's most promising rally of an otherwise quiet day fizzled after that. Steve Pearce walked to load the bases, but Jackie Bradley Jr. swung through a 3-2 cutter that was low to end the inning.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora didn't think it was fair to pin the lost opportunity on Chavis, Boston's No. 1 prospect according to MLB Pipeline.

"I mean that guy is one of the best closers in the big leagues, so you take your chances," said Cora. "He's what, [0-for-2] with [two walks]? [Alvarado] won his battle today. He made his pitches and got him out. That's how it works at this level."

However, Chavis earned a reputation through high school and the Minor Leagues as someone who could always drive in the big run. And just because he's at the highest level now, he's not going to make excuses for himself when he doesn't come through.

"I don't think I'm tougher [on myself] than I should be," Chavis said. "I think it's a situation where the job should get done and it's something that I've done in the past without a problem and it's something I take pride in. A big part of my game is RBIs and I need to get that one for sure. That's pretty much it."

Some momentum lost, but rotation clicking

Just when the Red Sox appeared to have found their groove offensively, they ran into the nasty offerings of starter Charlie Morton on Saturday afternoon, and he silenced their bats.

Just when the Red Sox looked like they were going to make a comeback against Tampa Bay's bullpen thanks to Mookie Betts' rocket homer to lead off the eighth, Alvarado silenced their bats. Emilio Pagán did the same in the ninth. Morton was masterful, allowing two hits over six shutout innings.

David Price did his job for the Red Sox, allowing just two runs over six innings and shaking off Yandy Díaz's leadoff homer.

The rotation that was such a problem earlier in the season is settling in. The Sox have allowed four runs or fewer in the last four games, and the rotation's ERA is 3.27 in the last 11 games. Perhaps even more impressively, Boston starters have allowed three earned runs or fewer in 13 of the last 14 games.

"The first couple of weeks were tough as a group," said Price. "We definitely are throwing the ball better our last couple of turns through the rotation. So that's a good sign. It takes a lot of pressure off our offense. We'll get back to clicking on all cylinders like we need to do."

As far as Price is concerned, it's a matter of when and not if the Boston lineup goes on a prolonged hot streak.

"Absolutely," said Price. "Our offense is too good. They've carried me for three years since I've been here. They'll get back to it."

J.D. scratched due to back spasms

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- A couple of hours before the start of Saturday's game against the Rays, the Red Sox scratched star slugger J.D. Martinez due to back spasms.

Martinez is listed as day to day.

The right-handed-hitting masher has been Boston's best all-around hitter this season, slashing .340/.423/.526 with four homers and 13 RBIs.

Steve Pearce, who has started the season in a hitting slump, replaced Martinez as the designated hitter in the 2-1 loss to Tampa Bay.

"When he got here, [Martinez] felt it was tight and he tried to go to the cage and tried to swing and it didn't make sense to push him to go back out there," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said of Martinez's after the game.

Will Martinez be available to start Sunday? "[We'll see] when he comes in," Cora said. "He got treatment the whole day, so we'll see how he feels [Sunday]."

Rehab updates

The Red Sox have missed the versatility of Brian Johnson in the bullpen, not to mention the fact he is their only lefty reliever.

There is good news on that front: Johnson is making progress from the elbow inflammation that has sidelined him since April 6, and he is likely to throw a side session on Sunday.

It will mark the first time Johnson has thrown off a mound since going on the injured list. Johnson will throw all fastballs.

The Red Sox also have three other players on the IL who are making progress.

Super-utility man Brock Holt started a Minor League rehab assignment for Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday and went 1-for-3 and walked three times while serving as the DH. Pawtucket was rained out on Saturday, but Holt will resume action on Sunday and start to mix in different defensive positions.

Holt has been out since April 6 with a scratched cornea in his right eye.

“He got what, six at-bats, that was pretty solid,” said Cora. “He said he saw the ball well, I guess they already canceled the game today. Weather’s going to be a factor I guess here and everywhere in the Northeast. It was only six at-bats, he didn’t play the field, he was the DH, but he felt good. He saw the ball a lot, he walked twice, got a hit, seems like everybody yesterday got a hit down there. So, for yesterday it was good.”

Eduardo Núñez (mid-back strain) and Dustin Pedroia (left knee irritation) both had productive workouts before the game.

Cora said the team would huddle with Nunez and Pedroia on Sunday to map out their next steps and perhaps potential dates for rehab assignments.

*** *WEEI.com***

Red Sox reminded why they should be worried about these Rays

Rob Bradford

Remember Moneyball?

It was a book, and then came the movie. Scouts vs. stats. It built fortresses for two ways of thinking when it came to how baseball teams should be run, propping up the Oakland A's as the team that had figured out something nobody else had. Brad Pitt and Billy Beane may have lost in the playoffs, but they showed the baseball world the secret sauce.

There has been the same vibe when it comes to the Tampa Bay Rays. How could one of the lowest payrolls in baseball be doing what they're doing, living atop the American League East with a 17-9 record? In the last 365 days, the underdog Rays have only four fewer regular season wins than the Red Sox and Yankees. Four outfielders. The opener. Those shifts.

Look at how perfectly positioned Tampa Bay shortstop Wily Adames was when robbing Mitch Moreland in the sixth inning. Or how about the ball Christian Vazquez hit into the right-field corner that Avisail Garcia was bizarrely in the perfect position to haul in.

All intriguing.

But you know what that Moneyball movie left out that made the whole thing work? Tim Hudson, Mark Mulder and Barry Zito. Three dominant starting pitchers are what usually ultra successful teams are built on, and those A's and these Rays are no exception.

"Sometimes you have to tip your cap," said Red Sox starter David Price after his team's 2-1 loss to the Rays Saturday. (For a complete recap, [click here.](#)) "Those guys over there have a very good team. (Charlie) Morton threw the ball well, and the four relievers who came in after him, they made big pitches. They've got a good team."

They sure are, and Morton showed why. Sunday there will be another reminder with Tyler Glasnow going up against Chris Sale. And laying in weeds just happens to be the reigning American League Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell.

This is what the Red Sox - and the rest of the American League - are going to be contending with. It's all well and good the Sox will have countered the Rays with two \$30 million-a-year pitchers this weekend in Price and Chris Sale, but right now it sure feels like Tampa Bay is carrying the upper-hand in the area it counts the most, the top of the starting rotation.

Morton offered an uncomfortable reminder of this new reality Saturday, allowing just two hits over six innings to bring his ERA down to 2.76 and with his batting average against sitting at .184. Price was pretty good himself but in this results business his six-inning, two-run outing wasn't good enough. (That franchise record-setting, two-year, \$30 million given to Morton by the Rays might end up being the steal of the offseason.)

Now comes Glasnow. This is a pitcher who has allowed two runs or fewer in each of his five starts this season, carrying a 1.53 ERA. This is supposed to be where the Red Sox set themselves up for a message-sending series finale using what is supposed to be their most potent weapon, Sale. But it sure doesn't feel that way.

The Rays' starters have a combined 2.03 ERA, which is more than a run better than the next best staff. It is the only group in Major League Baseball with a batting average against of under .200 (.186), with the Tampa Bay starting pitchers carrying a collective 11-2 record.

The time is now for the Red Sox' starters to start showing Tampa Bay what's what, with their ace being called on to show the young buck a thing or two. But, as we have discovered while watching Alex Cora's team drop to 6 1/2 games in back of the Rays, none of it will be easy.

The Red Sox bullpen did its job Saturday with Brandon Workman, Marcus Walden, Colten Brewer and Matt Barnes pitching three scoreless innings.

Barnes continued his remarkable run of striking batters out, fanning one more. He has now fanned 23 of his 46 batters faced this season.

Michael Chavis reflects on his hug-the-commissioner moment

Rob Bradford

The differences between the NFL and MLB Drafts are too many to mention.

Put it this way: Major League Baseball will never be able to fill the streets of Nashville to announce the first picks of their event, and for good reason.

Go down the list. Few have seen these baseball prospects play. It might be years before they actually contribute to the team that is drafting them. There is hardly any build-up to the day the ballplayers are selected.

Rick Porcello, one of the most highly-regarded high school pitchers in the 2007 draft, got picked by the Tigers in the first round while sitting at home with his family before continuing his day with practice at Seton Hall Prep (High) later that afternoon. Get the picture.

But Michael Chavis did live the life of an NFL draft pick, at least as much as a baseball draftee could. He was, after all, the one that got to hug the commissioner.

"I know I hugged Bud Selig and everyone made a big deal of it. I was excited," Chavis told WEEI.com when talking about being drafted by the Red Sox with the 26th overall pick in the 2014 draft. "I was like, 'Come here, man!' I didn't know it was a thing. ... When I went in I'm pretty sure he extended the hand but I just went for the hug. I was excited, man."

In the NFL Draft, it is commonplace for those selected in the first round to give full-on embraces of commissioner Roger Goodell. In the MLB Draft? Not so much.

The whole scene for Chavis that day was somewhat surreal, having been summoned to the MLB Network studios along with a group of potential first-rounders to participate in the made-for-TV event MLB was putting on as their answer to the NFL's pomp and circumstance.

Chavis had just recently graduated Sprayberry (GA) High, having committed to Clemson. But the fact his hometown Braves had let the infielder know he wouldn't be making it past Atlanta's pick at No. 32 there was little chance the collegiate option was going to come into play.

So when the 18-year-old and his family joined the other prospects in a tour of Citi Field before settling into the television showcase he had a pretty good idea whatever team called his name would be his future employer. And for just a few seconds Chavis was convinced that club would be the Mets.

"One of the teams that was really looking at me was the Mets," he remembered. "I was aware of if a team really liked me so if like Oakland came up I knew I wasn't going to go there. But the Mets were one of the teams that really liked me. So when they said, 'With pick 10th the Mets select Michael ...' I literally went to stand up. And then went 'Conforto' So I just sat down. Conforto doesn't know me but I know him really well. That was wild."

Sixteen picks later, Chavis got a chance to spring out of the make-believe dugout.

That pink and gray bow tie was finally able to be put on display. ("There was a lot of thought that went into it. It was the first time I had to buy really nice clothes. I wanted to look, not flashy, but different. So I was like, bow tie.")

"I was nervous without a doubt," said Chavis, who didn't know the Red Sox were picking until the on-camera announcement -- which ended up being his first live TV interview ever. "I was excited, but in the moment after I was drafted they were doing those interviews and there was a lot going on. It was kind of similar to when I was called up. I was excited, trying not to mess up and trying to clear my thoughts."

And then came the hug, the minors, and, nearly five years later the big leagues.

*** NESN.com**

Red Sox Wrap: Quiet Bats Hinder Boston Once Again In 2-1 Loss Vs. Rays

Abigail Adams

It's one month into the 2019 season and the Boston Red Sox have still yet to meet expectations following a championship season in 2018.

Saturday's 2-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays on Saturday at Fenway Park was Boston's 16th of the season, which many didn't expect Boston to earn until much later in the season.

David Price gave the Sox another solid outing Saturday, despite taking the hard-luck loss. Price had gone 10-2 in his previous 17 games at Fenway Park, collecting 102 strikeouts along the way.

Rays' starter Charlie Morton, meanwhile, gave up just two hits and struck out five in over six innings of work. He did walk four batters, but the Sox were unable to capitalize on the opportunities.

The Red Sox fall to 11-16 with the loss to the Rays. They will round out their series with Tampa at 1:05 p.m. ET Sunday afternoon, with Chris Sale set to take the mound for Boston.

GAME IN A WORD

Tantalizing.

Despite a late-game spark on offense, the Sox just could not eke out the win.

ON THE BUMP

— Price has been pitching well at home as of late, and that didn't change much Saturday afternoon. The lefty gave up two earned runs on four hits over six innings pitched, striking out seven batters in the process.

Unfortunately, Price started his day by giving up a leadoff homer to Yandy Diaz in the first inning.

Price settled down for a while after that, but would get into more trouble in the fourth inning.

With just one out in the inning and runners on first and second, Mike Zunino slapped a long one-out RBI single off of the Green Monster that would load the bases for the Rays and give them a 2-0 lead.

Price would get out of the jam with a strikeout and a groundout, and breezed through the fifth and sixth with back-to-back 1-2-3 innings.

— Brandon Workman would take over in the seventh. After striking out the first two batters, the righty gave up back-to-back walks to the Rays, leading Cora to give him the hook.

— Marcus Walden came in to close out the seventh inning and got Diaz to ground out into a force out at second base. He would come back out for the eighth, allowing one walk and getting two out before being pulled from the inning.

— Colten Brewer was the next pitcher to take the mound for Boston, and was able to get Zunino to ground into a force out at second to end the eighth.

— Matt Barnes pitched a quick 1-2-3 ninth inning.

IN THE BATTER'S BOX

— Boston's bats remained quiet for most of Saturday's contest with just one hit between all nine batters through the first five innings.

There were glimmers of hope throughout the game, including this solo homer courtesy of Mookie Betts that kicked off the bottom of the eighth.

Then Rafael Devers smacked a single to right field that moved Bogaerts up to third, followed shortly by a Steve Pearce walk to load the bases.

But it was too little too late for Boston, as Jackie Bradley Jr. struck out to end the inning.

— Andrew Benintendi took another ball off his left foot when he was hit by a pitch in the fifth inning. He would remain in the game and appeared unfazed by the incident.

— Base-running mistakes also hurt the Sox, who left 20 men on base throughout Saturday's match.

After Price gave up a second run to the Rays in the top of the fourth, the Sox had an opportunity to do some damage of their own. But they wouldn't get the chance after Rafael Devers was picked-off at first base.

— Betts had two hits against the Rays, while Bogaerts and Devers each had one of their own. The four combined for the five hits garnered by the Sox.

— Boston struck out 11 times against the Rays on Saturday.

TWEET OF THE DAY

Things may not be perfect, but they are getting better.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox will complete their adjusted two-game set with the Tampa Bay Rays on Sunday with Chris Sale slated to take the mound. First pitch from Fenway Park is set for 1:05 p.m. ET.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

MLB Notebook: Early success comes for Michael Chavis after minor league challenges

Sean McAdam

For the first week of his big league career, Michael Chavis has made it look easy.

In his first at-bat, he drilled a rocket to center for a double off Tampa Bay's Jose Alvarado, a ball hit so hard that Kevin Kiermaier, who leads all major leaguers in defensive runs saved for the past three seasons, got turned around the wrong way while in pursuit.

Soon after came two home runs at Fenway, one of which cleared everything in left and was measured as the longest home run hit by a member of the Red Sox this season.

Hitting in the big leagues is simple, right?

Not quite.

To get here, Chavis had to overcome a couple of hurdles in the minor leagues – one that's common for most prospects and another that, frankly, isn't.

First came a couple of seasons of struggle at Low-A ball. In 2015, the year after he was selected in the first round of high school in Georgia, Chavis slashed just .223/.277/.405 and struck out 144 times in 435 at-bats. Then, the next year, he battled a couple of hand injuries and additional inconsistency.

It was Chavis's first experience with failure and it was a challenge.

"He didn't have that same body control," said Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers, who watched Chavis as a high schooler in Georgia and served as the Red Sox' minor league hitting coordinator for the first two years of Chavis's pro career. "Like every high school player, when he first got here, the breaking ball away gave him a lot of trouble. And I think, at times, his swing got long."

Chavis made some adjustments. He stopped chasing balls out of the strike zone and waited for more hittable pitches. The results? He had a breakout year in 2017, split between High-A and Double-A, smashing 35 homers.

"Talking to him and some of our (minor league) coaches," said Hyers, who by then had moved on as assistant hitting coach with the Los Angeles Dodgers before returning to the Sox last year, "I think he learned to lay off some pitchers' pitches and be more consistent with his pitch and not miss it as often. I think he realized he had to tighten up some things with his swing. When you're at that level and you start getting to Double-A and Triple-A, you start to realize you have to make some adjustments. You can get by with some things in A ball and you can beat up the league on talent alone. But by Double-A, you're facing pitchers who command a lot better and can hit you with a plan.

"You have to dig deep and make the adjustments. It's a mental game. A lot of these guys come in physically strong and mentally weak. You have to be strong in both to make it up here. And your mental strength has to go, just like your physical strength. It's a day-to-day grind and it can beat you up. In this day and age, they identify your weaknesses pretty quickly and they see them clearly."

But in the spring after his breakout season, Chavis failed a drug test and was suspended for half the year for violating baseball's PED protocol. To this day, Chavis maintains that he didn't knowingly take anything illegal, and to his credit, returned at midseason in 2018 and picked up right where he left off the year previous, slashing .298/.381/.538 with nine homers in 46 games.

That, to Hyers, showed something about the player's resiliency.

"Absolutely," Hyers said. "You know it weighed on him and for him to come back the way he did and not miss a beat, it shows he's growing up and that he learned from a difficult time and he'll be better off for it. I didn't doubt that he would come back."

Chavis politely declined to talk about his frame of mind during the suspension ("Honestly, at this point, I'm kind of done talking about that – it's in the past"), but did say the experience made him stronger.

"I definitely think it did," said Chavis. "In this area, given how intense it is with sports in Boston, everyone's very into it and cares so much, so I think (that experience) kind of prepared me for it. There's going to be a time down the road when things aren't going to be going my way, things are going to get tough, but I think that taught me the value of perseverance and how to grind through tough times and press on."

And should those challenges surface, Hyers believe Chavis is uniquely situated to handle them.

"He's a baseball rat when it comes to hitting," he said. "He loves to talk about it. Hitting's his thing. He knows his swing and he knows how it feels. He understands his swing and he knows what to do when it gets out of whack. He also does a much better job of having a plan during batting practice. He hits the ball the other way, mimicking some things that he'll have to adapt to in the game. It's really impressive seeing his growth."

Swihart trade return in focus: There's been a lot of discussion about the Red Sox trade last weekend which sent Blake Swihart to the Arizona Diamondbacks in exchange for outfield prospects Marcus Wilson.

On the face of it, that seemed like a meager return for Swihart. Wilson, despite being a second-round pick by the Diamondbacks, hadn't reached Double-A until this, his sixth pro season and was ranked by Baseball America as only the 20th-best prospect in the Arizona organization.

Moreover, the Red Sox sent \$500,000 in international signing pool money along with Swihart to the Diamondbacks, which seemed to make the deal even more lopsided in the D'backs' favor. If the Sox were dealing away a big league player and international money, shouldn't they have received more in return?

To investigate further, I spoke to a number of evaluators and executives around the game to get their take.

Here's what I heard:

1. Swihart's trade value was shockingly low.

Locally, the sense was that Swihart had a high ceiling, with the potential to become an offensive catcher and the athleticism to play at several other positions around the infield and outfield. But the reality was that Swihart, over 573 at-bats and 207 games, had a career OPS of .672 and a slugging percentage of just .360.

Defensively, Swihart had started just 101 games behind the plate and while his play had improved there considerably over the past year, he had to demonstrate that he could be an impact receiver at the big league level. (Indeed, after the trade was made, the Diamondbacks indicated that the majority of Swihart's playing time would come at other positions).

The fact is that, at 27, Swihart was still largely unestablished. Maybe he'll eventually develop into a valued major league catcher, but in part due to circumstances beyond his control (injuries, more experienced catchers ahead of him on the Red Sox' depth chart), he's yet to establish that.

Several evaluators noted that it was well known within the game that Swihart could have been had at any point over the last two seasons, thanks to the logjam behind the plate. The fact that the Sox never got much in the way of offers for him in that time speaks to how he's viewed around the game.

2. The timing and circumstances didn't help the Red Sox.

Faced with a roster crunch and an internal decision not to again carry three catchers, the Sox had to make a move. They designated Swihart for assignment and had a week to try to work out a trade, but were operating at a distinct disadvantage.

"When you designate someone," noted one team executive, "you don't have a whole lot of leverage."

Other teams know that you run the risk of putting the player on waivers and getting nothing in return. So, naturally, teams aren't about to overwhelm you by offering much in return.

Another issue: Swihart got designated less than three weeks into the season, at a time when teams have set their rosters and don't have much flexibility. That's particularly true when it comes to the catcher's position, given that they've just spent spring training having their catchers learn the pitching staff. To ask someone to come in cold — and at the expense of someone who has far more familiarity with the staff — is a big leap.

Finally, Swihart was being moved by a team with well-documented pitching issues in the first three weeks.

"That may not have been Swihart's fault," noted a National League evaluator, "but it's also not a good look, either. You're going to take on a catcher who's coming from a team who's starters have been getting lit up."

3. The international money helped get the deal done.

Multiple industry sources indicated that the Sox couldn't have made the deal without including the half million in international pool money. That alone puts Swihart's value in perspective: they needed to include \$500,000 in order to get another team's 20th best prospect in return.

From the Red Sox standpoint, the money wasn't a great loss. With the international market pretty picked over from last year — the new international calendar year begins July 1 — there wasn't much left to sign, and it likely would have gone to waste anyway.

Powerful impression: Asked what has surprised him the most in the first month of the season, one NL executive didn't hesitate: "Power. It's everywhere."

The numbers back up that observation.

Through 386 games — through Friday night — in both leagues, a total of 1,027 homers had been hit, or an average of 2.66 per game.

By comparison, last year on this same date, teams had played 361 games and hit 783 homers, for an average of 2.17 homers per game.

"If it's like this now," wondered the executive, "with cold temperatures and some rain, what's it going to be like when we get some warm weather all over and the ball starts to really carry?"

There are plenty of theories as to the rise of the long ball, but the most logical explanation centers around the baseballs being used. This year, for the first time, Triple-A is using the same baseballs manufactured for the big leagues and the executive said his organization's Triple-A manager has noticed the same phenomenon happening in the upper reaches of the minors.

"He told me, 'Guys that you would never expect are hitting balls out,'" said the executive.

TOP 3/THE LIST

In honor of the NFL Draft, here are the three top MLB players who also played Division 1 college football:

1. Frank Thomas: Before he clubbed 521 homers and won two MVP awards, Thomas was a tight end at Auburn. An injury before his sophomore season cut short his nascent football career, which was probably just as well given how he excelled in that "other" sport. But seriously — how would you like to have been an SEC linebacker or safety trying to take Thomas down?
2. Jackie Robinson: Robinson, of course, was a tremendous athlete. He ran track and played basketball at UCLA, and also was a standout in football, twice leading the nation in punt return average and amassing more than 1,400 yards throwing and running in his two seasons on the gridiron. Of course, bigger things were in store for him in baseball.
3. Kirk Gibson: Gibson had a 17-year career in the big leagues and was named the 1988 NL MVP. That October, he hit one of the most famous homers in baseball history to lead the Dodgers to what was their last World Series victory. Before making it to the big leagues with the Tigers, he was a wide receiver at Michigan State, scoring 26 touchdowns in four seasons with the Spartans.

Honorable mention: Todd Helton, Darin Erstad, Steve Garvey, Deion Sanders.

BSJ Game Report: Rays 2, Red Sox 1 – Late-game rallies come up empty

Sean McAdam

Price good in defeat: He got no support over six innings, but it's tough to blame this loss on David Price. Price allowed a solo homer in the first inning, then another solo run in the fourth and that was the only damage done against him. "Six innings, two runs (allowed)," noted Alex Cora. "We'll take that any night. He battled." Price judged his outing to be largely successful. "I threw some really good fastball cutters," he said, "and my fastball command was there at times. I made some pitches when I needed to." The toughest inning for him was the fourth when the Rays sent seven men to the plate and Price had to wiggle out of a bases-loaded, one-out predicament after allowing one run. It took 32 pitches to get out of the mess. "Whenever you throw that many pitches in one inning," said Price, "that's pretty taxing. But it could have been a lot worse — damage control, kept us in the game." Price has allowed two or fewer earned runs in each of his last three starts and he's pitched through the sixth inning in four of his five outings.

Big hit elusive: As was the case earlier on the homestand, the Red Sox found themselves unable to deliver the big hit when they needed it. They left 11 baserunners on and were 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position. After being limited to one hit — an infield single — over the first five innings, but even then, the Sox had scoring opportunities, using a walk and a botched play by the Rays infield to get runners at first and second and one out — to no avail. The Sox kept giving themselves some chances as the game wore on. They had a one-out double from Xander Bogaerts, but wasted it in the sixth. In the eighth, after a solo homer by Mookie Betts cut the Tampa lead in half, the Sox had first-and-third and one out, then loaded the bases with two outs, but couldn't produce anything further. "You look up and there were a lot of at-bats with men on," said Cora. "We just couldn't get the big hit."

Martinez sidelined: J.D. Martinez was in the original lineup, but was scratched an hour or so before gametime with back spasms. Cora said Martinez reported to the ballpark feeling stiff and tried to loosen up in the cage with some swings, but couldn't get comfortable. He was replaced in the starting lineup by Steve

Pearce. In the late innings, with the bottom third of the order due, there were several opportunities for Martinez to hit for either Jackie Bradley Jr. or Christian Vazquez. But Cora said Martinez wasn't available to use off the bench. Bradley ended up striking out on a full count to leave the bases loaded in the eighth. Cora was unsure about Martinez's availability for the series finale on Sunday. Martinez had appeared in every one of the first 26 games for the Sox, hitting safely in all but two of them.

TURNING POINT

In the bottom of the eighth, after a Mookie Betts leadoff homer sliced the Rays lead in half, the Red Sox had runners at the corners with one out. But Alvarado fanned Michael Chavis for the second out and, after walking Steve Pearce to load the bases, got Jackie Bradley Jr. swinging to end the threat.

TWO UP

Matt Barnes: The reliever had a one-two-three ninth inning and required only nine pitches to record the three outs.

Mookie Betts: Betts continued to wield a hot bat with a single and homer in five at-bats. Over his last eight games, he's reached base 19 times in 37 plate appearances.

ONE DOWN

Steve Pearce: A month into the season, Pearce has yet to get untracked at the plate. A late sub for Martinez in the lineup, he was 0-for-3 with a strikeout and double play.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"Our offense is too good. They'll get back to it. Sometimes, you just have to tip your cap." Price on the lineup's struggles.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:

This was just the second one-run game in the last 10 between the teams that the Rays won. Matt Barnes has struck out exactly half of the batters (23-of-46) he's faced this year. Over the last three games, the Red Sox have worked 20 walks. Xander Bogaerts extended his hitting streak to six games.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Rays close out their rain-shortened series with a 1:05 start, with Chris Sale (0-4, 7.43 ERA) vs. RHP Tyler Glasnow (4-0, 1.53).

*** *The Athletic***

Has the Red Sox rotation finally turned a corner?

Jen McCaffrey

Through the first 13 games, the Red Sox rotation bore the burden of guilt for the team's collective failures.

As the Sox trudged to a 4-9 record over those first two weeks, the starters went 0-8 while posting an 8.79 ERA. In just three of those starts they reached the sixth inning. But since Eduardo Rodriguez held the Baltimore Orioles to two runs on three hits in 6 2/3 innings on April 12, it's been a different story.

Over the last 14 games, the Red Sox have gone 7-7 with the starters pitching deeper and factoring into more decisions. The rotation has allowed three earned runs or fewer in 13 of those 14 games while going 4-5 with a 3.41 ERA, much closer to their collective 3.77 starter's ERA at the end of last season.

David Price continued the trend on Saturday, limiting the Tampa Bay Rays to two runs on four hits over six innings in a 2-1 loss. The loss, however, was on Boston's offense — one that scored 18 runs between two games earlier this week. The Red Sox had just one hit, an infield single, through 5 1/3 innings against starter Charlie Morton. Mookie Betts hit a solo homer to save them from their fourth shutout loss this season. Tampa escaped a bases-loaded situation in the eighth to hold on for the 2-1 win.

“Those guys (the Rays) are pretty good,” manager Alex Cora said. “They make some pitches when they need to. When you looked up there were a lot of at-bats, a lot of at-bats with men on, just couldn't get a big hit.”

Over his last three starts, Price has allowed just four runs while striking out 24. On Saturday, he registered 18 swings-and-misses, according to Brooks Baseball, tied for his season high.

“The first couple of weeks were tough, and as a group we definitely are throwing the ball better our last couple of turns through the rotation,” Price said. “So that's a good sign. It takes a lot of pressure off our offense. We'll get back to clicking on all cylinders like we need to do.”

Sunday marks one month since the Red Sox began the season in Seattle, and the seesaw continues. The offense and the bullpen scraped the club through those first two weeks when the starters struggled, now the rotation has started to turn a corner as the bullpen and offense have hit a few speed bumps.

In 27 games, the Red Sox have scored one or zero runs six times. Last year through the same number of games, they failed to score more than one run in only three games.

“Our offense is too good,” Price said. “They've carried me for three years since I've been here. They'll get back to it. Sometimes you have to tip your cap. Those guys over there have a very good team. Morton threw the ball well, and the four relievers who came in after him, they made big pitches. They've got a good team.”

There's evidence the flickering lights of the Red Sox season will eventually remain on: A sweep of the Rays last weekend; two big offensive nights this past week against Detroit; increasingly better pitching performances from the rotation Price and Chris Sale.

The Red Sox won't finish the month of April with a winning record, a clear disappointment coming off last season's historically successful start. But the rotation is finally trending the right direction, and that's as good a reason for optimism as any this time of year.

*** *The Tampa Bay Times***

Rays finally get some relief, escape with 2-1 win over Red Sox

Marc Topkin

BOSTON – Emilio Pagan's first trip to Fenway Park has gone pretty well so far.

Before Friday's game was rained out, he got to poke around the historic baseball cathedral, including a trip inside the Green Monster where, following the local custom, he signed his name on the wall. Saturday, he left a different kind of mark.

With his Rays bullpen mates seemingly headed for another implosion, Pagan saved the day, and the game, getting the final three outs so they could escape with a 2-1 win, and some revenge for Boston's sweep last weekend at the Trop.

"It's my first time (here), I don't think it can go much better," Pagan said. "It's a lot of fun."

Pagan has reason to feel good. This is a guy who didn't get to save a game during his first two seasons in the majors, with Seattle and Oakland.

A guy who didn't make the Rays opening day roster, starting the season in Triple-A.

And a guy who has stepped up while the other relievers have struggled, saving the Rays last three wins. Saturday's was certainly the biggest given the setting and the circumstance.

And his reaction on the mound, arms clenched, mouth open, after striking out Mitch Moreland – who hit a grand slam off him last year - was telling.

"Emotion got the best of me, I guess," Pagan said. "Let out a little bit of a scream. Didn't really know where I was. But at the same time it was a lot of fun."

The Rays needed everything Pagan had, as a game that started with a homer on the second David Price pitch by Yandy Diaz, his team-high seventh, and included six shutout innings from Charlie Morton, turned way too tense.

And as much satisfaction as there may be in the Rays' majors- best 17-9 record, there also needs to be concern over how they are going to keep it up given the lack of dependable relief.

Either the guys they have are going to need to be more consistent, or they're going to have to start looking at getting some new guys. There are a few more in-house candidates to try, but at some point they may have to start looking elsewhere. And as long as Craig Kimbrel remains unsigned, that possibility should at least be considered.

Consider Saturday that they needed to use five relievers to get the final nine outs to protect what was then a 2-0 lead.

Chaz Roe got the first call, getting an out to start the seventh, but walking the No. 8 hitter before getting the second out. Adam Kolarek came in and took care of his business, striking out Andrew Benintendi.

The bigger issue, and cause for concern, surfaced in the eighth.

Manager Kevin Cash went to one of his high-leverage guys, but Diego Castillo, in his first action since Sunday, was again not sharp. He gave up a leadoff homer to Mookie Betts, got Mitch Moreland on a deep fly out and, most troubling, a four-pitch walk to Xander Bogaerts.

Cash then went to the other half of the occasionally dynamic duo, Jose Alvarado.

But the hard-throwing lefty, who also hadn't pitched since Sunday, gave up a single to lefty-swinging Rafael Devers, putting the tying run on third and the go-ahead run on first. Alvarado struck out rookie Michael Chavis, then walked Steve Pearce, who worked a tough nine-pitch at-bat, to load the bases.

The Rays caught a bit of a break in that Sox slugger J.D. Martinez, who was scratched from the lineup due to back spasms, wasn't able to pinch hit.

Instead, Alvarado got to face lefty Jackie Bradley, and struck him out to end the threat, though by throwing 21 pitches, he was done for the day.

Cash said there were some reasons for the lack of sharpness. "With Alvarado and Diego, we knew we had to give them some time off with the workload they had last weekend," Cash said. "Then with the off-day and then the rainout, now we're teetering on what's too much off time. They both came out blowing 99-100 miles an hour, maybe a tick erratic. Jose came in and ultimately made some big pitches to Jackie Bradley."

But the Rays were fortunate Pagan came in and made bigger ones.

"He's been a huge impact," Cash said. "He seems very under control."

Even then, the ninth wasn't without drama. Pagan gave up a leadoff single to Christian Vazquez. He struck out Benintendi.

Then the Rays turned a bad break into a good one, as Betts' popup drifted in the wind out of Diaz's reach behind first, but he was positioned to grab it on the bounce and get the force out at second. Pagan took it from there, settling his own personal score with Moreland.

"It's been kind of crazy the last few days," Pagan said. "It's a lot of fun. I closed in college and I closed in the minors. That's not to say I'm a closer or whatever, but it's definitely fun whenever you get the opportunity. We've got a lot of guys that can do. I've been fortunate to get the last three opportunities."

And they've been fortunate he's stepped up and handled them.

*** *Associated Press***

Diaz homers, Morton goes 6 scoreless as Rays top Red Sox 2-1

BOSTON -- Emilio Pagan was sitting at his locker nearly 30 minutes after the game was over and still had a big smile.

Sent down the minors at the end of spring training and then brought back up in mid-April, he has his first three big league saves.

Yandy Diaz hit David Price's second pitch over the Green Monster for a home run, Charlie Morton pitched six shutout innings and the Tampa Bay Rays held off the Boston Red Sox 2-1 Saturday.

"Yeah, it's a lot of fun," Pagan said. "I closed in college and closed in the minors. That's not to say I'm a closer. It's definitely fun when you get the opportunity to do it."

He's the fifth Rays' pitcher with a save this season. Tampa Bay has converted 11 of 13 opportunities.

"They're pretty selfless," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "They recognize that we're mixing and matching trying to get the best matchup for each individual."

Pagan allowed Christian Vazquez's leadoff single in the ninth, then threw a called third strike past Andrew Benintendi. He gave up a popup to Betts that Diaz lost in the wind and allowed to drop on the infield dirt. The first baseman grabbed the ball and threw to second to force Vazquez, and Pagan struck out Mitch Moreland for his third save.

Mookie Betts hit an eighth-inning homer into the center-field batter's eye against Diego Castillo. The Red Sox loaded the bases with two outs before Jose Alvarado struck out Jackie Bradley Jr. swinging on a sharp slider.

"Those guys are pretty good," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "They made some good pitches when they had to."

Mike Zunino had a fourth-inning RBI single off the Monster for the AL East-leading Rays, who were swept at home by Boston in a three-game series last weekend.

Morton (3-0) gave up two hits, struck out five and walked four, and five relievers completed a five-hitter.

Price (1-2) gave up two runs, four hits and three walks in six innings. He entered 10-2 with a 2.78 ERA in his previous 17 starts in Fenway Park

Boston slugger J.D. Martinez was scratched from the lineup because of back spasms.

Tampa Bay had lost five of seven coming in and had not played since Wednesday afternoon.

MEMORY LANE

Seventeen years earlier, Red Sox right-hander Derek Lowe no-hit the Rays in a 10-0 victory. It was the first no-hitter in Fenway Park since Boston's Dave Morehead accomplished the feat on Sept. 16, 1965.

WINDY CITY II

A stiff 18 mph breeze was blowing straight out at the first pitch, with wrappers flying around the outfield grass, at times, during the game.

It might have helped Diaz's drive, too.

"Yeah, you're aware of this stadium and how it can play with the wind," Cash, saying it reminded him of Chicago's Wrigley Field.

"I knew I hit it high enough. I thought maybe I had a chance in the wind," Diaz said through a translator.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rays: RHP Hunter Wood is on the family medical emergency list after the premature birth of his daughter.

Red Sox: 2B Dustin Pedroia (IL, left knee irritation) and INF Eduardo Nunez (IL, mid-back strain) took grounders and appeared to be moving freely when they ran down the first-base line and from first to third before Boston took batting practice. ... Benintendi was hit on the left foot by a pitch, limped to first and stayed in.

Plate umpire Chris Segal took a Castillo fastball off his left shoulder after it nicked Zunino's glove.

UP NEXT

Rays: RHP Tyler Glasnow (4-0, 1.53 ERA) is set to start the series finale Sunday. He has allowed two runs or fewer in all five starts, including last Sunday over 5 1/3 innings against Boston.

Red Sox: LHP Chris Sale (0-4, 7.43) has gone without a win in his first five starts for the first time in his major league career.

Martinez late scratch for Red Sox due to back

BOSTON -- Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez was scratched from Saturday's game against Tampa Bay because of back spasms.

Martinez, who was in the original lineup hitting cleanup as the DH, was replaced by Steve Pearce, who was inserted into the seventh spot in the batting order. He went 0-for-3 in Boston's 2-1 loss and is now batting .114 on the season.

Martinez is batting a team-best for regulars at .340 with four homers and 13 RBIs.

Xander Bogaerts was moved up from fifth to the cleanup spot.