

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, April 30, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

A couple breaks, and a breakout inning, put Red Sox back in win column

Nora Princiotti

One of the byproducts of a slow start by a supposedly good team is that every notable inning, good or bad, becomes a referendum on its identity.

So when Eduardo Rodriguez gave up four runs to the A's in the second inning — with two walks to batters he'd gotten ahead of 0-and-2, a wild pitch and a stolen base allowed contributing — it was further evidence that this team is what it's looked like on the field, not what it's talented roster says it should be.

But when the Sox scored six runs in the third inning — their biggest inning of the season, with the meaty part of their lineup taking smart at-bats and stringing together singles — it was an indication that the team people expected might still be there after all, waiting to break out.

On Monday, that high point didn't settle for silver-lining status. The Red Sox won at home, 9-4, improving to 12-17.

"I think it was a good night," said shortstop Xander Bogaerts, who was 2 for 5 with two doubles and two RBIs. "Good night overall. I know Eddy didn't pitch his best game, stuff-wise he wasn't where he wanted to be, but I think that was a really important inning by us. That's the type of offense we're capable of."

They got a couple breaks, too, like Oakland second baseman Jurickson Profar's throwing error on a fielder's choice by Tzu-Wei Lin in the third that allowed both Lin and Christian Vazquez to stay on base. Andrew Benintendi reached on a grounder to first to load the bases when Oakland starter Frankie Montas failed to get his foot on the base covering. Then came three straight hits from Mookie Betts, J.D. Martinez, and Bogaerts to tie the game at 4.

Bogaerts thought his double wouldn't get over Ramon Laureano's head in center, but it was hit better than he thought.

"Hey, I told you guys the other day," Bogaerts said. "A little break our way? It worked out tonight. You can't be hoping for many breaks but tonight was a good one."

Another concomitant quality of teams that leave people searching for answers is that they produce things that seem like answers and may not be. Monday night's win was one of the better ones the Sox have put together this season, but only time will tell if it's the beginning of a turnaround.

"It's just one game," said manager Alex Cora. "I'm not going to get caught up in we're getting better or we will be better. It's just one day. We played good today."

Still, even confident teams start to question themselves when the results aren't there. Several Red Sox players had a conversation in the dugout before the third inning, telling each other their lineup could score five runs just like that. They proved themselves right — except that they scored six off Montas.

"That was kind of cool, after having that conversation to come out and put up six so that was very fun to be part of," said Michael Chavis, who was 2 for 4 with 3 RBIs, two in that third inning. He knocked in the third in the fifth with an RBI single and has eight RBIs in nine career games.

Jackie Bradley Jr., who hit a double on Sunday, hit an RBI single to add one more run in the seventh. It was just the third time this season Bradley has had hits in consecutive games. Martinez scored Benintendi on a sacrifice fly in the eighth for the final run.

Rodriguez pitched $4\frac{2}{3}$ innings and gave up four runs on seven hits on 97 pitches with two walks and seven strikeouts.

“I was a little bit out of command, that’s what I think was the whole trouble tonight,” Rodriguez said.

Outside of the messy second inning, no more runs scored but it did take six relief pitchers to finish the game for Boston. Matt Barnes got the save, needing just two pitches to get the two outs he needed.

“[Rodriguez] was in and out of the strike zone, not his best obviously but after that he gave us a chance to get back in the game,” Cora said. “We were trying to get five, we needed to get five but [Heath Hembree] did a good job, using the fastball to get out of that inning and the bullpen did a good job.”

An important turn of events: Mookie Betts is playing like an All-Star again

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox were down 4-0 on Monday night and the crowd at Fenway Park was booing as Eduardo Rodriguez slogged through a 37-pitch second inning.

It was a here-we-go-again moment in what has been a wildly inconsistent season.

Then the Sox punched back.

More accurately, they jabbed.

A walk and two errors loaded the bases for Mookie Betts. He lined a high fastball into right field for a single that produced the first of six runs in that inning. It led to a 9-4 victory.

It would be a mistake to write that this was the kind of victory that will turn the season around for the Red Sox. The three-game sweep at Tampa Bay was supposed to do that and it didn’t, so the Red Sox will have to actually prove it in the standings before anybody believes it.

What is undeniably true is that Betts is playing like an All-Star again and that’s something required for the Sox to catch the Rays and Yankees and get back in the postseason for the fourth consecutive year.

No player on the roster is more important over the long term.

Betts finished 3 for 4 with a walk. He has reached base in 25 of his last 46 plate appearances and in the last 10 games has hit .287 with an .891 OPS. The Sox have won six of those games.

“Mookie is heating up. That’s huge for us,” Andrew Benintendi said. “It’s good timing.”

Benintendi has hit first and Betts second the last 10 games and it’s starting to work the way manager Alex Cora thought it would when he decided to construct his lineup that way over the winter. The idea was to prod Benintendi into being more aggressive and give Betts more opportunities to drive in runs.

Whether it works over the course of the season isn’t certain. Betts had a .438 on-base percentage last season, second in the majors to Mike Trout. That he should hit leadoff seems obvious.

Benintendi didn’t think much of being switched in the order when Cora told him about it before the season and he still doesn’t see what the big deal is.

“I think both of us take the same approach,” he said. “I know I do. I’m going to hit the way I hit whether it’s first or second or anywhere else.”

But Betts fully bought into hitting leadoff last season. It was one of the first things Cora said he would do after he was named manager and he instilled in Betts the idea that he would be the sparkplug for the offense. Being a leadoff hitter became part of Betts’s identity as a player and an MVP season followed.

Only in the last two weeks has Betts adjusted to the new spot.

“It took a little time,” he said. “I had to understand what [Benintendi] was going to do and how he would go about his at-bats. I was seeing the game from a different point of view than when he was behind me.

“Now he’s in front of me and I’m behind him. It was one of those things that took a little time. But the biggest thing for me has been putting in the work before games. That’s why I’m hitting better.”

Betts had a .676 OPS 12 days ago and admitted at the time he was searching for some rhythm with his mechanics and approach. He was taking pitches over the plate and swinging through ones that were too high.

Now Betts is more selective and starting to drive the ball.

“A lot of work,” he said. “Every day hitting early; kind of grinding in the cage. Trying to be consistent; focusing on competing.”

Betts helped produce another run in the eighth inning, his single pushing Benintendi into scoring position. It helped the Sox to a series-opening victory against an Oakland team that has given them trouble over the last three seasons.

The offense bailed out Rodriguez, who allowed four runs in the second inning. But after the Sox took the lead back, he retired six batters in a row and got the game under control.

The shutdown third inning was important.

“After I saw they scored all those runs. I went out there thinking I had to get three outs and get back to the dugout,” Rodriguez said. “I felt pretty good. After we scored some runs, as a pitcher you have to go out there and get three outs and get the other starter back on the mound.”

For the Sox, it felt like a reprieve.

“Now we need to run off a few more like it,” Betts said.

Brock Holt returns to Boston — for MRI on shoulder

Nora Princiotti

Brock Holt will return from his rehab assignment with Triple A Pawtucket, but not because he’s ready to play.

Holt had been on the injured list with a scratched right cornea, but returned before his assignment was scheduled to be over because of right shoulder inflammation. He is still on the injured list.

Holt will have a doctor’s appointment in Boston on Tuesday after flying back from Buffalo, where the PawSox were playing. Manager Alex Cora said the soreness just showed up.

“They’re going to check on him [Tuesday],” Cora said before the Red Sox’ 9-4 victory over the A’s. “He was playing catch. He did everything here [before the assignment] and he was fine. Just regular soreness

like in spring training, something that he went through last year. [Sunday] he tried to play catch and it was a different feeling so he will see the doctor tomorrow morning and see where he's at."

Holt began this rehab stint Friday, going 1 for 3 with three walks. The PawSox were rained out Saturday and Holt was scheduled to start Sunday until the soreness popped up.

He's one of three Red Sox infielders on the IL, the others being Dustin Pedroia and Eduardo Nunez, who began a rehab stint with Pawtucket on Monday.

Nunez DH'd Monday and went 0 for 4. He went on the 10-day injured list with a back strain April 18.

Holt suffered his eye injury on Opening Day when his 2-year-old son scratched him. He went on an earlier rehab assignment but had it stopped after one game to give his eye more time to heal. He was expected to make his Red Sox return soon, but it's unclear how the shoulder soreness will affect that timetable.

Devers on defensive

Rafael Devers has struggled defensively this season and, in general, his problems haven't been with making the big plays. Devers is struggling with the routine.

The latest example was Sunday, when he booted a double-play ball in the second inning that wound up costing the Red Sox two runs. Had Devers turned it, the inning would have been over. Instead, Tampa Bay got another at-bat and Yandy Diaz hit a two-run triple. Devers has committed eight errors at third this season.

Even though it seems to be simpler plays Devers is struggling with, Cora said he doesn't think the problem is one of focus or some other mental issue.

"I can't get into his mind but I do feel he's in tune with the game," Cora said. "He's paying attention, he's always looking to the dugout. He's got his card, looking at it. So, it's just one of those. We have to figure it out, obviously, but if the process stays the same we expect a good defensive player, a more consistent player. Because I don't think he's horrible defensively, it's just we need that consistency. He needs to make the routine play."

Workout for Pedroia

Pedroia ran the bases before the game and hit off a pitching machine so he could face higher velocity. The second baseman, who is on the IL with inflammation in his left knee, is scheduled to start a rehab assignment with Double A Portland on Thursday. "The goal is for him to go Wednesday and start playing on Thursday, so they'll map it out, they'll go back and forth see what makes sense, what doesn't make sense, how he feels and we'll be able to have a decision and we'll go from there," Cora said . . . Oakland placed first baseman/outfielder Mark Canha on the injured list with a sprained right wrist and recalled lefthanded reliever Ryan Buchter from Triple A . . . Cora said he hasn't decided if he'll go when the Red Sox visit the White House next Thursday. "I'll let you guys know when I decide," he said.

Everything going wrong for October's hero, Steve Pearce

Peter Abraham

Steve Pearce has been traded four times, released twice, and claimed off waivers on two other occasions during his 15 seasons in professional baseball. The game has humbled him more times than he would care to count.

But what's going on now is another level of being reminded how quickly everything can change.

Pearce was selected the Most Valuable Player of the World Series last fall after hitting three home runs and driving in eight runs in five games against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

He was outstanding at first base, too, contorting his stout frame into positions he didn't know he was capable of to make crucial plays.

Major League Baseball gave Pearce a red Chevrolet Silverado and the Red Sox came through with a new \$6.2 million contract two weeks later.

The lifelong Patriots fan even got to meet Tom Brady and Bill Belichick along the way.

"Now I feel like smashing every bat I have," Pearce said Monday before the Red Sox opened a three-game series against Oakland with a 9-4 win.

The guy who hit two home runs and drove in three runs in Game 5 at Dodger Stadium had one extra-base hit and one RBI in 43 plate appearances through Sunday.

Pearce is 4 of 39 with 17 strikeouts and, with runners in scoring position, is 0 for 10 with five strikeouts.

His career has been built on hitting lefthanders, but Pearce is 2 for 16 against them with nine strikeouts.

It gets worse. His .295 OPS is the fifth lowest in baseball among players with at least 40 plate appearances. Two of the players below Pearce were sent to the minors and another is on the injured list.

"Baseball is pointing at me and laughing right now," Pearce said.

The slump has its roots in spring training. The Sox were cognizant of Pearce's history of early-season injuries and eased him into playing. But he still strained his left calf March 17 after only seven games and 17 at-bats.

Pearce, 36, was on the injured list to start the season then returned April 4 after spending six days in extended spring training at the team complex in Florida, taking swings against prospects not deemed ready for even low A ball.

"When I first came back, the game was just too fast for me," Pearce said. "I wasn't ready. I was physically ready, but I wasn't seeing the baseball. Now I'm starting to see the baseball and mechanically I'm not in the right place.

"I'm trying to do too much and, at the same time, I'm trying to relax. I've tried so many things. It feels like I'm trying to get four hits in one at-bat. I've come up in big situations and it feels like, 'OK, now I'm going to get it done.' But I haven't. I miss my pitch."

Pearce said he felt ready to go two days before the Sox activated him off the injured list. He was eager to come back.

"I was doing great," Pearce said. "Then the next day I picked up a bat and it did not feel right in my hands. It was literally the day before I was called up and I've been struggling to find it ever since."

The Sox need Pearce to be productive. He hit third, fourth, or fifth in the lineup 34 times last season after the Sox acquired him from the Toronto Blue Jays and had a .901 OPS with the Sox.

Whether it was as a first baseman, designated hitter, or pinch hitter, Pearce was a player Alex Cora found plenty of uses for.

Cora is putting Pearce in the same spots he did last season. But it hasn't worked.

Pearce isn't responsible for the Sox being off to a poor start. But he's part of the problem.

“He’s off mechanically. His hands, his feet, everything. He’s just fighting it right now,” Cora said. “He’s been working hard the last week, looking at video from last year.

“You see where we’re at and people start trying to do too much. It should be the other way around. Don’t try to do too much. Just play the part. Just contribute.

“That’s a message for everybody. It hasn’t been great for three weeks. We get it; we understand. But at the same, we know we’re very talented, we have a good team . . . Play your part. Don’t try and be the hero and the MVP of the World Series. Just be you.”

Pearce knows what’s coming if he doesn’t, another transaction. He sees Michael Chavis on the roster and understands the Red Sox could turn to him to platoon with Mitch Moreland. That Chavis started at first base on Monday was a sign the Red Sox would be comfortable with that.

The Sox won’t ride with a roster that doesn’t work into June. They can’t afford to wait.

“I’ve been humbled,” Pearce said. “I need to show them something.”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Six-run third inning lifts Red Sox past A’s

Steve Hewitt

Though the Red Sox have gotten off to a slow start offensively this season, they know they still have the ability to light it up in a hurry.

Inside the dugout on Monday night, they talked about it.

When Eduardo Rodriguez put the Red Sox in an early 4-0 hole, they knew they weren’t out of it.

“We had a conversation earlier about how the vibe in the dugout is kind of contagious,” Michael Chavis said. “Everybody knows hitting is contagious in general, but we had a conversation and we said this team is capable of putting up five runs no problem, any time. You look through our lineup and we definitely are.”

Chavis might be a rookie, but even he knew. Then, he watched and contributed as it all unfolded.

A pair of errors by the Athletics opened the door in the third inning, and the Red Sox took full advantage as they exploded for a six-run burst that carried them to a 9-4 series-opening victory at Fenway Park.

“It was unbelievable,” Chavis said. “It was kind of cool after having that conversation to come out and put up six, so it was very fun to be part of.”

For once, the Red Sox were the beneficiaries of a few breaks and mistakes by the opponent, which helped ignite the rally. It began with a Christian Vazquez walk before Tzu-Wei Lin followed with what should have been a double play ball, but second baseman Jurickson Profar mishandled the exchange and threw the ball away, and both runners were safe.

The next batter, Andrew Benintendi, hit a grounder to first, but A’s starter Frankie Montas failed to touch the base while covering, and everyone reached safely to load the bases.

The Sox didn’t let the opportunity go to waste.

Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez hit back-to-back RBI singles through the right side, setting up Xander Bogaerts, who delivered the biggest hit of the inning. He lifted a 1-0 fastball from Montas to deep center,

but Ramon Laureano, the A's center fielder who famously threw Bogaerts out twice during their series in Oakland earlier this month, misplayed the ball. He took a few steps in and it sailed over his head for a two-run double.

It was prescient thinking from manager Alex Cora, who said before the game the Red Sox needed to come up with a big hit with the bases loaded and string together a big inning — both of which have mostly eluded them this season — to help cure their offensive woes. Both came to fruition.

Chavis followed Bogaerts with a two-run single, and just like that, the Red Sox had produced their second-biggest inning of the season, after their seven-run eighth against the Tigers last week.

“Obviously we know we have a lot of really good players in the clubhouse, and a win like tonight and a big inning like that can change a lot of stuff,” Bogaerts said. “Come in here tomorrow with the same attitude and try to do it again.”

That saved Rodriguez, who pitched mostly well in $4\frac{2}{3}$ innings, but was poor in a 37-pitch second inning. The lefty walked his first two batters of the inning — Chad Pinder and Kendrys Morales — despite getting ahead of both of them 0-2. Laureano then grounded into what should have been a double play, but he was safe to put runners on first and third. He stole second to set up a two-run single by Profar that gave the A's an early two-run lead.

After Profar advanced on a wild pitch, Josh Phegley drove him in with an RBI single. Two batters later, Matt Chapman delivered a two-out, 3-2, RBI double to put Oakland up 4-0.

Rodriguez settled down after he was given the lead, as he spun a 1-2-3 fourth inning on 13 pitches. He ran into traffic in the fifth when he allowed a pair of two-out singles to Stephen Piscotty and Khris Davis, but Heath Hembree relieved him and cleaned up the mess.

The Red Sox extended their lead in the fifth when Chavis blooped an RBI single that found grass in right and scored Rafael Devers. That marked the first career three-RBI game for Chavis, who now has eight RBI in his first nine big league games.

Chavis was also impressive in the field. Playing at first base, he was reliable and turned a 3-6-3 double play that ended the sixth inning. The rookie said he's gaining comfort at this level.

“I think a lot of it has to do with the people around here,” Chavis said. “They make me more than comfortable in the clubhouse, and having had some success, definitely, safe to say I'm getting more comfortable.”

The offense overshadowed a strong performance from the bullpen, which kept the A's scoreless for $5\frac{1}{2}$ innings, though it wasn't without some scares.

In the seventh, with the Red Sox up three, Brandon Workman gave up two walks and allowed both runners to advance to scoring position on a wild pitch. But he responded to strike out Piscotty, and Ryan Brasier punched out Davis to end the threat.

Then in the ninth, Hector Velazquez loaded the bases, but Matt Barnes rescued him by retiring Chapman and Piscotty on two pitches to end the game.

Rafael Devers' defense, like the Red Sox' season, needs improvement

Michael Silverman

Much like the Red Sox' season, Rafael Devers' defense at third base has left plenty to be desired.

His eight errors lead the majors at the position, with his avoidable mistakes almost evenly divided between five fielding miscues and three off-target throws.

If errors were the only measure of a fielder's ability, Devers' defense would be more grim than it appears.

As it turns out, entering Monday night's 9-4 victory against Oakland, Devers also led the majors in plays made at his position with 50. He's seeing a lot of action, so the holes in his game have had more chances to be exposed than other, less-active third basemen. More complete defensive metrics, Defensive Runs Above Average, Defensive Runs Saved, UZR and UZR-150 certainly support the overall notion that Devers has earned a place in the bottom handful of third basemen in the game, but if it's any consolation, he's not at the bottom.

His range, which measures how well or poorly he gets to balls hit in his vicinity, ranks slightly above average, which is in line with his good range the previous two seasons. Another third baseman, Travis Shaw, has no errors, but his range is second-worst in the majors, next to only Seattle's Ryon Healy, who will forever be remembered for collecting three errors in one inning in the third game of the season against the Red Sox.

FanGraphs' Defensive Runs Above Average, the catch-all metric that accounts for every conceivable factor, has Devers at minus-1.6, slightly worse than Shaw (minus-1.2) but a tick better than the White Sox' Yoan Moncada (minus-1.7) and better than the worst, Healy at minus-2.4.

Throw enough stats, especially the defensive variety, on a page or screen, and the picture can begin to blur when in Devers' case, it's been in focus from the start. He is messing up more than he should. He will occasionally dazzle, but mostly he has disappointed, showing much less than the Red Sox expected when he turned up at spring training leaner than last year and moving much more lightly.

With Oakland's Matt Chapman in town this week, the odds favor the chances that fans will have to witness the differences between the two.

Which begs the question: What do the Red Sox believe is behind Devers' poor performance?

Again, it gets back to the team's thoughts about its unenviable record.

They thought they'd be much better than this, but certain sectors on the team have been underperforming — for some reason.

One underperforming sector is Devers' defense, but it's unclear if the flaws are more mental or physical.

"I don't think it's mental," manager Alex Cora said. "We've got to keep working. There are certain moves that he makes before he makes a play that we've been trying to clean. Like I said (Sunday, when a Devers flub in the second inning led to two unearned runs), it's just a matter of inconsistency. He makes a great play, then the play yesterday was a routine play and he misses it, so if we had our way, it'd be the other way around, just make the routine ones and the hits are hits."

Devers has been putting in the work, and Cora (a former infielder) sees a player who has absorbed lessons — in practice and in theory, but not in games.

"His throws are a lot better, the carry of the ball is a lot better than last year, actually moving better than last year, just seems like the routine plays he misses that one," Cora said. "We talk to him and feel he's in a good place. We don't feel he's putting pressure on himself. We'll keep talking to him about positioning, how deep, how close and all that. He keeps working and we keep preaching the principles. We've got some good coaches that were good defensive players, Ramon (Vazquez) and Carlos (Febles), so they have a pretty good idea of him. It's a just a matter of being inconsistent."

Again, it's that inconsistency that is essentially becoming what's maddening about Devers' defense.

If Devers is putting in the effort and the time practicing his defense in between games, then why isn't the work paying off in the games?

The lack of execution suggests that this is a mental issue more than anything else, but Cora does not agree with that reasonable take.

"No, I don't know — I don't think so," Cora said. "He's in tune with the game and he's been working on his pre-pitch and getting ready a lot earlier the last few weeks, so I don't know. I can't get into his mind, but I do feel he's in tune with the game. He's always looking to the dugout and he's got his (defensive positioning) card, looking at it."

The Red Sox have five months to fix what's wrong with the 12-17 team that will play two more games against Oakland before hitting the road.

Fixing Devers' defense is high on that to-do list.

"Just one of those we have to figure out obviously, but if the process stays the same, we expect a good defensive player, more consistent player because I don't think he's horrible defensively," Cora said. "We just need consistency and he needs to make those routine plays."

Steve Pearce 'grinding' to find answers to offensive struggles

Steve Hewitt

In the matter of six months, Steve Pearce has experienced the extremes of being a big league baseball player.

He was the darling of Boston in October after he went on a magical run to become World Series MVP, but he's followed that up with one of the worst stretches of his career through the first month of this season.

"You go from the high of the highs to the lowest of lows," Pearce admitted.

Now, Pearce is on a mission to prove he's the player of last October, and not this April.

Pearce hasn't been anything close to his performance level in the World Series. Though the sample size is relatively small — he's only had 39 at-bats in 13 games this season — his numbers are staggeringly bad. He's batting .103 with just one extra-base hit and 17 strikeouts.

His struggles were compounded this past weekend against Tampa Bay. With J.D. Martinez out of the lineup Saturday and Sunday, Pearce was given an opportunity, but went 0-for-7 with two punchouts.

"I'm not where I was last year," Pearce said. "I'm trying to find it. I'm grinding every day, I'm working every day in the cage, so if baseball comes around like it's supposed to, I'm going to come out with a vengeance. It's just buying that time, trying to figure out how to get comfortable."

Manager Alex Cora said Pearce's problems are rooted in both mechanics and timing at the plate, to which Pearce agreed. Some of that, he said, may be because he's behind because of an injury he suffered in spring training that limited him to just 17 at-bats.

Pearce admitted he's pressing at the plate and trying to do a little too much, and he's trying to simplify his approach at the plate. Cora said Pearce has been looking at video over the last week in an effort to rediscover himself.

“Missing pitches, ball’s not going your way, you start to press a little bit, and trying to get four hits in one at-bat,” Pearce said. “I just need to dumb it down a little bit and see ball, hit ball, and hopefully it’ll start to work out.”

Some of that pressing, Cora suggested, may be due to the Red Sox’ record. They entered Monday’s series against Oakland at 11-17, but the struggles offensively have stretched beyond Pearce.

“It’s probably a little bit of everybody,” Pearce said. “I’m sure everybody feels it because last year it just came so much easier. Everybody was picking each other up, everyone was having the big hit, we’re always getting out of jams, the ball was going our way. We were always finding ways to win.

“This year, it’s a little bit harder. If we’re hitting, we’re not pitching. If we’re pitching, we’re not hitting. So it’s kind of like, we’re not on the same page, but we’re only what? Seven and a half back with 130 games to go. We’ll find a way to get it done, it’s just this time up, maybe with May getting here, maybe a new month, maybe things will start turning around.”

And especially so for Pearce. By the nature of his role — platooning at first base with Mitch Moreland — it’s hard for him to get consistent playing time, but even he knows he hasn’t earned much playing time right now. He’s fighting to change that.

“I’m playing right now like the player that I’m not,” Pearce said. “I’m not this type of player. So, right now it’s kind of hard to put me out there because I’m not playing well, I’m not producing, I’m not doing a lot of things well, but I’m out here every day and I’m grinding and I’m working on it, trying to figure out how to get back to the player that I am.”

Martinez returns

The Red Sox’ lineup Monday wasn’t posted until 4:40 p.m., which was later than usual. That was likely to make sure Martinez, who missed the previous two games with back spasms, was good to go after going through batting practice. The designated hitter was back in the lineup and batting third.

Cora undecided on White House

The Red Sox are scheduled to visit the White House next Thursday after their series at Baltimore, but it’s still uncertain if they’re manager will join them.

“I’ll let you guys know when I decide,” Cora said. “You guys don’t have to worry about that one, I’ll let you guys know.”

Injury updates

After being scratched from his rehab start Sunday with Pawtucket because of right shoulder soreness, Brock Holt is scheduled to see a doctor Tuesday morning.

Eduardo Nunez (back) batted second in the lineup as the designated hitter for Game 1 of Pawtucket’s doubleheader Monday night as he began his rehab assignment. Cora wants to see Nunez have at least 20 at-bats before he’s activated.

Dustin Pedroia (knee) is expected to begin a rehab assignment Thursday. In the meantime, he has continued to be a leader for the Red Sox off the field.

“He’s been around since what, 2006?” Cora said. “So he understands the game and is just another — I hate to say it because with that talk I know how it goes. You start saying he’s another coach, people start seeing you that way. He’s not another coach but he’s another person that knows the game and is helping his teammates out.”

*** *The Providence Journal***

Red Sox 9, Athletics 4: Boston rallies past Oakland in series opener

Bill Koch

BOSTON — The Red Sox aren't too proud to accept a little help these days.

It hasn't quite reached the point where Boston is begging to be let off the mat by its foes, but you might be able to see it from here. Anything to turn this wretched start to the campaign in favor of the defending World Series champions is appreciated.

Two errors committed by the Athletics opened the door. The Red Sox had the good sense to take advantage in the bottom of the third inning on Monday night, scrapping their way to a seventh come-from-behind victory of the campaign.

Boston's 9-4 triumph over Oakland at Fenway Park carried with it some elements of good fortune. The Red Sox erased a 4-0 deficit after just two frames and pinned a loss on a starting pitcher who allowed just one earned run. Frankie Montas was let down by his defense and couldn't escape the game's deciding jam, as Boston sent 10 men to the plate in its third time at bat.

"I think that was a really important inning by us," said Xander Bogaerts, who doubled twice and drove home the eventual winning run. "That's the type of offense we know we're capable of."

"Great to see everybody trying to do their part — not trying to do too much," said Mookie Betts, who singled three times and drew a walk in his 10th straight game of reaching base safely. "Just doing what we can to score runs."

The Red Sox bullpen recorded 13 outs in relief of Eduardo Rodriguez, who made life difficult for himself over 4 2/3 innings. Brandon Workman's pair of walks to open the seventh brought the tying run to the plate, but three straight strikeouts — two from Workman, one from Ryan Brasier — put out the fire. Brasier continued through a 1-2-3 eighth and Matt Barnes cleaned up a mess left by Hector Velazquez in the ninth to record his second save.

"It's just one game," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "I'm not going to get caught up on we're getting better or we will be better. It was just one day. We played good today."

Christian Vazquez drew a one-out walk in the third and Tzu-Wei Lin sent a bouncer to second that could have been a 4-6-3 double play. But Jurickson Profar spiked his throw into the dirt and everybody was safe, extending the inning. Another grounder to the right side by Andrew Benintendi also failed to result in an out, with Montas missing the bag at first while covering on the flip from Kendrys Morales.

Betts and J.D. Martinez both knocked RBI singles to right, halving the deficit to 4-2. Bogaerts sent a liner to deep center and Ramon Laureano initially broke toward the infield, allowing the tying two-run double to sail over his head. Michael Chavis followed one batter later by grounding a two-run single up the middle, staking Boston to a 6-4 lead.

"We know we have a lot of really good players in the clubhouse," Bogaerts said. "A win like tonight and a big inning like that can change a lot of stuff."

Chavis looped an RBI single to right in the fifth, Jackie Bradley Jr. grounded an RBI single up the middle in the seventh and Martinez lofted a sacrifice fly to right center in the eighth. The Red Sox overcame a pair of early double plays that threatened to ice the offense, with Montas requiring just 14 pitches to record his first six outs.

“You saw early in the game we took advantage of a mistake,” Cora said. “Profar makes the error and after that it opened the gates.”

Rodriguez gave up all four of his runs in the second. He was up 0-and-2 on Chad Pinder and Morales before issuing back-to-back walks and Profar lined a two-run single to left to make it 2-0. Josh Phegley’s RBI single to the corner in left and Matt Chapman’s sizzling RBI double to deep right gave Oakland what falsely appeared to be a comfortable lead.

Red Sox Journal: Boston hopes to avoid A’s closer Treinen

Bill Koch

BOSTON — The Athletics made their lone visit to Fenway Park this season off the back of a grueling series finale with the Blue Jays on Sunday.

Toronto outlasted Oakland in 11 innings, 5-4, at Rogers Centre. Justin Smoak’s walkoff single through the left side plated Freddy Galvis with the deciding run, as the Blue Jays answered three runs in the top half of the inning by the Athletics with four of their own.

Smoak’s key hit came against Oakland closer Blake Treinen, who threw 39 pitches in his 1 2/3 innings. That sort of taxing workload could have an effect on how the right-hander is used over the next three days against the Red Sox, and it’s certainly not something that escaped manager Alex Cora’s attention.

“Honestly, I don’t want to see him pitch in three days,” Cora said. “If he pitches that’s not good for us. Our goal is to stay away from him regardless. We know where they’re at in the bullpen.”

Treinen was an American League All-Star last season and finished sixth in the Cy Young Award voting. He posted a microscopic 0.78 earned-run average over 68 appearances and 80 1/3 innings of work. The Athletics were 61-7 in games where Treinen made his jog from the bullpen to the mound.

Fellow right-hander Lou Trivino would likely pick up any save chances for the Athletics early in the series. Trivino impressed during his first full season in 2018, allowing just 53 hits and striking out 82 in 74 innings. He’s off to another strong start this year, posting a 1.42 earned-run average through his first 12 appearances.

Pedroia works out

Dustin Pedroia (left knee) went through a full baseball workout Monday afternoon, another step required before he embarks on a scheduled rehab assignment later this week.

Pedroia hit in the batting cage against a pitching machine and took ground balls at second base. The session lasted about an hour in all, as Pedroia performed under the watchful eye of multiple medical staff members. Double-A Portland is his tentative destination ahead of a weekend series with Binghamton beginning on Thursday.

“The goal is for him to leave Wednesday and start playing on Thursday,” Cora said. “They’ll map it out. They’ll go back and forth — what makes sense, what doesn’t make sense, how he feels — and we’ll have a decision.”

Pedroia hasn’t been shy about offering his input to teammates since making his last appearance on April 17 against the Yankees. Eduardo Rodriguez credited Pedroia with suggesting an adjustment on his slider and infielders Rafael Devers and Michael Chavis have both done pregame work with Pedroia over the last week.

“I hate to say it — that talk, I know how it goes,” Cora said. “When you start saying he’s another coach, people start seeing you that way — he’s not another coach. He’s another person who knows the game and is helping his teammates out.”

Setback for Holt

Brock Holt (right eye) appears to have suffered another early setback during a rehab assignment.

Holt was out of the lineup Sunday with Triple-A Pawtucket and returned to Boston late Monday. He reported right shoulder soreness and was scheduled to see a doctor Tuesday morning.

“He was fine — just regular soreness like at spring training and something that he went through last year,” Cora said. “(Sunday) he tried to play catch and it was a different feeling.”

Holt suffered a scratched cornea prior to Opening Day and was pulled back from his first 20-day stint with the PawSox after one game and three at-bats. Holt was unable to see the ball adequately while at the plate and was fitted with a new contact lens.

Eduardo Nunez (back strain) was in the lineup with Pawtucket for the opening game of its Monday doubleheader at Buffalo. Nunez batted second and served as the designated hitter.

“He’ll play second, he’ll play third, he’ll DH,” Cora said. “Then we’ll decide how he feels. We have a pretty good idea at-bats wise what we want.”

Devers’ defensive troubles not lost on Bogaerts

Bill Koch

BOSTON — Xander Bogaerts remembers the days when he was viewed as a defensive liability.

The Red Sox shortstop is as sure-handed in the field as any member of the current club. Bogaerts entered Monday night’s series opener with the Athletics at Fenway Park having committed just one error in 27 games this season. The benefit of hindsight reveals how ill-advised it was of former manager John Farrell to shuttle Bogaerts between shortstop and third base during his first full campaign in 2014.

Bogaerts made 20 errors in 143 games that season — 10 in 44 games at the hot corner, 10 in 99 games at his natural position. He cut that number to just 11 errors while playing all of his 156 games at shortstop in 2015. Bogaerts made a career-low 10 errors in 136 games last season, and his message to Devers has been one of steady encouragement.

“I talk to him a lot,” Bogaerts said following Sunday’s 5-2 loss to the Rays. “I was his age, and I made a good amount of errors at that age. I kind of know what he’s going through.”

Like Devers, Bogaerts was just 21 years old when he became a Boston regular. His development proved a bit more immediate when contrasted with the current struggles Devers is enduring in the field. His eighth error in 28 games this season helped lead to a pair of Tampa Bay runs in the second inning on Sunday.

“There are certain moves that he makes before he makes a play that we’ve been trying to clean up,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Like I said yesterday, it’s just a matter of inconsistency.”

Devers was on the field well before the scheduled 7:10 p.m. first pitch with Oakland. He was working with third-base coach Carlos Febles and Ramon Vazquez, who serves as a liaison between the club’s scouting and field staffs. Febles and Vazquez played a combined 1,202 games as big-league infielders and presumably have a few tips they can share with the third baseman.

“He makes a great play, and then the play yesterday was a routine play and he misses it,” Cora said. “If we had our way, it would be the other way — just make the routine ones and the hits are hits.”

“Footwork and his throws are a lot better. The carry on the ball is a lot better than it was last year. Actually, he’s moving better than last year. It just seems like the routine play, he misses that one.”

Willy Adames sent a two-hopper to third base that should have started an inning-ending 5-4-3 double play. Devers allowed the ball to carom off his glove and failed to record an out, extending the threat. Yandy Diaz drove a two-run triple to deep center two batters later, allowing the Rays to double what was a 2-0 lead.

“When you’re going like that, whenever you make an error, those runs seem to score,” Bogaerts said. “That makes it feel even worse. I know he’s going through it. When I see him hang his head, all I can say is to keep your head up and try to catch the next one. Deep down I know how bad that is.”

Cora and his staff are hoping to stay in front of any potential mental scarring. There’s been no loss of faith or confidence in Devers, and the club still views him as a potential franchise player at the position going forward. That the organization has opted to use top position player prospect Michael Chavis on the right side of the infield at both Triple-A Pawtucket and with the Red Sox this season should speak volumes.

“If the process stays the same, we expect a good defensive player — a more consistent player,” Cora said. “Because I don’t think he’s horrible defensively. We need that consistency. We need him to make the routine play.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Red Sox capitalize on Jurickson Profar’s error, post 6-run inning on way to win over Athletics

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- The Red Sox have felt like they haven’t had many breaks go their way so far in 2019. On Monday night, they caught a big one-- and capitalized on it-- in a 9-4 win over the Athletics.

With the A’s leading 4-0 in the third, Tzu-Wei Lin hit a grounder to second baseman Jurickson Profar that would have set up easy inning-ending double play. Instead, Profar muffed the throw to second and, put two runners on base for Andrew Benintendi.

One day after a muffed double play by Rafael Devers cost the Red Sox in a loss to the Rays, Boston was suddenly in position to flip the script. The Red Sox, who have had trouble exploiting opponents’ mistakes so far this season after doing so frequently last year, took advantage.

Benintendi reached on an error by pitcher Frankie Montas, loading the bases for Mookie Betts. Betts and J.D. Martinez hit back-to-back RBI singles to make it 2-0, Xander Bogaerts drove in two more with a double over center fielder Ramon Laureano’s head and Michael Chavis ended the assault with a two-run bloop single. Minutes after trailing 4-0, Boston was up 6-4 and had momentum on its side.

“We took advantage of a mistake by them,” manager Alex Cora said. “Profar made the error and after that it opened the gates.”

The inning was not the most productive of the year for the Red Sox, who scored seven runs in the eighth inning of Wednesday’s win over the Tigers. But considering the team was trailing early after a lifeless weekend sweep at the hands of the Rays, it may have been the most significant.

“I think that was a really important inning there by us. That’s the kind of offense we know we’re capable of,” shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. “A win like tonight and a big inning like that can change a lot of stuff.”

Chavis, who was 2-for-4 with a team-high three RBIs in the win, said some of the team's hitters had a discussion earlier in the day about how Boston's lineup was capable of putting up five runs at any time. That conversation ended up being a premonition.

"You look through the lineup and we definitely are," Chavis said. "It was kind of cool, after having that conversation, to come out and put up six. That was very fun to be apart of."

In the wake of Sunday's loss to Tampa Bay, Bogaerts stood at his locker and told reporters that something as simple as a "little blooper or an infield hit" could turn things around for Boston. In the third, a bunch of little things came together after Profar's error to guide the Red Sox to an important victory.

"I told you guys the other a day... a little break our way," Bogaerts said. "It worked out tonight. You can't be hoping for (many) breaks, but tonight was a good one."

Boston Red Sox's David Price told Chris Sale he's there for him: 'I was beaten over the forehead until I was black and blue' in 2016

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Chris Sale is 0-5 with a 6.30 ERA in six starts since signing a five-year, \$145-million extension with Boston during spring training. He became the first Red Sox pitcher since Mike Gardiner in 1992 to have a month with a record of 0-5 or worse and an ERA above 6.00, according to Baseball-Reference via Twitter.

Teammate David Price experienced a similar stretch during his first seven starts of 2016, after he signed a seven-year, \$217-million contract with Boston in December 2015. Price went 4-1 but he posted a 6.75 ERA. His two-seam fastball, his best pitch, averaged 93.6 mph during 2016, down from 94.8 mph the previous season, per Baseball Savant.

A decline in velocity also has been the main storyline for Sale.

Sale has thrown his four-seam fastball an average of 92.3 mph after he averaged 95.2 mph last year. The opposition is batting .395 with a .895 slugging percentage, five home runs, two doubles and one triple against Sale's four-seamer.

Price reflected on his difficult stretch during 2016.

"I think whenever I was going through this, you guys asked me about it. You didn't ask my teammates," Price told MassLive.com on Monday at Fenway Park. "I was beaten over the forehead until I was black and blue by every last person in here."

Price told Sale he'd be there for him to bounce ideas off whenever he needs. But Price said Sale needs to figure it out mostly on his own.

"Ask him. I can't tell you. Everybody's different," Price said. "What I need to do might be different than what he needs to do. If a guy gets off track, there's a bunch of different things he can do to get back on track. There's no book you can read that will tell you this is the right way to do it. This is something you've got to figure out kind of on your own. He knows I'm here for him. He knows I'm here to talk to him about any of this. We talked about that a couple weeks ago. I'm here for him. Anything he wants to bounce off of me, cool. I'm here for him. It's something he's going to have figure out."

Many aces have experienced similar stretches. Price knows from first-hand experience.

"That's part of it," Price said. "Everybody's going to struggle at some point, especially in this profession. You've just got to find ways to combat that, get back on track. He's doing everything in his power. His

start (Sunday) was a lot better than what it looked. Just keep building on these last couple of starts. He punched out 10 two starts ago. (Sunday) he went seven innings, gave up two earned runs. Looked more like himself."

Justin Verlander posted a 4.54 ERA in 32 starts during 2014, his age 31 season. He had a 5.54 ERA in six starts during May and a 6.82 ERA in five starts during June.

The five-year contract extension Verlander signed with the Tigers in spring training 2013 looked like a potential disaster at that point. But Verlander has a 3.02 ERA in 127 starts since then. The 2014 season became the outlier, not the new norm. He just signed a two-year, \$66-million extension at 36 years old.

Jon Lester's 4.82 ERA in 33 starts during 2012 certainly was the outlier in his career. He has a 3.23 ERA in 197 starts since then.

James Shields posted a 5.18 ERA in 34 starts during 2010. He then recorded a 3.30 ERA over his next 167 starts. CC Sabathia had a 4.81 ERA in 69 starts from 2013-15. He has an ERA of 3.72 in 89 starts since.

Zack Greinke posted a 4.02 ERA in 61 starts during 2010-11 after he won the 2009 AL Cy Young. He has a 3.00 ERA in 223 starts since then. Dallas Keuchel recorded a 4.55 ERA in 2016, after he won the 2015 AL Cy Young. He then had a 3.39 ERA in 57 starts in 2017-18.

Price turned things around in 2016 after his May 7 start at Yankee Stadium when he allowed six earned runs in 4.2 innings. He posted a 3.39 ERA over his final 28 starts and finished with a 3.99 ERA and 3.60 FIP.

Plenty of great pitchers have experienced strange, outlier years. But plenty of talented pitchers also have suddenly just lost their dominance altogether. Sale's story has yet to be told.

Tim Lincecum and Matt Cain never were the same pitchers after their age 27 seasons. Felix Hernandez recorded a 3.11 ERA in 334 starts from 2005-15. He has a 4.57 ERA in 75 outings (74 starts) since the start of his age 30 season in 2016.

It seems obvious Sale must increase his fastball velocity to get back on track based on the batting average and slugging percentage against the pitch. His four-seamer is getting hit the hardest of all.

The opposition also is slugging .538 against his changeup.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora is confident Sale's velocity will return. Sale showed it April 16 at Yankee Stadium when he averaged 95.5 mph with his four-seamer and topped out at 97.5 mph, per Baseball Savant. But that's the only start he has showed it.

Cora continues to say command of his offspeed pitches "is the key" for Sale.

Would the Red Sox have been smarter to wait until the end of 2019 before deciding whether to re-sign Sale? Yes. He had shoulder issues last year and late-season durability always has been a question mark.

But he's signed for another six years, including 2019. It's way too premature to label the contract good or bad. The same mistake could have been made with Verlander in 2014 and look how he's pitching now.

But Sale must solve his issues quickly, especially if the Red Sox want to return to the postseason this October. The Red Sox can't keep losing every time their ace starts.

Boston Red Sox's Steve Pearce says he's 'gone from highest of highs to lowest of lows' with prolonged April slump

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Just six months after being named World Series MVP, nothing is going right for Red Sox first baseman Steve Pearce.

Pearce is off to a miserable start this season, hitting 4-for-39 with 19 strikeouts in his first 13 games after opening the season on the injured list with a calf injury. After spending October as one of the most feared hitters in Boston's lineup, the 36-year-old has become a near-automatic out in April.

"You go from the highest of the highs," Pearce said, "to the lowest of the lows."

Pearce strained his calf during an exhibition game on March 17 and stayed in Fort Myers while the Red Sox embarked on their 11-game west-coast trip to open the season. He didn't play in any affiliated rehab games before joining the team April 4 with only 17 spring at-bats under his belt.

Pearce credits his lack of spring reps as a major reason for his struggles but also believes his mechanics are way off. Manager Alex Cora said Pearce's hands and front foot are out of sync when he swings.

"I'm not being the type of player that I want to be," Pearce said. "Pressing a little bit. Timing. Just a little bit of everything."

Pearce admitted he has gotten away from his regular approach at the plate and has, at times, tried to break out of his slump with one big swing instead of doing the things that have led to success in the past.

"I'm just missing pitches, ball's not going (my) way," Pearce said. "You start to press a little bit trying to get four hits in one at-bat. I just need to dumb it down a little bit and just 'see ball, hit ball.' Hopefully it'll start to work out."

He believes he's one of a few Red Sox hitters who are pressing on a club that entered play Monday with an 11-17 record and staggering offense.

"Last year, it just came so much easier," Pearce said. "Everybody was picking each other up. We would always have the big hit. We were always getting out of jams. The ball was going our way. We were always finding ways to win. This year, it's a little bit harder."

Pearce has spent extra time at Fenway Park over the last week, watching hours of video and taking early batting practice on the field before games. Though he started against some righties last year, he understands why Cora is opting to go with Mitch Moreland as the primary first baseman.

"I'm not this type of player," he said. "So right now it's kind of hard to put me out there because I'm not playing well. I'm not producing. I'm not doing a lot of things well. I'm out here every day and I'm grinding. I'm working on it, trying to figure out how to get back to the player that I am."

Cora continues to trust Pearce, at least in part because he appreciates the extra work the veteran has put in. Pearce has still been Boston's starting first baseman against left-handers and was Cora's choice to replace J.D. Martinez at designated hitter over the weekend.

Cora's advice for Pearce is simple. He wants him to play his part as an offensive weapon against left-handed pitching without trying to be a hero in every at-bat.

"Don't try to do too much," Cora said. "Don't try to be the MVP of the World Series."

Pearce understands his role and is doing everything in his power to get back to being a productive member of Boston's offense. He has faith things will turn around soon.

"If baseball comes around like it is supposed to, I'm going to come out with a vengeance," Pearce said. "It's just buying that time trying to figure it out and get comfortable."

Brock Holt shoulder injury: Red Sox infielder will see doctor Tuesday in Boston

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox utility player Brock Holt will return to Boston for an examination Tuesday after injuring his right shoulder during a rehab stint with Pawtucket.

Holt, who has been on the injured list since April 6 with a scratched cornea in his right eye, will fly from Buffalo to Boston on Monday night. He went 1-for-3 for the PawSox on Friday night before a rainout and soreness in his shoulder put his rehab assignment on hold.

“He did everything here (before the rehab assignment) and he was fine,” manager Alex Cora said. “Just regular soreness like in spring training or something he went through last year. Yesterday, he tried to play catch and it was a different feeling.”

The shoulder issue is the latest setback for Holt, who suffered the eye injury when his two-year-old son, Griff, scratched him in the eye on Opening Day. He hit the IL after a week of trying to play through it and has been sidelined for almost a full month.

Holt tried various types of contact lenses with little success and had his original rehab assignment stopped after just one game. He was nearing a return to the Red Sox this time around with his eye fully healed but will now have to wait a bit longer due to the shoulder injury.

Boston Red Sox’s Alex Cora still undecided on attending White House visit

Chris Cotillo

BOSTON -- Red Sox manager Alex Cora remains undecided about attending the team’s visit to the White House next Thursday.

“I’ll let you guys know when I decide,” Cora told reporters Monday. “You guys don’t have to worry about that one. I’ll let you guys know.”

The Red Sox accepted an invitation to have their World Series championship honored at the White House in December and originally scheduled the trip for Feb. 15. Cora originally said he planned to attend but changed course after the visit was postponed to May 9 due to the government shutdown.

Sox players David Price, Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Rafael Devers, Christian Vazquez and Hector Velazquez will not attend the ceremony while others, like Xander Bogaerts and Eduardo Nunez, haven’t made their intentions clear. The organization has made the trip optional for all of its employees.

Cora has been critical of President Donald Trump before, calling his statements about Puerto Rico “disrespectful” last September. He vowed to “use his platform the right way” to help Puerto Rico if he does decide to attend the visit.

The Sox will visit the White House on an off day after a three-game series in Baltimore next week. Click here for a full list of who plans on attending the visit.

Christian Vazquez won’t join Boston Red Sox at White House next Thursday; 'It’s personal. Nothing crazy, but my opinion’

Christopher Smith

BOSTON — Christian Vazquez is the latest Boston Red Sox player who has decided not to attend the White House.

“I’m not going,” Vazquez told MassLive.com on Monday at Fenway Park. “Don’t ask why.”

The Red Sox will celebrate their 2018 World Series title next Thursday, May 9, at the White House with President Donald Trump. Vazquez was undecided until just recently.

“Personal. It’s personal,” Vazquez said. “Nothing crazy but my opinion.”

Boston Red Sox pitcher Hector Velazquez will not attend the White House visit May 9, because of the harsh remarks President Donald Trump has made about his native Mexico.

Vazquez is a native of Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

Asked if his decision has to do with President Trump’s remarks about Puerto Rico, Vazquez said, “I don’t know.”

President Trump has tweeted about the death toll after Hurricane Maria, claiming that the number of deaths had been exaggerated. Last year, Red Sox manager Alex Cora, a native of Caguas, Puerto Rico, called the tweets “disrespectful.” He also said that he was frustrated that the argument over the number of deaths had become political.

The president has said Puerto Rico received too much aid after the hurricane. President Trump also has called Puerto Rico leaders “grossly incompetent” and San Juan mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz “crazed and incompetent.”

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Five Red Sox Takes: Michael Chavis proving he belongs

Chris Mason

BOSTON — Michael Chavis is making it very, very difficult for the Red Sox to send him back down. The top prospect was a spark again last night, coming up with a pair of RBI hits as Alex Cora's club knocked off the A's, 9-4. With Eduardo Nunez, Brock Holt and Dustin Pedroia at varying stages of rehab, something will have to give at some point, but Chavis is proving he belongs in the big leagues.

Here are five takes from a long night at Fenway Park:

1. The kid can play

Since being recalled, Chavis' on-base percentage is over .400, while his OPS is north of 1.000.

With three more RBIs last night, the rookie now has eight in nine games, and he's shown impressive plate discipline as well. The book on Chavis was that he could be prone to chasing pitches, but to this point he boasts just eight strikeouts to six walks. Given the power he's provided, the Sox can certainly live with that.

2. He's fine at first, too

Chavis came through the Red Sox system as a third baseman, but with the big club beleaguered at second, he's played there much of his first recall despite just five starts in Pawtucket. Last night they asked him to play another relatively new spot.

With Steve Pearce struggling mightily, Chavis got the nod at first base and looked comfortable there, too. He began a fine double play and had no problem throwing an Oakland runner out after Eduardo

Rodriguez picked him off first.

3. Sox strike for elusive six spot

Before the game, Cora lamented his team's lack of big innings this season.

"It hasn't been consistent," Cora said. "Put a big inning together. I think the only big inning we've had the whole season was against Detroit. It's one of those we're trying to figure out."

His team did just that in the third.

Aided by a pair of A's errors, the Red Sox batted around and hung six runs on Frankie Montas, climbing out of a 4-0 hole Eduardo Rodriguez had dug them. Mookie Betts, J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts and Chavis all struck for RBIs in the rally.

4. E-Rod regresses

Just when it looked like Rodriguez was starting to roll, the young lefty took a step back again.

His stuff has always been there, but Rodriguez's unwillingness to attack with it has long been an Achilles heel. In Oakland's four-run second, Rodriguez got ahead of back-to-back batters 0-2 — he wound up walking them both.

The lefty's inefficiency led to a hook after just 4 2/3 innings and he wouldn't qualify for the win.

5. Bullpen gets it done

After Rodriguez failed to go deep into the ballgame, Boston's bullpen picked them up.

Heath Hembree stranded two runners he inherited, and then Colten Brewer, Ryan Brasier and Hector Velazquez and Matt Barnes combined for four shutout innings. Brasier was particularly good, giving the Red Sox multiple innings of relief.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox invigorated by six-run third inning

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- The grounder by Tzu-Wei Lin was headed right into 4-6-3 double-play territory and the third inning was about to end with the Red Sox still down by four runs on Monday night at Fenway Park.

But when A's second baseman Jurickson Profar threw the ball into the ground instead of shortstop Marcus Semien's glove from a close distance, opportunity struck for the defending World Series champions, and they kicked the door in on Oakland like they did to so many of their opponents last season.

What ensued was a six-run inning by the Red Sox, aided by a few more mistakes by the A's, ultimately ending in a much-needed 9-4 victory for Boston.

"Hey, like I said the other day, just a little break our way," said shortstop Xander Bogaerts. "It worked out tonight. We can't be hoping for many breaks but tonight was a good one."

If you hadn't heard, things had become a little stressful around Fenway. So maybe that zany bottom of the third inning will wind up as the one that helps the 12-17 Red Sox get their groove back.

Boston's return to championship form has to start somewhere if it's going to happen, right?

"Obviously we know we have a lot of really good players in the clubhouse, and a win like tonight and a big inning like that can change a lot of stuff," said Bogaerts. "Come in here tomorrow with the same attitude and try to do it again."

After Profar's miscue, pitcher Frankie Montas missed the bag while covering a routine grounder to first by Andrew Benintendi.

Before the game, manager Alex Cora talked about how his players needed to stop trying to be heroes and just hit line drives. On cue, Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez laced back-to-back RBI singles following Montas' error.

"Just have to do what we did," said Betts. "Build an inning some way, somehow."

Then came another line drive by Bogaerts, this one a two-run double, which A's center fielder Ramón Laureano misread off the bat. It was Laureano who tormented Bogaerts and the Red Sox multiple times in their early-season series at Oakland, when the A's won three out of four.

"We did a good job staying to the big part of the field and we weren't greedy," said Cora. "Early in the game, we took advantage of a mistake by them. Profar makes the error and then after that, it opened the gates. But we made sure [Montas] got the fastball up and we started going up the middle and the other way, so that was a good sign."

Michael Chavis, Boston's No. 1 prospect per MLB Pipeline, who doesn't seem interested in returning to the Minor Leagues, closed the scoring in the game-breaking inning with a two-run single.

"It was unbelievable," Chavis said of the rally. "We had a conversation earlier about how the vibe in the dugout is kind of contagious. Everybody knows hitting is contagious in general, but we had a conversation and we said this team is capable of putting up five runs, no problem, at any time. You look through our lineup and we definitely are. And it was kind of cool after having that conversation to come out and put up six, so it was very fun to be part of."

Speaking of fun, the Red Sox had some in the fifth when the powerful Chavis blooped an RBI single into short right field that had an exit velocity of 62 mph and an expected batting average of .230.

"You know how many times you catch barrel and get called out, so you'll take those any day," said Chavis.

After losing two straight to the Rays over the weekend, it was discomfoting for the Fenway faithful to watch the A's tag Eduardo Rodriguez for four runs in the top of the second to pin the Sox in a quick 4-0 hole.

This time, with some help from the opponent, Boston stormed back.

As for whether it will have a carryover effect, Cora sounded like he was tired of making those kind of predictions.

"It's just one game," said Cora. "You know, I'm not going to get caught up in it and say, 'We're getting better or we will be better.' It's just one day. We played good today."

J.D. returns to Sox's lineup after 2 games out

Ian Browne

BOSTON -- After struggling to score runs the previous two days while J.D. Martinez was out with back spasms, the Red Sox welcomed their star slugger back to the lineup for Monday's opener of a three-game series against the Oakland Athletics.

The Red Sox accumulated just three runs in the two games Martinez missed -- both losses to the Rays.

Martinez was in the lineup at DH, batting third, and went 1-for-4 with 2 RBIs in Boston's 9-4 win over the A's.

While Boston usually puts the lineup out roughly four hours before first pitch, the club waited an extra 90 minutes or so on Monday so Martinez could test his back in the cage and in additional pregame work. All systems were go.

There might be times this season when the Sox can cover Martinez when he misses a game or two. But the offense has been there only in glimpses, not for sustained stretches.

Martinez has easily been Boston's most potent hitter through the club's difficult first month of the season, putting up a line of .337/.414/.515 with four homers and 15 RBIs.

New setback for Holt

Red Sox super-utility player Brock Holt had finally recovered from the scratched cornea in his right eye and started a Minor League rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket on Friday night. But now there is another issue with his return to health.

Holt was scratched from Pawtucket's lineup on Sunday after experiencing discomfort in his right shoulder, and the Red Sox announced on Monday he has officially been returned from his rehab assignment due to right shoulder inflammation. He remains on the injured list and is on his way back to Boston, where the Red Sox will examine him on Tuesday.

"He was playing catch," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "He did everything here, he was fine, just regular soreness, like in Spring Training and something he went through last year. But yesterday he tried to play catch and it was a different feeling. He'll see the doctor tomorrow morning and see where he's at."

Devers needs to tighten up defense

In 2018, Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers led the Majors with 24 errors. The hope was that his performance on defense this season would be a lot cleaner than last. Thus far, that has not come to pass.

Devers entered Monday's game with eight errors, trailing Tim Beckham by three for the Major League lead. He made a costly error on Sunday that led to two unearned runs against Chris Sale in Boston's eventual 5-2 loss.

"There are certain moves that he makes before he makes a play that we've been trying to clean up," said Cora. "It's just a matter of inconsistency. He makes a great play and then the play yesterday was a routine play and he misses it, so if we had our way it'd be the other way around. Just make the routine ones and the hits are hits.

"Like I said, footwork. His throws are a lot better, the carry of the ball is a lot better than last year, [he is] actually moving better than last year. We talk to him and feel he's in a good place. We don't feel he's putting pressure on himself. We'll keep talking to him about positioning. How deep, how close and all that. He keeps working and we keep preaching the principles. We've got some good coaches that were good defensive players, Ramon [Vazquez] and Carlos [Febles], so they have a pretty good idea of him. It's a just a matter of being inconsistent."

Cora will soon reveal White House plans

Cora has yet to say if he will join the Red Sox for the team's optional trip to the White House on May 9 -- the day after the team completes a three-game series in Baltimore. The visit is the customary White House celebration for the World Series-winning team.

Several Red Sox players have chosen not to go, including Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., David Price, Devers and Christian Vazquez. But many will attend, including Chris Sale, Martinez, Rick Porcello, Nathan Eovaldi and Mitch Moreland.

Red Sox ownership has made it clear from the start that the trip is considered optional.

"I'll let you guys know when I decide," said Cora. "You guys don't have to worry about that one -- I'll let you guys know."

*** *WEEI.com***

This Red Sox' post-Craig Kimbrel plan is one thing that is actually working out

Rob Bradford

Alex Cora wasn't about to overreact, and he shouldn't have. The Red Sox won Monday night thanks in large part to a six-run third inning. In the big picture, it was a step the right direction, little more.

"It's just one game, you know," Cora said after the 9-4 win over the A's at Fenway Park. "I'm not going to get caught up in, we're getting better or we will be better. It's just one day. We played good today." (For a recap of the Red Sox' win, [click here](#).)

There is still a lot to fix, a reality that would have put on display once again if not for some key hits in that big inning by Xander Bogaerts and Michael Chavis. But there was one aspect of the Red Sox' 12th win of the season that they could lean on when searching for long-term optimism.

This post-Craig Kimbrel plan is actually working.

The reminder of how generally well Cora's late-inning relief-pitching blueprint came this time in the seventh inning, which is fitting considering that's the frame we've been led to focus on more than ever thanks to the new wave way of bullpen thinking.

With the Red Sox clinging to a three-run lead and American League home run champ Khris Davis coming to the plate Cora turned to one of his two kind-of-closers, Ryan Brasier. Designated pitcher vs. designated hitter. The result was exactly what Cora had drawn up, four straight sliders led to an inning-ending strikeout.

The other piece of the Red Sox' high leverage relief-pitching puzzle Matt Barnes would get the opportunity for the save this time around, picking up his second of the season by recording the game's final two outs.

Sure, Kimbrel would be nice to have for any team. He is a Hall of Fame closer still at the peak of his powers. And a case could be made that the real way to go would be to live life with Kimbrel and the current closers, thickening what has been an occasionally thin bullpen. But certainly, the way things are going for this team, that idea is far closer to luxury than a necessity.

This has been the part of the plan that has actually come up roses.

The Red Sox' pitchers currently hold the American League's lowest batting average against in close and late situations, and from the seventh inning and on. That's not a coincidence. As Monday night showed once again, Barnes and Brasier have been the weapons Cora had been banking on.

In the seventh inning this season, for instance, the two have combined to limit hitters to just one hit in 10 at-bats, striking out seven. The ninth? Batters are 6-for-35 against the duo, with Barnes striking out seven of his 15 opponents.

In fact, in close and late situations hitters are just 12-for-72 vs. the pair, with Barnes striking out nearly half of his foes (18 of the 37).

Another part of the plan was to use Barnes and/or Brasier against the opponents' iron, which was clearly the case in the Davis at-bat. Well, when facing hitters in the No. 3, 4 or 5 spots the two relievers have limited their opposition to just five hits in 27 at-bats, with Barnes getting 12 of his 18 outs on strikeouts.

So, save the screaming and yelling for something else other than bemoaning the absence of Kimbrel. There's enough elsewhere to focus on and fix than something that is actually working.

Five things that are dragging down Red Sox

Rob Bradford

I would say this is starting to feel a whole lot like 2014 but it's not. At this time that year, there was probably a bit less panic considering the Red Sox were two games under .500 and three games out of first place. This time around they are sitting at 11-17 while residing 7 1/2 games back of first-place Tampa Bay.

It really wasn't until a Mid-May 10-game losing streak that wheels truly felt like they were coming off that 2014 club.

This time around? These are wobbly wheels.

The problem for the Red Sox is that there are bizarrely too many issues to zero in on. For a while, it was undeniably starting pitching but now that concern has company.

Here are five of the issues Alex Cora and Co. are dealing with which should jump to the front of the line:

THE STARS AREN'T BEING STARS

Sunday had all the makings of an opportunity for an ace, getting to go up against the team your chasing, with one of their best pitchers on the mound and while coming off a loss. This is why Chris Sale is here. What the Red Sox got was far from the dominant portrait they signed up for.

It was almost as if Sale's existence in the Sox' loss Sunday was a microcosm of this entire team: Uncomfortably unexpected.

There is a reason all of this contract talk dominated the offseason and spring training. When you get the kind of performance and production the Sox saw from the likes of Sale, Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Andrew Benintendi, J.D. Martinez, David Price, Nathan Eovaldi, Rick Porcello and other foundation pieces you expect more of the same just seven months later. For whatever reason, the images and expectations have changed.

Martinez has been the best, but now his back is acting up. Betts, Benintendi and Bogaerts? They've been decent but not good enough to strike the kind of fear in the hearts of opposing pitchers this offense really, really needs. Sale, Price, Porcello and Eovaldi have been better of late, but typically just off enough that weekends like we just witnessed keep popping up.

Who is the Red Sox' All-Star right now? Maybe Martinez. Perhaps Matt Barnes. For the highest payroll in baseball that is not a good sign.

STEVE PEARCE AND JACKIE BRADLEY JR. CAN'T HIT

In case you forgot, back in March both Pearce and Bradley Jr. were in the conversation for hitting in the coveted No. 3 spot. (More Pearce than Bradley, but the outfielder's early-March optimism had surfaced the idea of increased responsibilities.)

They were both, in their own ways, being counted on to make this whole thing tick. Their presences thus far are serving as the poster men for this tale of woe.

Of qualifying players, Bradley Jr. heads into Monday carrying the worst batting average in the American League (.150), with only Cincy's Scott Schebler and old friend Ian Kinsler managing worse clips. The Sox outfielder also has the rock bottom OPS in the majors, sitting at .421.

While Pearce doesn't have enough at-bats to qualify for such honors, his numbers are worse. The guy who was supposed to be the Sox' weapon against lefty pitching has four hits in 39 at-bats (.103) with an OPS of .295.

If Sandy Leon struggles that's one thing. He never was going to be counted on to produce offensively entering this season. These two? That's a different story.

RAFAEL DEVERS HASN'T TAKEN THAT NEXT STEP

Devers is a proven major league hitter and hasn't fallen off a cliff in that respect. The 22-year-old is hitting a respectable .287 with a .731 OPS. But the idea of this being his breakout season is starting to seem like a bit of a reach.

The lack of a single home run isn't ideal, but it would seem to be wise to wait on that panic button. The defense is a different story.

Devers continues to keep giving the opposition extra outs at a time this Red Sox team simply can't afford to do so. He is once again leading all major league third baseman in errors with eight, three more than the next guy, Seattle's Ryon Healey, who made three in one inning.

The team's overall defense hasn't been good (22), which is the go-to example of how these Red Sox are failing to lock up the little things that seemed so seamless a year ago.

THERE HAVEN'T BEEN A LOT OF PLAN B'S

Christian Vazquez has taken off somewhat since the Sox parted ways with Blake Swihart. But other than that the Red Sox' opportunities to adjust to adversity haven't seen great results.

There was always the possibility Dustin Pedroia would need more time, and that's where Eduardo Nunez and Brock Holt came in. In large part due to injuries, neither have contributed in any form or fashion.

Leon's reintroduction hasn't done much, with his catcher's ERA sitting at 6.62.

Finding consistency from the second half of the bullpen has been a challenge, with the Red Sox still trying to figure out what they have in Tyler Thornburg, Heath Hembree and Colten Brewer before permanently dipping into the minors.

There have been some adjustments which have helped some an occasional day, with Michael Chavis and Marcus Walden stepping up to provide much-needed production. But it sure seems like there haven't been nearly enough patches to put over this many leaks.

BAD STARTS AREN'T HELPING

Simply put, last year it felt like something was always going to right. This time around it feels the Red Sox are waiting for the next thing to go wrong. Maybe that's because it usually has felt off from Jump St. in most of these games.

The Red Sox have fourth-lowest batting average in Innings 1-6 (.216) and fifth-worst OPS (.648). Within the same span of innings the Sox pitchers carry the third-worst worst ERA as a group (5.73).

In 28 games, the Red Sox have come to bat in the fifth inning with the lead just seven times. So, there you go.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Instead of waiting for the real Chris Sale, maybe we should redefine what that means

John Tomase

We've recycled the phrase since his first start, but it has grown as stale as his fastball. Perhaps it's time to stop waiting for "the real Chris Sale."

Maybe we're looking at him.

On Sunday, Sale delivered another flawed outing in a 5-2 loss to the Rays that dropped the Red Sox to 11-17 and Sale to 0-5. He probably deserved slightly better -- he limited Tampa to four hits and two earned runs while striking out eight over seven innings -- but let's not get carried away. He pitched well enough to take a no-decision instead of another L.

He allowed a two-run homer in the first to a batter who hadn't left the park since last July, and he compounded a Rafael Devers error by serving up a two-run triple with two outs an inning later. His fastball, briefly back in the 95-97 mph range a couple of starts ago, slipped back to 91-92, and Sale once again didn't trust it. Nearly half of his 111 pitches were sliders.

At this time last year, Sale was 2-1 with a 2.31 ERA and the Red Sox had won four of his six starts. Now he's winless with a 6.30 ERA and the Red Sox are 0-6 when he takes the mound.

MLB Power Rankings: Where do the Sox stand after their slow start?

If there's a positive, it's that Sale settled down and limited Tampa to one hit over his final five innings, but by that point the damage had been done. Six starts into the season, Sale has run out of things to say.

"I keep saying the same things over and over, but it's a step in the right direction," Sale told reporters. "I know nobody wants to hear that. I'd love to be sitting up here talking about wins and all of that, but at the end of the day, you've got to do what you've got to do and I'm grinding. I'm trying to find a way. It doesn't matter what I show up with on a given day. It doesn't matter where our team is at or who we're facing or who's in the box, whatever. Got to find a way to win. It's kind of the double-edged sword of this game. It's fun when you're on one side but it kind of sucks when you're on the other side of it, so you've just got to do what you've got to do to get on the right side and keep winning games."

That 4-0 hole on Sunday proved insurmountable against overpowering Rays right-hander Tyler Glasnow, who featured an upper-90s fastball while striking out nine and limiting the Red Sox to two runs over 6.2 innings. He looked more like Sale than Sale.

Unfortunately, that guy has been missing in action since last July, and while it's too soon to say he's not coming back, it's clearly time to be concerned.

"I'm sitting here like a broken record," Sale said. "What am I, six starts in? I've sucked every bit of every last one of them. I don't want to sit here and say the same things over and over, but hopefully sooner rather than later. That's for damn sure. Like I said, this is a result-oriented game. No one cares about the hard work. No one cares about the effort. We've got to start winning games. I appreciate the effort. I appreciate the hard work, and I know on the other end of that comes success, but we've got to find a way."

With the Red Sox just two games out of last place, Sale deserves a large portion of the blame. Had he produced at even last April's level, the Red Sox would be at least 15-13, and probably even better, since he wouldn't have killed the bullpen with a series of four- and five-inning starts.

The Red Sox haven't seen that Sale in a while, but baseball can be cruel that way.

"I mean it's a love-hate relationship," Sale said. "I've loved this game for the same reason I hate it. Today is one of those days where, don't give up a two-run homer in the first inning, maybe we've got a chance, or you find your groove a little bit earlier, or this or that, whatever. I've got to find a way. I've got to find a way."

He's still searching and we're still waiting, and it's enough to make you wonder exactly who the real Chris Sale is, anyway.

It turns out Sandy Leon wasn't the savior after all, which reminds us of Doug Mirabelli

John Tomase

Theo Epstein doesn't regret much about his tenure as Red Sox general manager, but bringing back Doug Mirabelli is an exception.

In 2006, Mirabelli famously received a police escort to Fenway Park after being reacquired from the Padres to once again serve as Tim Wakefield's personal catcher. The Red Sox had shipped Mirabelli west that winter for second baseman Mark Loretta and acquired Josh Bard from Cleveland to handle Wakefield's knuckler.

It was a disaster. Bard allowed 10 passed balls in five starts, and Epstein panicked. He brought Mirabelli back on May 1 in exchange for Bard and promising reliever Cla Meredith.

Mirabelli ended up hitting .193 in 59 games as Jason Varitek's backup, while Meredith dazzled in San Diego, posting a 1.07 ERA in 45 appearances.

Maybe this is the real Chris Sale

"No offense to anyone involved in the deal, but I point to that trade because it was the worst process I've ever had," Epstein told the Hardball Times two years ago. "We were faced with a challenging situation, Bard not being able to adjust quickly to handling the knuckleball.

"Instead of being patient and coming up with a creative situation, we got caught up in some of the panic that was enveloping our clubhouse. I got too close to the situation and made a really reactionary move."

The Mirabelli deal feels relevant today, because the Red Sox made a similarly rushed decision at backup catcher two weeks ago, designating the versatile and forever-promising Blake Swihart to summon Sandy Leon from Triple-A Pawtucket to serve as Christian Vazquez's backup.

With the starting pitching staff delivering one abysmal start after another, Swihart became a convenient scapegoat, particularly since he's considered a subpar receiver. Many in the organization had wanted Leon to open the season with the team, anyway, after building trust with him during four seasons as a backup and occasional starter.

The Red Sox made the transition official by trading Swihart to the Diamondbacks on April 19 for outfielder Marcus Wilson in a swap of stalled prospects.

Ten days later, where do we stand? Leon's arrival has had a negligible impact on the staff and his bat barely registers for statistical purposes. If there's a saving grace, it's that Swihart hasn't done anything with his opportunity in Arizona, either.

MLB Power Rankings: Where do the Sox stand after their slow start?

The stats are hideous. Leon is hitting .091 in five games and Red Sox pitchers own a 6.62 ERA with him behind the plate. A year after catching two-thirds of Chris Sale's appearances and guiding him to a 2.04

ERA in those 18 games, Leon was on the bench for Sunday's 5-2 loss to the Rays. Vazquez caught Sale, who delivered his first seven-inning outing of the season.

Leon's 1-for-11 since returning is actually percentage points better than Swihart's 1-for-12 (.083) in Arizona. Swihart stroked a pinch single in his D'backs debut and has only reached base once since. He has been limited to the corner outfield spots thus far, with as many as four catchers ahead of him on the depth chart: Alex Avila (who is on the IL), Carson Kelly, John Ryan Murphy, and Caleb Joseph.

The Red Sox may not end up regretting the deal if Swihart fails to develop, but it doesn't erase questions about the process that prompted his departure. Just ask Epstein. He knows what it's like to think a backup catcher is the answer to your problems.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Michael Chavis has earned the right to stay with Sox

Sean McAdam

By Thursday, the Red Sox could have as many as three infielders on rehab assignments with various minor league affiliates.

Eduardo Nunez (back) is already with the Pawtucket Red Sox. Dustin Pedroia (knee) is set to join the Portland Sea Dogs. Brock Holt (scratched cornea) is in some limbo, as he returned to Boston on Monday to have a sore shoulder examined.

At some point, however, all three players will matriculate back to Boston, creating a roster logjam. Eventually, the Sox will have to move some players out to allow for the return of the three injured players.

Tzu-Wei Lin is an easy call. Though Lin is a strong defender and versatile enough to play all over the infield as well as the outfield, he has remaining options and can be returned to Pawtucket. An extra pitcher — the Sox are carrying 13, one more than is optimum — can be moved out, creating a second spot while allowing the Sox to have four players on the bench, one more than they now have.

After that, it gets complicated. One more player will eventually have to be returned to the minors in order to accommodate all three players currently on rehab.

But one thing is already clear: when all the musical chairs and rosters machinations get played out, Michael Chavis has to remain. In a little more than a week and a half, he's demonstrated that he belongs.

When he was first promoted from Pawtucket halfway through the last Red Sox trip, Chavis appeared to be a spare part, an extra body to help out in the infield while the team battled through some injuries. Only the day before he was summoned, manager Alex Cora expressed some reservations about his readiness to play second base at the major league level.

But since arriving, Chavis has found himself in the starting lineup every game but his very first. He's started six games at second, one at third and another (Monday night) at first base.

He's reached base safely in all but one of those games, cranked three home runs and knocked in eight runs. He's put together a slash line of .286/.429/.643 and demonstrated — in an admittedly small sample size — that's he hardly overmatched facing major league pitching.

The biggest question, as Cora had hinted, was his acumen in the field, and while he's had occasional lapses at second — on Sunday, he pivoted on the double play and made a wild throw that he never should have attempted — he's been perfectly acceptable at the position. Drafted as a shortstop, Chavis is comfortable at the corner infield spots.

On Monday, in the Red Sox' 9-4 victory over the A's, his versatility came in handy. Mitch Moreland is mired in one of his patented slumps (0-for-16) and Steve Pearce — with four hits all season — was hardly an attractive alternative, especially against a right-handed pitcher. So, Cora wrote Chavis's name in the lineup at first base.

Result? Chavis knocked out two more hits, including a big two-run single to center in the Red Sox' big six-run third inning. He also turned a nice 3-6-3 double play at first, a position he hasn't played a great deal.

Of course, it's his bat that the Sox value most, as they struggle at times to score runs (two runs or fewer in three of the previous five games before Monday's breakout). At a time when the Sox are getting next-to-no production from the bottom third of their batting order, Chavis helps to lengthen the lineup.

Unlike a lot of young hitters transitioning to the big leagues, many of whom have a habit of expanding the strike zone in their eagerness to contribute, Chavis has nearly as many walks (six) as strikeouts.

And his ability to move around the infield could allow Cora to spot him at a number of positions. If Rafael Devers continues to be plagued by errors at third, Chavis offers an alternative. It's a given that Pedroia will need occasional time off when he returns to second. And Chavis offers a potent bat off the bench, an important asset given the struggles of both catchers and slumping center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr.

The hard part, naturally, will be in determining whom to sacrifice in order to extend Chavis's stay in the majors. Would the Sox think about releasing Nunez, who's contributed next to nothing in the first month? Holt's lefty bat and the ability to play everywhere but behind the plate would seem to mark him safe, and Pedroia isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Perhaps, as often happens, something will transpire to prolong Chavis's tenure. Maybe Holt will need extended recovery time because of the latest setback with the shoulder and a tough call won't have to be made for several more weeks.

But when that time comes, keeping Chavis around shouldn't even be a question. Or, if it is, the answer should be: yes.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 9, A's 4 – Red Sox capitalize on A's mistakes

Sean McAdam

A's open door, Red Sox walk through: The Oakland A's were spotted a 4-0 lead, but then invited the Red Sox to climb back into the game. In the bottom of the third inning, the A's committed two glaring errors and the Sox took full advantage. First, with one out and one on, Tzu-Wei Lin hit a tailor-made double play ball to A's second baseman Jurickson Profar, who seemed to freeze, then inexplicably threw the ball past shortstop Marcus Semien. Instead of an inning-ending double play, the A's gave the Sox first-and-second one out. Then, compounding things, when Andrew Benintendi hit a chopper to the right side, starter Frankie Montas was late covering first and couldn't get his foot on the bag, enabling Benintendi to reach and the other runners to advance. That loaded the bases and Montas came unglued thereafter, allowing three straight hits. By the time the inning was over, the Sox had scored six runs — every one of them unearned.

Chavis keeps hitting: Moved over to first base for a game as slumping Mitch Moreland (0-for-16) got the night off, Michael Chavis continued to wield a hot bat. After hitting into a double play in the second inning, he singled home two runs with a sharp single to center to put the Red Sox ahead to stay, part of the team's six-run third inning. Then, in the fifth, he placed a bloop single into shallow right, enough to score Rafael Devers from second base. In nine games since being promoted, Chavis has now delivered eight runs and has an OPS of 1.072. At a time when the Red Sox lineup had been a bit top heavy, his presence in the middle of the order has helped to lengthen the lineup and provide some punch in the lower half. Equally as impressive was that both of Chavis's run-scoring hits were either up the middle or to the opposite field.

Poor second inning dooms Rodriguez: Eduardo Rodriguez turned in a shaky start, costing himself a win, and very nearly doing the same for the Red Sox. In the top of the second inning, Rodriguez had 0-and-2 counts to the first two A's hitters he faced; he went on to walk both hitters — first Chad Pinder, then Kendrys Morales — and both came around to score as the walks paved the way for the A's four-run inning. To his credit, Rodriguez made some adjustments and retired seven in a row at one point. But the long second inning ran his pitch count up so high that when he got into more trouble in the fifth — allowing three hits to the first four batters he faced — Alex Cora had no choice to lift him at 97 pitches, an out shy of qualifying for the victory.

TURNING POINT

There were two out in the third, with the Sox having come back to tie the game 4-4. And just when it seemed like the A's were going to get out of the inning without further damage Chavis drilled a two-run single up the middle, putting the Sox ahead to stay.

TWO UP

Rafael Devers: Devers had a rough afternoon, committing an error that led to two unearned runs. But he handled all his chances without incident Monday night and added two hits and two runs scored at the plate.

Mookie Betts: His hot streak continued at the plate with a walk and three more hits. Betts has a five-game hitting streak and has reached base safely in 10 consecutive games.

ONE DOWN

Brandon Workman: On the one hand, Workman continues to be almost impossible to hit, allowing two hits all season. But control continues to be an issue. He walked two hitters last night — giving him 12 in 12.2 innings this season.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

“It’s just one game; I’m not going to get caught up in ‘we’re getting better.’” – Alex Cora.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

Seven of the Red Sox' 12 wins this season have come from behind.
After going 0-for-11 with RISP in the last two games, the Sox were 6-for-14.
Mookie Betts has reached base 25 times in his last 10 games.
Ryan Brasier earned his first win of the season.
Rafael Devers is hitting .366 at home this year.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and A's continue their series Tuesday at 7:10 with RHP Rick Porcello (1-3 7.43) vs. RHP Aaron Brooks (2-2, 5.33)

*** *The Athletic***

Can the Red Sox come back from a miserable April? Why not? Last year's Dodgers did

Chad Jennings

It was one year ago Monday that Dodgers manager Dave Roberts considered his fourth-place team – already seven games out of the division, its offense lost, its pitching staff sputtering – and declared, flat out, that his expectations had not changed.

“When it’s all said and done,” Roberts said, “the Dodgers will be at the top of the division. I believe it. We believe it.”

The Dodgers were 12-15 at the time. Within two days, they would be 12-17. In less than three weeks, they would be 10 games below .500.

They would ultimately win the division and play in the World Series.

The quote, the date and the record resonate today because of the Red Sox. After Monday’s win, the defending World Series champions are, themselves, 12-17, in fourth place, 7 1/2 games out of the division. Their offense has occasionally vanished. Their pitching staff has sputtered. Their fans have grown frustrated and restless.

Their manager, it seems, has not.

“Sometimes, you see where we (are) and people start trying to do too much,” Alex Cora said. “And it should be the other way around. Don’t try to do too much. Just try to play the part. Just contribute and big things can happen. I think that’s the message for everybody. Like, hey, it hasn’t been great for three weeks. Like, we get it. We understand. But at the same time, we know we’re very talented. We have a good team.”

That’s the way they won on Monday. After falling behind 4-0 in the second, the Red Sox rallied with six runs in the fourth. It started with a walk and two errors. There were three RBI singles and a game-tying double. The lineup tacked on insurance runs late, and the bullpen closed the door. No one did too much. Everyone played his part.

“It’s just one game, you know,” Cora said. “I’m not going to get caught up in, we’re getting better or we will be better. It’s just one day. We played good today.”

Yet last year’s Dodgers offer hope that there’s a meaningful turnaround in the works.

The 2018 Dodgers were awful through the middle of May, worse than the Red Sox at various points, and then they suddenly couldn’t lose. They went a month without back-to-back losses and played 31 games over .500 the rest of the way. They traded for Manny Machado in mid-July but were already in first place by then.

There are, as is obvious, parallels to be drawn between the Dodgers’ slow start a year ago and the Red Sox’ brutal beginning this season. The question is, are there opportunities for the Red Sox to follow the Dodgers lead in turning this season into something worth remembering?

Get a key player healthy

For the Dodgers, it was Justin Turner. The bearded third baseman had a fractured wrist at the beginning of 2018 and missed the first month and a half. He returned with a .924 OPS, the best on the team. Turner got healthy, and the Dodgers almost immediately became an elite team again.

This won’t work for the Red Sox. Unless Dustin Pedroia has another MVP-type performance in him, or Nathan Eovaldi can pitch for four months the way he did in October, the Red Sox can’t expect a medical report to drastically change their fortunes, and their best hitters – Betts, Martinez, Bogaerts, Benintendi – are already playing well.

The star player the Red Sox are missing is Chris Sale. He’s made six starts and the Red Sox have lost each of them. Getting Sale back to his old self would be a Turner-like boost. They just have to hope Sale doesn’t

instead follow the lead of Corey Seager, who got off to an underwhelming start with the Dodgers and wound up needing season-ending surgery after a month.

Ride the hot hand of the new guy

For the Dodgers, it was Max Muncy. The minor league veteran was called up on April 17 and made his season debut in the Dodgers' 16th game of the year. He went 1-for-1 as a pinch hitter. It wasn't long before Muncy was an everyday guy, getting reps at first, second and third while moving into a run-producing spot in the middle of the order.

In this, the Red Sox might have a near perfect comparison. He doesn't have the same out-of-nowhere backstory, but prospect Michael Chavis was called up on April 19 and made his debut in the Red Sox' 21st game of the season. He went 1-for-1 as a pinch hitter. He's already become an everyday guy, getting his reps at first, second and third. He had the go-ahead base hit on Monday.

The Red Sox are not built to mix and match the way the Dodgers were last year. The Red Sox don't have a first baseman who can slide seamlessly into center field (like Cody Bellinger), or a center fielder who can take over at shortstop (like Chris Taylor). The Red Sox cannot as easily integrate new ideas into their daily formula.

But Chavis has given them a boost, and even with three other infielders currently working their way back from nagging injuries, the Red Sox might owe it to themselves to keep finding him at-bats.

Find a way to make the pitching staff work

The Dodgers' early pitching issues were different from the Red Sox' current problems. The Dodgers rotation was pretty good out of the gate last season. Through their first 28 games, Clayton Kershaw, Alex Wood, Kenta Maeda and Hyun-Jin Ryu each had an ERA of 4.11 or better. Kershaw and Ryu had ERAs in the 2.00s. The Dodgers' problem was a bullpen with no answers. Even Kenley Jansen was having a hard time.

The Red Sox are in – kind of – the opposite situation. Their late innings have been solid, but their rotation has been a mess outside of David Price. Monday's starter Eduardo Rodriguez had appeared to turn a corner in recent starts, but he couldn't pitch out of the fifth against the A's and the bullpen had to pick him up with 4 1/3 scoreless innings.

The Dodgers wound up with a good pitching staff last season. They had the second-lowest team ERA in the big leagues, and even their bullpen ERA wound up being 3.72 (same as the Red Sox). They got there with an all-hands-on-deck approach. Seven different Dodgers made at least 15 starts last season, and 17 made at least 12 relief appearances. Two Dodgers pitchers did both.

The Red Sox have so far held off on any massive change to their pitching staff. They have five active pitchers with an ERA above 6.00, but all have been with the team all year. Of the five minor league call-ups added to the bullpen, only Marcus Walden has stuck around to play a meaningful role. Travis Lakins and Darwinzon Hernandez were sent back almost immediately after impressive debuts.

Trust the hitters to hit

Through their first 28 games, the 2018 Dodgers had a .719 collective OPS that ranked 15th in baseball. They were held to two runs or less in 10 of their first 18 games, and they won only twice when scoring fewer than four runs (meaning the pitching staff rarely had a game when it made a low-scoring night hold up). The Dodgers ultimately finished the year with a .774 OPS, third-best in the game.

Much of that was the return of Turner, and some of it was the addition of Machado as an injury replacement for Seager, but some of the improvement was also because Taylor starting getting on base

again, and Yasiel Puig began to hit for power again, and Joc Pederson settled in as a role player to crush righties.

The Red Sox offense has been similarly underwhelming to start this season. They rank 21st in team OPS just one year after leading the majors. They've scored two runs or less eight times, and they've won only once when scoring less than four runs (their pitching staff, too, has rarely made one of those low-scoring nights hold up).

But there have been signs of life with Chavis's arrival, and in Mookie Betts' 10-game hot streak, and in Rafael Devers' improved on-base percentage and in J.D. Martinez's continued excellence. One can make the case that the Red Sox neglected their bullpen this winter, but there's little reason for their offense to be this much worse than last season.

*** *The East Bay Times***

A's four-run lead goes poof as Red Sox take opener at Fenway

Craig Forde

BOSTON – An early four-run lead was not nearly enough for the A's on Monday night at Fenway Park as they dropped the opener of their three-game series versus the defending World Series champion Red Sox, 9-4.

After a scoreless first, the visitors came out swinging in the top of the second inning, plating all four of their runs in the frame to gain the early advantage.

Jurickson Profar sparked the rally with a pulled single into the left-field corner which one-hopped the Green Monster, scoring Chad Pinder and Ramon Laureano. Josh Phegley and Matt Chapman each followed with RBI hits.

Starter Frankie Montas allowed singles in each of the first two innings but was backed each time by inning-ending doubles plays.

Boston would put an end to that trend in the third, scoring six runs on the heels of six straight batters reaching base after the first out of the inning.

Following a walk, Profar would err on a throw to second base which was followed by an error on Montas who was deemed to have come off the first base bag after coming over to cover on a slow Andrew Benintendi grounder. The bang-bang play was called safe initially and was upheld after video reply.

With the bases loaded, Boston unleashed three consecutive RBI hits, highlighted by a game-tying Xander Bogaerts two-RBI double to center that was misplayed by Laureano who was forced to retreat into the triangle for the sharply hit ball after initially taking two-steps in on the play.

The Sox would plate another in the fifth to run Montas from the game after giving up seven runs, one earned, on eight hits and two walks. It was his shortest outing of the season in six starts.

The A's would try to muster a late push, putting two runners on with no outs in the seventh to no avail and then loading the bases with one out in the ninth before Boston's Matt Barnes came in to shut the door on any comeback hopes.

The loss was Oakland's fourth straight, all coming on the road at the start of a nine-game road swing, pushing them to 4-9 away from home and 14-17 overall on the year.

*** *The San Francisco Chronicle***

Miscue by A's Jurickson Profar ignites Boston's winning rally

Susan Slusser

BOSTON — Jurickson Profar's day got off to such a promising start: The A's struggling second baseman provided a two-run single in the second as Oakland jumped out to a four-run lead at Fenway Park.

In the third, though, Profar's continued poor play afield helped sink his team. He badly muffed a throw to start what should have been an inning-ending double play, and Boston went on to score six runs in the inning en route to a 9-4 victory, sending the A's to their fourth consecutive loss.

Profar has been disastrous defensively; his seven errors lead all major-league second basemen, and he's batting .165. But Oakland's options at second base are fairly limited because Profar is out of options, and the A's are unlikely to give up on him a month into the season. He's 26, was once baseball's top prospect and he's coming off a good offensive year. Yes, he did lead the majors in errors last season, but the bulk of them came at shortstop, not his usual position, and the A's figured he'd settle in quickly at second base and be all the better for playing just one spot.

That has not been the case. Profar's throwing has been suspect, most head-scratchingly on some of the easiest throws, leading scouts to speculate he's got at least a slight case of the yips — the more simple the toss, sometimes the more he's struggled to make it.

Monday, he said the ball stuck in his glove a bit “and then I speeded up,” he said. “I didn't even grab the ball.”

Profar said he plans to work with shortstop Marcus Semien, who completely revamped his own defensive game under the tutelage of coach Ron Washington four years ago. “He talked to me about what he did, so I'm going to follow his steps and try to get better,” Profar said.

“Different position, different angles,” manager Bob Melvin said. “We're working. At some point, he'll get comfortable there.”

Given Profar's difficulties, Oakland had appeared poised to use Chad Pinder more often at second base, but with the team currently limited to a two-man bench, Profar, a switch hitter, was at second base against lefty Eduardo Rodriguez with Pinder, a right-handed hitter, in left instead of lefty-hitting Robbie Grossman. Should reliever Lou Trivino come back soon, the team could dip down to Triple-A Las Vegas for another infielder, such as Franklin Barreto or Jorge Mateo. Barreto, who has had numerous stints in Oakland, is batting .192. Mateo, who never has been called up, is hitting .346.

Montas had been dealing up until Profar's blunder, and had Profar made the easy flip to Semien on the grounder by No. 9 hitter Tzu-Wei Lin, it likely would have started the third inning-ending double play in a row induced by the Oakland starter.

“It's frustrating especially for Frankie, because he was having a good game,” Profar said. “And it got out of hand because of that (error), I think.”

Andrew Benintendi, the next batter, grounded to first, and Kendrys Morales made the toss to Montas, a half-step ahead of Benintendi, but first-base umpire Tom Hallion indicated that Montas had not stepped on the base.

The A's challenged the call, and on replays, Montas appeared to step with his foot right next to the bag, even if he did not step on top of it. But the call stood.

“I felt like I touched the base,” Montas said. “But there's nothing I can do about it.”

The bases were loaded with one out, and the Red Sox were off to the races. Mookie Betts drove in a run with a single, J.D. Martinez another with a base hit, Xander Bogaerts two with a double to deep center, and Michael Chavis two more with a base hit.

Six runs, none of them earned, and Montas, who'd thrown only 14 pitches total over the first two innings, had his pitch count soar to 48. He said the errors got into his head a little bit and he wasn't making pitches and felt "lost" a little bit. "But errors are part of the game," he said. "I still need to stay in the game and make better pitches."

Montas allowed an earned run in the fifth when Rafael Devers doubled and Chavis sent him in with a bloop single. Montas has yet to allow more than three earned runs in a start this season and his ERA is 2.97.

The A's started their second-inning rally against Rodriguez when Pinder and Morales each drew walks after starting 0-2. Profar then smacked a single off the Green Monster to send in both men, and took second on a wild pitch. Josh Phegley drove in Profar with a single, and with two outs, Matt Chapman doubled in Phegley.

Profar hit a blast to center in the ninth, but to the very deepest part of the park, and Jackie Bradley Jr. ran it down right in front of the 420-foot sign.

At 14-17, Oakland is a season-worst three games below .500 and the team is 4-9 on the road. "I believe we're going to jump back on it," Montas said. "The guys have started feeling better at the plate, it's just time. When we start, we're going to win."

*** *Associated Press***

Bogaerts' double highlights 6-run rally; Red Sox beat A's

BOSTON -- Xander Bogaerts found a way to neutralize Oakland's dynamic center fielder.

Bogaerts hit a tying two-run double that sailed over the head of Ramon Laureano, who made a bad read during a six-run third inning, and the Boston Red Sox beat the Athletics 9-4 on Monday night.

When Oakland took three of four from the Red Sox earlier in the season, Laureano threw Bogaerts out in consecutive games to secure wins. He also cut down Mookie Betts to preserve a victory.

"I hit (it) good, but right at him," Bogaerts said of his tying double.

Rookie Michael Chavis drove in three runs and Betts had three singles for Boston, which had lost two straight to AL East-leading Tampa Bay.

Boston also got some other help from the Athletics, who committed two errors in the big inning.

"Fortunately, we had an error there to get it started, a couple of singles and a big double there," Betts said. "Just showed what we can do."

Trailing 4-0, the Red Sox took advantage of two errors to score six unearned runs, getting Bogaerts' double over Laureano, who initially charged in before turning and running to where it bounced. Chavis followed that with a two-run single that made it 6-4.

Betts and J.D. Martinez had RBI singles after second baseman Jurickson Profar bounced a throw to second for the first error and Andrew Benintendi reached when Frankie Montas missed the bag covering first.

"It got stuck in my glove a little bit and then I sped it up. I didn't even grab the ball," Profar said.

Oakland manager Bob Melvin felt Profar rushed the throw.

"It looked like he just didn't get a great handle on it and then tried to be quick with the throw," he said. "Just kind of obviously threw it low. You've got a chance for a double play and get out of the inning there, and it just got out of hand a little bit."

Ryan Brasier (1-0) got four outs and was credited with the victory after starter Eduardo Rodriguez failed to go five innings with Boston leading. Matt Barnes got the final two outs on two pitches for his second save after the Athletics loaded the bases.

Profar had a two-run single for Oakland, which lost its fourth straight. Montas (4-2) gave up seven runs, one earned, in 4 1/3 innings.

Oakland had taken a 4-0 lead in the second on Profar's two-run single, an RBI single by Josh Phegley and a run-scoring double from Matt Chapman.

Rodriguez gave up four runs in 4 2/3 innings.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Athletics: OF Mark Canha was placed on the 10-day injured list with a sprained right wrist. Melvin said he's scheduled to have an MRI on Tuesday.

Red Sox: Manager Alex Cora said the team was sitting down with 2B Dustin Pedroia (left knee irritation) Monday night to map out a plan for his rehab stint that will likely begin Thursday at Double-A Portland. ... INF Eduardo Nunez (mid-back strain) started a rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket Monday, going 0 for 4. ... Utility INF Brock Holt (scratched right cornea) returned from his rehab assignment because of a new injury, to his right shoulder.

EMPTY BENCH

With Canha going on the IL, the Athletics had only two players on the bench -- OF Robbie Grossman and C Nick Hundley.

"It makes it a little bit challenging," Melvin said. "We'll play with the nine guys on the field today and have one potential spot to do something different."

Both entered during the seventh inning -- Grossman pinch-hit and Hundley went in to catch.

ANNIVERSARY

Thirty-three-years ago, Boston's Roger Clemens set a major league record, striking out 20 against Seattle. It was his first of his two 20-strikeout games. The other came 10 years later at Detroit's Tiger Stadium.

UP NEXT

Athletics: RHP Aaron Brooks (2-2, 5.33 ERA) is in line to start Tuesday. He went six scoreless innings versus the Red Sox on April 1.

Red Sox: RHP Rick Porcello (1-3, 7.43) got his only win of the season in his previous start, when he gave up three runs in six innings.

Red Sox's Cora remains undecided on WH visit

BOSTON -- Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora is still undecided whether he'll visit the White House next week when the team celebrates its World Series title there.

The Red Sox are scheduled to visit the White House on May 9 following a three-game series in Baltimore.

"I'll let you guys know when I decide," Cora said Monday before Boston's series opener against Oakland. "You guys don't have to worry about that one. I'll let you know."

In January, the Puerto Rico native was outspoken about the island's need for hurricane relief. He indicated he might skip the traditional champion's visit to Washington over President Donald Trump's policies toward Puerto Rico.

Trump hosted Baylor's NCAA title-winning women's basketball team on Monday.

The men's champions, Virginia, won't be going. Coach Tony Bennett said in a statement: "With several players either pursuing pro opportunities or moving on from UVA, it would be difficult, if not impossible to get everyone back together."