

## ***The Boston Red Sox Thursday, April 4, 2019***

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

**The Red Sox needed a lucky bounce to beat the Athletics, and they earned it**

Peter Abraham

OAKLAND, Calif. — It would have been rash to label the Red Sox as desperate. It's only a week into the season and three other powerhouse teams, the Astros, Cubs, and Yankees, have been playing poorly, too.

But the Sox were a group that needed something positive to happen after a series of dreary days, mounting losses and growing anxiety back home.

Manager Alex Cora had a sense of it before Wednesday night's game against the Oakland Athletics.

"There were some conversations around, guys talking," he said. "It's not that we have to win 10 straight or whatever. But we need to start playing clean baseball, better baseball."

Some well-timed good fortune didn't hurt, either.

Mookie Betts drove in two runs in the ninth inning on a bouncing ball that struck third base and hopped into left field for a double. The Sox went on to a 6-3 victory, snapping a four-game losing streak.

Gold Glove third baseman Matt Chapman was lined up to make the play, only to see the ball flutter over his head as Blake Swihart and Jackie Bradley Jr. scored. They had reached on two-out singles off Fernando Rodney.

"I told Chapman that was the only way I was getting it by him," Betts said. "That guy makes every play."

Andrew Benintendi followed with a triple to the gap in right field to score Betts.

Sometimes you earn the good bounces. The Sox had come back from a 3-0 deficit to tie the score, ending a 22-inning scoreless drought. They also had four innings of shutout relief pitching after Nate Eovaldi allowed three runs over five innings.

Matt Barnes was the winner, entering the game in the seventh inning and getting four outs. Ryan Brasier pitched the ninth for his first career save.

"It all starts with the pitching," Cora said. "That's how we're going to get going, with our pitching staff."

Barnes was used as the closer when the Sox beat the Seattle Mariners in the second game of the season. This time he entered a 3-3 game with a runner on first to face Khris Davis, who has already hit five home runs.

Barnes struck out Davis, then got through the eighth inning.

"I like being able to help the team win. I don't care where it is," said Barnes, whose willingness to take on any role has enabled Cora to stitch together an effective bullpen.

The series finale will be Thursday afternoon with Eduardo Rodriguez facing Brett Anderson. Then the Sox fly to Phoenix to continue their Lewis and Clark season-opening expedition with three games against the Diamondbacks.

“Once we finally scored a run, we loosened up. Then Mookie’s hit was huge,” said Mitch Moreland, whose two-run double in the sixth inning tied the score. “It broke the ice for us.”

The Sox started their comeback in the fifth inning when Swihart homered. He was 3 for 4 on his 27th birthday.

Betts drew a walk to start the sixth inning. With one out, Rafael Devers bounced a ball to Jurickson Profar at second base for what should have been a routine double play and the end of the inning.

But Profar’s flip to shortstop Marcus Semien sailed over his head. Betts ended up on third, alertly taking advantage of Chapman being in a shift.

After J.D. Martinez walked to load the bases, Oakland manager Bob Melvin called in lefthander Ryan Buchter to face the lefthanded-hitting Moreland.

Moreland swung at a first-pitch fastball high in the strike zone and doubled down the line in right to tie the game.

The Athletics had the lead run taken off the scoreboard in the eighth inning by a replay reversal.

Marcus Semien singled off Barnes with two outs, stole second and went to third on a throwing error by Swihart. Ramon Laureano followed with a groundball into the shortstop hole.

Brock Holt backhanded the ball and made a strong throw to first base that Moreland stretched out to catch.

Umpire Nic Lentz called Laureano safe as Semien scored. But the Sox challenged and the call was quickly changed to the delight of the many Red Sox fans in the crowd of 14,207. Video showed the throw beat Laureano by a step.

“I didn’t see the play at first. I was kind of falling off toward [third] base,” said Holt, who was filling in for Xander Bogaerts. “Fortunately we were able to get the out.”

The Sox then came right back and scored the three runs in the ninth.

“To get a bounce our way was huge,” Betts said. “It’s part of the season. Sometimes you need breaks. We were fortunate to get one. Been struggling this whole road trip so far, wins have been hard to come by. So every one is precious at this time.”

### **Steve Pearce set to be activated, and could be in Red Sox lineup Thursday**

Peter Abraham

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Red Sox plan to activate World Series Most Valuable Player Steve Pearce off the injured list on Thursday. With Oakland starting lefthander Brett Anderson, Pearce is a good bet for the lineup, too.

Pearce, who rejoined the team on Wednesday from extended spring training, missed the first seven games of the season with a strained left calf. The first baseman was injured on March 17 during a spring training game.

“We were very patient,” manager Alex Cora said. “He started playing and as he started playing defense and running around, it was good. So might as well.”

Pearce had a .901 OPS in 50 games for the Red Sox last season after being obtained from the Toronto Blue Jays on June 28. He was then 12 of 38 in 13 postseason games with six extra-base hits, nine walks and 11 RBIs.

“You bring Steve [back] now and it’s experience. It starts giving us options late in the game,” Cora said. “Everybody knows that he hits lefties but at the same time he’s a good at-bat against righties. It’s good to have him back. It starts giving us a little more balance.”

First baseman Sam Travis opened the season with the Sox and was 2-for-7 through Tuesday.

The other prominent player on the injured list, second baseman Dustin Pedroia, is scheduled to start for Single A Greenville on Thursday in its season opener.

Pedroia is lined up to play Friday then take Saturday off before playing Sunday.

If his left knee responds well to the workload, Pedroia could be activated for the home opener on Tuesday.

#### Workmanlike

Brandon Workman was in Triple A year ago, having failed to make the team out of spring training.

The 30-year-old righthander had some rocky moments during spring training this season, too. But he pitched well in the final week to secure a spot.

Through Tuesday, Workman has been one of the team’s most reliable relievers. He appeared in three games of the first six games and retired nine of the 10 batters he faced with five strikeouts. Workman also threw 30 of 44 pitches for strikes.

He attributes some of that success to an off-season program designed to improve his athleticism. Workman wanted to get more explosive in his movements to generate more movement and velocity on his pitches.

“I feel good right now, throwing the ball where I want to,” Workman said.

Without Craig Kimbrel and, to a lesser degree, Joe Kelly, the Sox have a different mix in their bullpen. Cora has not named a closer, but it’s clear that Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier are the top late-inning choices to protect a lead.

Workman could stake out a spot in the seventh inning.

“There’s opportunity,” Workman said. “This group has more on our shoulders than in the past. I feel like everybody is trying to do more than they’re had to do in the past.”

Workman was a key reliever down the stretch in 2013 and in the postseason. He struggled as a starter in ’14 then missed two seasons because of Tommy John surgery. There have been mixed results since.

“After last year, everybody’s had experience in big spots,” Workman said. “I don’t think anything will be overwhelming for me or anybody else. There’s been a lot said about us and we’re looking to prove everybody wrong.”

#### Long road

The Sox will cover approximately 6,605 air miles on this road trip. The itinerary was Fort Myers, Fla., to Phoenix to play two final spring training games against the Chicago Cubs. Then to Seattle and Oakland before going back to Phoenix to play the Arizona Diamondbacks this weekend then back to Boston.

The 11-game road trip is the longest to start the season in franchise history and longest in the majors since 1980 when the Minnesota Twins opened with 12 games on the road.

The Sox preferred the long trip in return for getting an extra day off prior to playing the Yankees in London June 29-30.

Mejia in AAA

The tentative roster for Triple A Pawtucket includes seven pitchers with major league experience: righthanders Jenrry Mejia, Erasmo Ramirez, Josh Smith, Marcus Walden and Ryan Weber and lefthanders Bobby Poyner and Dan Runzler.

For the 29-year-old Mejia, Pawtucket will be his first time with a team in the United States in almost four years.

He was thrice suspended for performance-enhancing drugs and banned for life before that punishment was rescinded last year. Mejia's last major league game was July 26, 2015.

The PawSox rotation is likely to be 24-year-old righthander Mike Shawarzyn followed by Weber, Ramirez, righthander Chandler Shepherd and lefthander Josh Smith.

Bogaerts rests

Xander Bogaerts, who fouled a ball off his left ankle on Tuesday, was out of the lineup on Wednesday but should return on Thursday . . . Blake Swihart turned 27 on Wednesday and was in the lineup catching Nate Eovaldi . . . Chris Sale will be happy to leave Oakland Coliseum on Thursday. Since joining the Red Sox in 2017, Sale has made three starts at Oakland and allowed six earned runs over 20 innings. But the Sox have scored two runs in those three games and lost all three. Sale allowed one run over six innings on Tuesday but the Sox lost, 1-0.

### **Red Sox are never too busy to keep track of Yankees, and other notes**

Dan Shaughnessy

OAKLAND, Calif. — Picked-up pieces from 10 days out west with the Red Sox . . .

■ While the Sox struggle out of the gate (2-5, in last in the AL East after Wednesday's 6-3 comeback victory), several key Yankees are returning from injuries or have gone down since the season started: Giancarlo Stanton, Miguel Andujar, Didi Gregorius, Aaron Hicks, Jacoby Ellsbury, Dellin Betances, CC Sabathia, Luis Severino, and Troy Tulowitzki. This has not gone unnoticed in the Boston clubhouse. The West Coast time zone allows the Sox to monitor their rivals back east. Almost daily, while the Sox are playing cards, listening to music, and getting ready to take batting practice, their clubhouse TVs are tuned into Yankee games vs. Baltimore or Detroit. Playing against the tanking Orioles and Tigers, the Yankees lost four of their first six.

■ New York's injury bug makes it a good year for the Sox to start slow, but that doesn't diminish the overreaction back home. A Globe reader e-mailed me and asked if the 2019 Red Sox might be the first team eliminated from contention before they have a chance to raise their championship banner. This is why we love the Boston baseball market.

■ The Red Sox can spin it any way they want, but there's got to be something wrong with Chris Sale. Two starts, 49 fastballs, zero swings and misses.

■ Just wondering, but did the 1950s and '60s Yankees shut down Whitey Ford every spring training back in the days when Ford pitched in the World Series every year? Or are the Red Sox the first to invent the reduced spring workload plan that's worked so well in the first week of the 2019 season?

■ The Kremlinesque erasure of Larry Lucchino from Red Sox history continues. Accompanied by a photo of John Henry and Tom Werner, the Red Sox press guide officially cites the duo's "18th season as stewards of the Red Sox franchise," even though Lucchino was running the team for the first three championships of Henry's ownership. Theo Epstein, who got his start in baseball with tremendous help from Lucchino,

became the latest “Larry Who?” revisionist when he told the Globe’s Peter Abraham, “It’s fun to see the organization have success and what John, Tom, and Sam [Kennedy] have accomplished.”

■ QUIZ: Name the two active big league pitchers who have won both the Cy Young and Rookie of the Year awards? (answer below)

■ Love the Oakland Coliseum, but it is indeed a dump. It’s now the fifth-oldest ballpark in baseball (trailing Fenway, Wrigley, Dodger Stadium, and Angel Stadium, though the last was significantly renovated). Revisiting the place this week reminded me of an Earl Weaver dustup with umpire Rich Garcia in 1979. Weaver was tossed early in the game but never left the dugout, opting to manage from the dugout bathroom. Garcia went looking for Weaver and pounded on the bathroom door, only to hear Earl say, “There’s no one in here.” When Garcia said, “I know you’re in there, Earl,” Weaver hollered, “Yeah, your umpiring was so bad it made me throw up, so I came in here.”

■ More Coliseum: The joint opened for baseball on April 17, 1968, when the Orioles defeated the A’s, 4-1, on a Dave McNally two-hitter. Oakland’s second hit was a ninth-inning pinch single by little-known middle infielder Tony La Russa. It was LaRussa’s only big league hit that season. He retired with 35. “Shows you what a horse [expletive] player I was,” says La Russa. “My claim to fame is that I got the first pinch hit in the history of this stadium.” La Russa went on to Cooperstown as the third-winningest manager in baseball history.

■ I was saddened to hear that the Red Sox manager’s office at Fenway has been relocated to a space safely distanced from the prying eyes of the media. Through the decades, it’s been informing to see who was going in and out of the manager’s office. That is all gone now as the space has been allocated to team video coordinator Billy Broadbent. When I texted Terry Francona with news of the death of his old office, the Tribe manager fired back with, “Lots of good [expletive] buried in there.”

■ One of the problems with baseball’s pace of play is the fact that most players do not think there is a problem. Here’s Bryce Harper in ESPN The Magazine: “Pitch clocks and all that? If you don’t want to come to a baseball game, don’t come. We’re not a timed sport.” Swell. But who’s going to pay your salary if bored fans heed your advice?

■ Book list: Make sure you pick up “K: A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches” by Tyler Kepner of the New York Times. Kepner, a former Globe intern, is the best baseball read in American newspapers today. While you’re at it, find “One Base at a Time: How I Survived PTSD and Found My Field of Dreams,” by Red Sox groundskeeping czar David Mellor.

■ Remember when “Who’s going to be the closer?” was the big question around the Red Sox?

■ The Sox would like to have Dustin Pedroia at second base for the home opener on Tuesday.

■ How did I go this long without knowing that Alex Cora’s dad was a sportswriter? Jose Manuel Cora covered Criollos de Caguas in winter ball for the San Juan Star.

■ My Opening Day in Seattle started with an e-mail from 80-year-old southpaw Jim Kaat, a guy who won 283 big league games in 25 seasons and still works as a baseball television analyst. Kaat’s playing career put him up against Ted Williams (who was a rookie in 1939) and Julio Franco (who played until 2007). It’s the baseball life’s equal of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who met both Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

“Baseball’s opening day is so much more significant than the opening days of other sports,” wrote Kaat. “This is my 60th MLB opener. I remember my first like it was yesterday. Ike threw out the ceremonial first pitch. Teddy Ballgame drove a Camilo Pascual fastball through the winds over the center-field wall, 421 feet. Camilo struck out 15. Still an opening day record. Game was played in 2:20.”

Naturally, everything checked out when I went to Baseball Reference's website. On April 18, 1960, the Washington Senators defeated the Red Sox, 10-1, in front of 28,327 at Griffith Stadium. Cuban curveballer Pascual fanned 15 in his complete-game win. President Dwight Eisenhower threw out the first pitch and Ted Williams hit a long homer to center in the second inning for the Sox' only run.

■ QUIZ ANSWER: Justin Verlander and Jacob deGrom.

### **Is Chris Sale's diminished velocity really cause for concern?**

Alex Speier

Obviously, this isn't Chris Sale's usual fastball. The lefthander, who last summer spent two months throwing his four-seam fastball an average of 97 miles per hour, instead sat at a career-low 89.0 m.p.h. (according to BaseballSavant.com) on Tuesday night — down from 92.3 in his first start of the year. He's thrown 49 four-seamers this season without a single swing and miss.

Pitching coach Dana LeVangie told reporters in Oakland that the lack of velocity isn't cause for alarm, suggesting that it was part of a controlled build of arm strength.

“You guys want him to pitch the whole year, or do you want him to go out and throw 100 right now and not be there for his team? He's building,” LeVangie said.

“He had a long last year. He's building up to be the guy he wants to be. He started last year similar. We're getting to that point, but just not right now.”

In many ways, Sale looked on Tuesday like a pitcher who was trying to pitch under control — and who perhaps was dialing back his velocity until he found the delivery where he could show command with less than 100 percent effort level. LeVangie sometimes speaks in car analogies, describing peak, rocket-fueled, high-90s-to-triple-digit-throwing Sale as a Ferrari. On Tuesday, he looked like a Prius, identifying the most fuel efficient delivery he could while emphasizing the ability to carve the strike zone.

A hint at what Sale was doing comes from his extension. When he's reaching for velocity, he's driving down the hill of the mound with a tremendous arm whip. On the followthrough of his delivery, his left leg — the one he uses to drive off the rubber — will come flying past his landing leg almost to the bottom of the mound. That's the Sale who works at 97-100 m.p.h.

On Tuesday, Sale's delivery was controlled. His left leg often landed adjacent to his right leg, much farther up the mound. He wasn't reaching for extra extension, not roaring down the slope of the mound.

The data backed up the visual evidence. Sale's average extension (meaning how far in front of the rubber he released the ball) averaged 5.91 feet on Tuesday, tied for the second-shortest extension in any start he's made since the beginning of 2018. (In his start last April 26 against the Blue Jays, he averaged 5.89 feet of extension, while featuring one of his lowest average four-seam velocities — 93.4 m.p.h. — of the season.)

This is significant, as extension for Sale has shown some correlation to the velocity on his four-seam fastball (an r-squared value of 0.37) and an even stronger relationship to the swing-and-miss rate on his fastball (an r-squared value of 0.48).

Sale's most recent outing is the one that's sitting on the 0 percent swing-and-miss line at the bottom of the graphic, the one that's furthest to the left. His Opening Day start likewise sits on the 0 percent line, immediately to the right of Tuesday's dot.)

The question then becomes: Why isn't Sale extending on his pitches, particularly his four-seamer?

Obviously, there's at least some design behind it. When Sale was with the White Sox in 2016, he and pitching coach Don Cooper resolved to have him pitch at a lower effort level in order to improve his

season-ending durability. Last year, LeVangie and the Sox asked Sale to do the same, with a more controlled buildup — which Sale observed from Opening Day through mid-June, at which point he busted out the Ferrari . . . and ended up needing to take it to the shop in mid-August, after two months of registering the highest velocities of his career.

Sale's velocity is certainly below where it was a year ago at this time — or, for that matter, at any other time in his career. But it's at least possible that, given that he ran out of gas last summer, he's being even more conservative with the gas pedal. Or, perhaps after his delayed entry into spring training games, he's still searching for his mechanics and could only repeat them and command with this low effort level. (Sticking in third gear?) Or, that he's dealing with a relatively normal dead-arm period.

There are more dire possibilities as well, even though both the Red Sox and Sale insist that the lefthander is healthy. (President of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski told colleague Dan Shaughnessy that the Red Sox were very comfortable with all of the pitcher's medical information before signing him to a five-year extension which takes effect in 2020.)

One National League scout watched with some fascination as LeVangie, one day after Sale's poor Opening Day start in Seattle, had an animated conversation with team trainers in which the pitching coach was very obviously pantomiming different parts of the lefthander's delivery. But it's impossible to say whether that conversation was focused on a health concern or simply a discussion about the mechanical issues that resulted in poor command.

The drop in Sale's velocity and the transformation of his fastball from a swing-and-miss offering to one that he's trying to get hitters to chase above the strike zone comes with a few knowns at this point:

- His velocity is down, and went down further in his second start from Opening Day.
- He's not getting swings and misses.
- His vertical release point (sometimes a tell for a pitcher who's fighting through shoulder discomfort) is normal — if anything, on the slightly high end for him, though that may be a function of the fact that he's not driving down the slope of the mound as aggressively.
- His command, which was poor in his first start, was significantly improved in his second, suggesting that he'd identified some way of better controlling his delivery. He was extremely effective working at diminished velocity, suggesting that if he wants to pitch with a more controlled effort level, he can do so while still being elite, so long as he features pinpoint deployment of his slider and changeup.
- He spent time on the disabled list with shoulder concerns last season.
- The Red Sox and Sale say that his shoulder is fine.

Sale's extension on his pitches seems to be at the root of why he looks like a different pitcher than at virtually any other point in his career. The question thus becomes whether that is a development by design or whether it is a concession to some physical limitation. Both causes are plausible, suggesting that an answer will come only if Sale eventually — whether this month or even later in the summer — leaves the Prius in the garage in favor of a less practical, more thrilling ride.

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

### **Brock Holt saves Red Sox win with 'unreal' throw from shortstop**

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — Brock Holt provided the final piece of the Red Sox' best game of the season.

It was like Holt had been starting at shortstop all season.

But Holt hasn't. He didn't even start a single game at shortstop in spring training. And when the game was on the line in the eighth inning of the Sox' 6-3 win over the Oakland A's on Wednesday night, Holt made it look easy.

Marcus Semien hit a two-out single off Matt Barnes, then stole second and advanced to third on a bad throw by Blake Swihart. Ramón Laureano hit a slow roller to the left side and Holt charged forward and to his right, then made an on-the-run throw to first for a bang-bang play.

Laureano was originally ruled safe and the go-ahead run scored.

Manager Alex Cora challenged the call, it was quickly reversed and Holt, who was starting in place of the dinged up Xander Bogaerts, saved the game.

"I mean, if there's no replay I get thrown out of the game," Cora said. "If it was before replay I get thrown out of the game. We were pretty sure he was out.

"Brock made a great play. That was unreal. That was a great play."

Holt looked relieved to see the call overturned.

"Once I threw it, I thought I had him," he said. "When he said safe, I didn't know. I figured he was out, but once they showed the replay, he looked pretty out. Just trying to help out however I can. It was good to make that play, get back in the dugout tied up, and our guys did a great job of scoring some runs."

Holt hadn't started at shortstop since Sept. 29 of last year, but proved his value as a premium utility player once again on Wednesday.

"I think I've played enough at each spot to feel comfortable there," he said. "Whenever I'm not playing, I normally take my groundballs there, so for me, that's probably one of the toughest positions on the field. So I get a lot of work there when I'm not playing there. I feel pretty comfortable up the middle at either spot. Fortunately, I was able to make that play, then good at-bats in that last inning to take on some runs."

Bogaerts is expected back in the lineup on Thursday though he's clearly not 100 percent after taking a foul ball off the leg on Tuesday. The Sox didn't use him off the bench in Wednesday's game.

### **Red Sox top A's with comeback win**

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — For the first time this season, the Red Sox' starting pitcher wasn't the story of the night.

It was the Sox' offensive catcher that had his breakout game at the Coliseum. Mookie Betts looks like he's starting to come around. Alex Cora had his first "Cora Magic" moment of the year. And a little luck finally went the way of the defending champs.

This was the game the Red Sox have been waiting for.

Blake Swihart snapped the club's 22-inning scoreless drought with a 405-foot homer off Marco Estrada in the fourth inning, then collected his third hit of the night to start a three-run rally in the ninth as the Red Sox knocked off the Oakland A's, 6-3.



Until Swihart homered in the fifth inning, the Red Sox were playing as poorly as they have all season. They were down 3-0 to Estrada, a familiar foe from his time with the Blue Jays. Nathan Eovaldi had allowed three runs. And the Sox had just one hit in four innings.

Swihart was the only one who looked alive, having lifted a long fly ball to deep center in his first at-bat.

When he homered in the fifth, the Red Sox finally felt something.

“Just a sigh of relief,” said Brock Holt. “We finally got on the board. We were joking in the shower that if Blake doesn’t hit that home run, we probably don’t score tonight either.

“That’s huge for him to come in, second game behind the plate, called a good game, caught great, got three hits, but that home run kind of lightened the mood a little bit. It was like, ‘alright, we scored, now let’s try to score some more. That was a big hit for us.’”

Making just his second start of the season behind the plate — and celebrating his 27th birthday — Swihart finished the night 3-for-4 with an RBI and two runs, touching home for the first run of the game and the winning run.

“It feels really good,” he said.

After Swihart singled in the ninth, Jackie Bradley Jr. poked a single to left and Betts — hitting just .226 to start the year — stepped up with two outs against Fernando Rodney. On the eighth pitch of the at-bat, he smoked a grounder that bounced off the bag at third base and flew over the head of Gold Glover Matt Chapman to allow both runs to score. Andrew Benintendi then drove one off the right-field fence for an insurance run.

“He has to hit the bag there,” Cora said. “If not, Chapman makes the play. That kid is amazing at third base. At least we found a way for him not to make a play.”

Swihart was the spark. Betts provided a clutch hit. The ball bounced in just the right place.

And Ryan Brasier closed the door in the ninth and the Sox ended their longest losing streak since 2017.

Cora will get some credit for this one, too.

He managed this game like he’s always wanted to manage, using his best reliever in the seventh inning to face the opponents’ best hitter.

Matt Barnes, who got the save last Friday, was called on with Khris Davis at the plate in the seventh. Barnes struck out Davis on a nasty curveball in the dirt and pitched the eighth inning, too.

Just like Cora had planned.

“Relievers now, that’s what they do,” Cora said. “They close games, get people out. We just need outs. We saw the matchup we wanted. We didn’t hesitate.”

Cora had previously made a bold move in the sixth inning, when the A’s brought out their lefty specialist, Ryan Buchter, to face the left-handed hitting Mitch Moreland, a career .240 hitters against lefties.

With Sam Travis and Xander Bogaerts on the bench, Cora left Moreland in the game rather than take the platoon advantage. The result was a two-run double.

“Probably tomorrow (when Steve Pearce is activated from the injured list) will be a different scenario,” the skipper said. “Nothing against Sam, but Mitch saw Buchter already. So he had a pretty good idea. They’ve been talking about him for the last two nights. Felt it was too early to pinch hit.

“I know we’re struggling, not winning games, but you have to be patient. The lineup is going to turn around. There’s going to be more at-bats. We were trying to stay away from Xander, too. We were patient.”

Patience is what Cora has been preaching.

“We played well yesterday, we’re getting close,” he said. “We’re getting close.”

Wednesday night, the Red Sox looked like the World Series champs again.

“I think we felt it kind of when Blake hit that home run,” Betts said. “Something to get us going. We needed something to get us going.”

### **Alex Cora wants Eduardo Rodriguez to pitch confidently**

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — Alex Cora is hard on Eduardo Rodriguez for a reason.

As hard as Cora has been on the 25-year-old lefty during their time together the last year-plus, there’s intention behind the manager’s words.

As Rodriguez takes the mound Thursday afternoon for his 90th career start, the Sox want him to remember they believe in him. And he needs to believe in himself.

“For how hard we are with him, he had a great season last year,” Cora said. “It’s not that he was horrible. He pitched one of the best games in the World Series. But we do feel that there are certain times his stuff in the strike zone, it works. It plays. He needs to realize that. He knows it.”

“Sometimes you get on the mound, you don’t feel it, people make adjustments and that’s the way it works. For how hard I am on him, I’m also a realist. I watch games. I know how it goes. Whenever I’m hard on him, it doesn’t mean he’s a bad pitcher. Let’s put it that way.”

His World Series start sums up his entire career, in a way. He was so dominant — perhaps more than anyone except Walker Buehler in the World Series — for five innings. An error in the sixth caused him to unravel, and then he made one mistake to Yasiel Puig and ended up allowing four runs in 5⅓ innings.

Cora has taken the blame for that game, saying he never should have let Rodriguez pitch that deep and he pushed him too hard.

But the potential Rodriguez has with a high-90s heater and one of the game’s best changeups remains tantalizing as the Sox look to get their rotation back on track.

His first start of the season, Rodriguez lost confidence in his fastball almost immediately and relied too heavily on the changeup, though he threw only one to left-handers, causing pitching coach Dana LeVangie to question the game plan.

On Thursday, Cora wants to see Rodriguez pitch confidently.

“Keep attacking the zone,” Cora said. “That’s what he has to do. It’s a different lineup with them. If you go back to the first game, the walk to Jay Bruce and homer to Bruce, that’s the game right there. For everything we talk about, for everything that was said about game plan, all that, it was only two bad at-bats. That’s the way it goes at the big league level.”

“He’s ready to go. Stuff-wise he’s still good. He’s built-up. We expect him to go out there and follow the lead. David Price did a good job two nights ago. Chris Sale did a good job. Nate Eovaldi tonight. It’s his turn tomorrow.”

#### BOGAERTS OUT

Xander Bogaerts was out of the lineup Wednesday night after fouling a pitch off his lower left leg late in Tuesday’s game. Brock Holt was at shortstop for Bogaerts.

“It’s like right above the ankle, inside part, right above,” Bogaerts said. “I didn’t feel it at all running.” ...

The Red Sox’ four-game losing streak was their first since 2017. The Sox haven’t started 1-5 or worse since 2011 (0-6) and 2012 (1-5). They missed the playoffs both years.

“There was a lot of slamming bats and helmets,” Cora said after Tuesday’s game. “That’s part of it. We’ll talk to them a little bit. It should be the other way around. The A’s have a good pitching staff, they’re throwing the ball well. Obviously you don’t want to see that, but we haven’t been in this situation in a year and a few weeks, whatever. It’s what baseball players do.”

The A’s have dominated the Sox in Oakland, going 37-15 against them in the past 52 meetings at the Coliseum.

#### PEARCE TO RETURN

Steve Pearce is set to be activated from the injured list Thursday and likely will take the roster spot of Sam Travis.

Pearce will hit third against lefties.

“Sam is swinging the bat well,” Cora said. “He finished spring training strong. Had a good game in Seattle. You bring Steve now, his experience, start giving us options late in the game. Everybody knows he hits lefties, but at the same time he’s a good at-bat against righties. It’s good to have him back and start giving us balance to do the things we did when we got him last year. Early in the season we had Hanley (Ramirez), then didn’t have him for a while. At that point we were unbalanced roster-wise. Now we got Pearce. He gave us options. I think it’s great to have him around.”

#### DEPTH IN MINORS

The Red Sox announced their rosters for the minor league affiliates, and most of their top prospects will begin the year at Double-A Portland, including third baseman Bobby Dalbec, right-hander Durbin Feltman and left-hander Darwinzon Hernandez. But Dave Dombrowski has made it clear in the past he doesn’t mind bringing up players to the majors straight from Double A. He did it with Andrew Benintendi and Rafael Devers.

The roster at Triple A includes third base prospect Michael Chavis, who could play other positions to increase flexibility, and then a lot of players with some major league experience to provide depth to the big league club.

The pitching staff will include former Mets closer Jenrry Mejia, once banned for life for getting caught using performance-enhancing drugs three times. Also on the staff is Erasmo Ramirez, Travis Lakins, Bobby Poyner, Marcus Walden, Mike Shawaryn, Chandler Shepherd, Josh Smith, Domingo Tapia, Josh Taylor, Ryan Weber, Dan Runzler and Trevor Kelley.

PawSox position players include Sandy Leon, Tzu-Wei Lin, Nick Lovullo, Mike Miller, Josh Ockimey, Tony Renda, Juan Centeno, Jake Romanski, Bryce Brentz, Rusney Castillo, Gorkys Hernandez and Cole Sturgeon.

## YANKEES HURTING

The Yankees suffered another blow on Wednesday when shortstop Troy Tulowitzki was taken to the hospital for further testing on a strained left calf. He's expected to go on the injured list and would be the 11th Yankees player on the injured list this season, joining Dellin Betances, Didi Gregorius, Aaron Hicks, Luis Severino, Miguel Andujar and Giancarlo Stanton, among others. ...

The Red Sox are running the bases with aggressiveness early in the year, tied for second in the majors with six steals in six attempts. Cora said he wants them to run even more, but they haven't had a lot of guys on base. The Sox ranked third in the majors with 125 steals last year and ranked second with an 80 percent success rate. ...

On Friday, the Sox will reveal the new MGM lion logo on the Green Monster as part of the team's new partnership with MGM Resorts.

## \* *The Providence Journal*

### **Red Sox Journal: World Series MVP Pearce ready to go**

Bill Koch

OAKLAND — Chris Sale raised both arms like a quarterback who had just thrown a touchdown pass.

Steve Pearce tends to trigger that sort of reaction in the Red Sox clubhouse, especially from his fellow Lakeland Senior High School (Fla.) alumnus. The amiable first baseman joined the team at Oakland Coliseum ahead of what is almost certain to be an activation off the injured list prior to Thursday's series finale against the Athletics.

Pearce (left calf strain) played seven innings at extended spring training in Fort Myers on Tuesday before making the cross-country flight and going through a full pregame workout. The reigning World Series Most Valuable Player would slot in against Oakland left-hander Brett Anderson, reprising the role that prompted Boston to trade for Pearce prior to last year's July 31 deadline.

"Everybody knows that he hits lefties, but at the same time he's a good at-bat against righties," manager Alex Cora said. "It's good to have him back. He'll start giving us a little bit more balance and do the things he did when we got him last year."

Pearce mashed three home runs against the Dodgers over the final two nights of last season, helping the Red Sox to their latest championship in just five games. He slashed .279/.394/.507 in 50 games with Boston and boasts a career line of .266/.352/.500 against southpaws. Pearce is likely to mix in at first base with Mitch Moreland, giving the Red Sox a true platoon option should they choose to employ it.

"When we got Pearce it gave us options," Cora said. "It's great to have him around."

In other injury news, Dustin Pedroia (left knee) has reported to Class A Greenville and will begin his rehab assignment on Thursday night. The Drive open their season at home in South Carolina, helping ease Pedroia's transition to live action in warm weather similar to Fort Myers. Pedroia is scheduled to play nine innings both Thursday and Friday before enjoying an off day on Saturday.

Day of rest

Xander Bogaerts received his first day off of the season on Wednesday.

Cora insisted it was a scheduled absence, but Bogaerts likely welcomed a day of rest after fouling a ball off his left ankle in the ninth inning on Tuesday in a 1-0 defeat. Bogaerts got on top of a sinker from Athletics' closer Blake Treinen and slammed it down off the inside of his leg.

"It's a little sore," Bogaerts said late Tuesday night, an ice pack wrapped around his lower leg. "We'll see how it is tomorrow."

Bogaerts ripped a double to right center two pitches later and was thrown out trying to stretch for third base. Boston suffered a second straight shutout for the first time in four years, and those previous 18 scoreless innings came in the midst of an eight-game losing streak.

"I didn't feel it at all running," Bogaerts said. "I think the adrenalin and the will and want to do something for your team – we needed some type of energy."

Pitch perfect

Aaron Brooks and Mike Fiers each fired six scoreless innings at the Red Sox to open the series, continuing a dominant run by Oakland's starting pitching.

The Athletics' rotation entered Wednesday having allowed just one earned run over their previous six games. Opponents were hitting just .164 against them, including a 7-for-41 showing by Boston through two games.

"Obviously there are a few things that we notice with our guys," Cora said. "But at the same time, when you're good, you're good. You've got to give credit to them."

Oakland's Wednesday starter was a familiar one against the Red Sox. Marco Estrada spent his previous four seasons in the American League East with the Blue Jays and was making his 16th start against Boston. The Red Sox pounded Estrada to the tune of a 7.98 earned-run average in three games last season.

Running game

Boston was 3-for-3 on stolen base attempts Tuesday and is 6-for-6 on the young season. The Red Sox have been caught just once in their last 27 attempts in the regular season ... Brandon Workman and Ryan Brasier threw scoreless innings out of the bullpen on Tuesday. Boston's relievers have allowed just three earned runs over their last 18 innings, good for a 1.50 earned-run average ... David Price celebrates 10 years of big league service time on Thursday. The lefthander's next scheduled start comes at Arizona on Saturday.

**\* *MassLive.com***

**Blake Swihart homers, then starts Boston Red Sox two-out, ninth-inning rally in win over Athletics; Mookie Betts delivers go-ahead double**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Blake Swihart celebrated his 27th birthday with three hits, including a 102.5-mph, 415-foot home run against Athletics starter Marco Estrada to cut the Red Sox's deficit to 3-1 in the fifth.

Swihart also began a two-out, three-run rally in the ninth inning to help the Red Sox win 6-3 over the A's here at Oakland Coliseum. Boston ended a four-game losing streak and improved to 2-5.

.With nobody on base and two outs, Swihart ripped a 98.8 mph single to right field. Jackie Bradley Jr. followed with a single to left field that beat the shift.

Mookie Betts capped off an eight-pitch at-bat by hitting an 83.8 mph changeup from Fernando Rodney off the third base bag. The baseball deflected into left field, allowing both Swihart and Bradley to score.

Andrew Benintendi delivered a 101.1-mph, 366-foot RBI triple to right field against Yusmeiro Petit, making it 6-3.

Colten Brewer pitched 1.2 scoreless innings. His cutter, one of the game's hardest, averaged 92.7 mph and topped out at 93.7 mph, per Baseball Savant. He allowed one walk, no hits and struck out two.

Matt Barnes pitched 1.1 scoreless innings, allowing one hit and striking out two. Ryan Brasier recorded the save with a scoreless ninth.

Holt keeps game tied at 3-3

Brock Holt made a terrific play with the game tied 3-3 and a runner at third base and two outs in the bottom of the eighth. He ranged to his right and his throw to first just beat Ramon Laureano hustling down the line.

Laureano initially was called safe, allowing Marcus Semien to score from third. But the Red Sox challenged and won the review.

Moreland delivered game-tying double

Mitch Moreland delivered a game-tying two-run double down the right field line in the sixth.

Nathan Eovaldi started for Boston. He allowed three runs, all earned, four hits (one homer) and four walks while striking out three. He didn't have his usual pinpoint control. He also hit Matt Chapman with a pitch in the first inning.

Alex Cora coached Ramón Laureano during spring training 2017 with the Houston Astros. The Oakland Athletics acquired the center fielder from the Astros in November 2017.

Eovaldi gave up a two-run home run to Ramón Laureano who has been a Red Sox killer the past three days. The center fielder threw out Xander Bogaerts at third base in the ninth inning Tuesday. He also threw out Bogaerts at home plate Monday.

Laureano's blast traveled 109.7 mph and 438 feet.

**MLB News and Notes: Boston Red Sox's Colten Brewer enjoying being only new guy on team, Xander Bogaerts/Chris Sale extensions deemed fair by rival agents**

Chris Cotillo

Twenty-four of the 25 players on the Red Sox's current roster will receive their World Series rings next Tuesday at Fenway Park. For reliever Colten Brewer-- the only player who won't get a ring-- that fact is pretty inspiring.

"That's definitely very motivating," Brewer said. "I'll be cheering them on in the dugout while it's going on."

While the Red Sox were making history in 2018, Brewer was bouncing back and forth between the Padres and their Triple-A affiliate in El Paso. The 26-year-old was the only outside player Boston added to its 40-man roster over the winter, acquiring him in a small trade in November.

"Going from San Diego to here, it's actually a big difference," Brewer said. "Considering how they go about their business here. They're definitely looking forward to the postseason every single year as opposed to, last year, we were still in development. That'll be something to look forward to."

Brewer showed enough in spring training to win a roster spot, finding out he made his first Opening Day roster right before the Sox left for a two-game exhibition series against the Cubs in Arizona last week. Unlike most players who came over from other organizations, Brewer didn't know anybody in the Red Sox clubhouse personally before joining the team.

"Being the new guy... it's a little different trying to find comfort with other guys," Brewer said. "But these guys are very welcoming and I think they're doing a good job helping me be comfortable in this organization."

Brewer has been trying to hang out with all of his new teammates equally and said he doesn't have his clique inside the clubhouse quite yet. He enjoyed watching his new teammates dominate the postseason on TV and got a first-hand taste of Boston's magic when Mitch Moreland hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the ninth inning of Friday's win over the Mariners.

"I felt like I was in October," Brewer said. "The crowd and everybody jumping up, being happy... that was cool."

Like many in the Red Sox bullpen, Brewer has been one of the bright spots of the team in an otherwise dreary first week of the season. The righty has thrown 3.2 scoreless innings so far, allowing just one hit and striking out six batters in three appearances.

Brewer's goal this season is to win his first championship since 2016, when he won the Florida State League title as a member of the Pirates' High-A affiliate. That was his second championship in the minors, joining a 2012 title he won in the Gulf Coast League.

Back in 2012, Brewer's team defeated the Red Sox's GCL affiliate to clinch the title. He jokingly wondered if Boston is making him sit through Tuesday's ceremony as a punishment for what happened six years ago.

"I didn't get (a ring)," Brewer said, "because I took one away from them in the Gulf Coast League."

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Rival agents think Bogaerts, Sale got fair deals from Sox

We polled five certified player agents on what they think of the Red Sox's recent contract extensions for Chris Sale and Xander Bogaerts. Here's what they said:

Agent 1: "Sale's was fair, Bogaerts was underpaid."

Agent 2: "Have to think more about Bogaerts. Seems light to me. If I had to say, I'd say Sale's was good for the player and Bogaerts' was good for the team. Sale's mostly a good deal because I never think he's healthy."

Agent 3: "Good deals for both. Fair. Sale carries injury risk. Bogaerts can (opt out) and get another bite at the apple."

Agent 4: "Sale deal was a good one on both sides. Very close to his market value. My first thought was that I felt like the Sox paid a lot for Bogaerts. Good player but I thought AAV was a little high. Average defender at best. I am sure his makeup is off the charts and he's a good clubhouse guy."

Agent 5: "Unless Sale's stuff gets a lot better, I think he won that battle. But he has been dominant and deserves it. Bogaerts plays a premium position right now but will probably have to move later. He has made a great swing adjustment (pre-2018) that should really boost his numbers and the team is paying for

that. If he continues to produce 20-30 homers, hit .280+ and play solid defense, I think it will be a fair deal for both sides.”

The group generally thought Sale’s deal was a fair one while acknowledging some injury risk for the Red Sox. The opinions on Bogaerts’ were more mixed but averaged out in the “pretty fair” to “fair” range.

The big takeaway: those in the industry don’t look at either deal as drastically favoring one side or the other. That bodes well for future Red Sox negotiations.

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Trade market already active thanks to Jays

Baseball’s decision to have only one summer trade deadline was expected to cause the trade market to pick up earlier than usual, but the Blue Jays aren’t waiting until then to make moves. Toronto has made two significant trades in the last week, shipping Kendrys Morales (Athletics) and Kevin Pillar (Giants) to the Bay Area.

Toronto has been trading key players since last summer, when they sent J.A. Happ, Roberto Osuna and Josh Donaldson were sent out of town. They won’t compete in the A.L. East this year and are on pace to be one of baseball’s worst teams.

Tanking teams like the Jays aren’t going to wait until July to make deals, so contenders could beef up their rosters long before then. With a rash of early-season injuries affecting some of baseball’s top teams, we could see an earlier flurry of activity than usual.

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10 observations from Opening Week

1. This might be the year for MLB teams to adopt the Patriots’ philosophy that the beginning of the regular season doesn’t matter. Four top preseason contenders-- the Red Sox, Yankees, Astros and Cubs-- have stumbled out of the gate.
2. Love him or hate him, Bryce Harper is good for baseball. His return to Nationals Park, which was capped off by a bat flip for the ages, will go down as one of the signature moments of the entire season.
3. People shouldn’t hate on the Nationals’ Twitter account for showing some personality and poking some fun at Harper. It’s about time some of these team accounts start following the lead of the Vegas Golden Knights and stand out from the pack.
4. Baseball fans should get to know the name Ramon Laureano. What he’s shown in three games against the Red Sox this week has been extremely impressive.
5. Boy, the free-agent market for next winter looks weaker than we’ve seen in a while. The burst of extensions over the last couple months means Gerrit Cole, Anthony Rendon, J.D. Martinez (if he opts out) and Didi Gregorius will headline the group.
6. The Mariners and Athletics playing exhibition games after playing two regular season games in Tokyo is one of the weirdest scheduling quirks in sports. Yes, reps are important, but I can’t imagine getting juiced up for Opening Day and then having to settle down for an exhibition series before revving things up again.
7. Hanley Ramirez sure looks like he has something left in the tank with the Indians. Clearly, the Red Sox’s decision to move on from him worked out anyway.



8. The Yankees' early-season injury bug one of the worst in recent memory. As bad as it has been for the Red Sox, at least they've stayed healthy.

9. Yoan Moncada looks like a different player this season. Even if he's a perennial All-Star, the Red Sox still win the Chris Sale trade.

10. Umpire Ron Kulpa was out of line in the Astros-Rangers game Wednesday night and might get disciplined by the league as a result... even if he does believe the umpires aren't governed by any rules.

### **Hector Velazquez, Boston Red Sox pitcher: President Donald Trump 'has said a lot of stuff about Mexico. I'd rather not offend' people back home by visiting White House**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Hector Velazquez will not attend the Red Sox's visit to the White House on May 9, because of the harsh remarks President Donald Trump has made about his native Mexico.

Velazquez was the lone Mexican to play on the 2018 World Series champion Red Sox.

"I made the choice not to go because, as we know, the president has said a lot of stuff about Mexico," Velazquez told MassLive.com through translator Daveson Perez at Oakland Coliseum on Wednesday. "And I have a lot of people in Mexico that are fans of me, that follow me. And I'm from there. So I would rather not offend anyone over there."

During his campaign launch speech, President Trump said, via The Washington Post, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."

That is not the Mexico that Velazquez knows and loves.

His family lives in Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico. He's very close to all of his family members. His grandmother, Emilia — who he said last year he talks with by phone multiple times each week during the baseball season — cried when he made his major league debut. Velazquez named his son after her and has Hector Emilio's name tattooed onto his neck.

Velazquez and his wife welcomed their second son into the world Dec. 7. (Velazquez has a new '7' tattoo).

He said he learned respect growing up in Mexico.

"To respect others so that in return they can respect you," Velazquez said. "And the other is to be disciplined and work hard for the things that you want. The things that make a man who he is are those two things. It's the discipline you have and the hard work you put in to get to where you want to be."

Velazquez is the opposite of what President Donald Trump described in his campaign launch speech. He's hard working and admired by teammates and coaches.

"If people want to get to know Mexicans and the kind of people we are, I invite them to go to Mexico and see the people that are over there," Velazquez said. "The narrative is that Mexicans are crossing over. But it's not just Mexicans. It's people from Honduras and Guatemala and all over South America that have to go through Mexico to get here. So that's another piece. But again, if anyone wants to get to know Mexicans and get to know the kind of people we are, I'm not the only one, like you said, that's hard working. The country is full of people that are like that. And if they want to know, then they should go.

"And I feel like the people who do come here are people who are trying to work hard and provide for their families and not cause any trouble for anybody. I think that's another important piece, too."

Velazquez's family felt a lot of excitement for him last October even though the pitcher didn't make the postseason roster. He finished 2018 with a 7-2 record and 3.18 ERA in 47 outings (eight starts). His 85 innings helped keep the starters' innings down during the regular season, helping keep them fresh for October.

"My parents were actually able to go to Los Angeles for the World Series and they were able to see it," he said. "So they were very proud, very happy afterwards."

Velazquez is a candidate to pitch Sunday

The righty is a candidate to start for the Red Sox on Sunday. Manager Alex Cora will use a sixth starter the second turn through the rotation.

Velazquez has worked on elevating his fastball to counter launch angle.

"That's one of the things I worked on in the offseason," Velazquez said. "But one thing I wanted to keep working on is throwing my sinker more. Throwing my sinker up in the zone and inside to righties to get more groundballs."

He spent the entire 2018 season on Boston's 25-man roster except for a brief injured list stint. As an established major leaguer, why does he still wear No. 76?

"They asked me early if I wanted to change the number," Velazquez said. "But I just said this is the number that I debuted in. And I'm comfortable with this one. So I'm just going to keep it."

**Brock Holt: Boston Red Sox players joked in shower 'if Blake (Swihart) doesn't hit that home run we probably don't score tonight either. So that's huge'**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Twenty-two innings without scoring a run.

Yes, the Red Sox hadn't scored since the ninth inning in Seattle on Sunday.

But then Blake Swihart celebrated his 27th birthday with a 102.5-mph, 415-foot home run against Athletics starter Marco Estrada to cut the Red Sox's deficit to 3-1 in the fifth.

"Just a sigh of relief," Brock Holt said. "We finally got on the board. We were joking in the shower if Blake doesn't hit that home run we probably don't score tonight either. So that's huge for him to come in, second game behind the plate, called a good game, caught great and got three hits. But that home run kind of lightened the mood a little bit. It was like, 'All right, we scored. Now let's try to score some more.' So that was a big hit for us."

Swihart stroked three hits, including a single with two outs and nobody on base in the ninth to begin a three-run rally. The Red Sox won 6-3 over the A's to end a four-game losing streak.

"He put a great swing on the homer," Cora said. "A battle the whole night. He was on some fastballs. Laid off some breaking balls. It was great. His birthday and all that, it was cool to see that."

Swihart showed his potential. Remember, Jason Varitek never played 100 or more games in a season until his age 27 season. Swihart still is young and needs to catch more to get better.

He still has work to do. A throw to second base sailed into center field for an error and allowed Marcus Semien to reach third base with two outs in the bottom of the eighth. Luckily for Swihart and the Red Sox, Holt made an "unreal" play — as Alex Cora called it — to end the eighth and keep the game tied.

Brock Holt ranged four or five steps to his right toward third baseman Rafael Devers for a ground ball off Ramon Laureano's bat. He fired to first baseman Mitch Moreland to keep the game tied in the eighth.

"He did awesome tonight," starting pitcher Nathan Eovaldi said about Swihart. "We were on the same page behind the plate."

Wednesday's game marked only Swihart's second start this season. Christian Vazquez has handled the five other games.

"I've been working every day, trying to stay ready," Swihart said. "It's been feeling really good. BPs been good. So to finally put it into a game, it's been good."

The Red Sox need more consistency from their catchers offensively this season. That's why they chose Vazquez and Swihart. They outrighted Sandy Leon to Triple-A Pawtucket.

Swihart slashed .303/.353/.452/.805 during the second half of 2015 as a rookie. His .303 batting average was the third best among major league catchers with 100 or more at-bats after the All-Star break.

How much more information is there to absorb now than during his rookie season in 2015?

"There's so much more," Swihart said. "And with picking signs now, it's a learning experience every day for everybody. I mean, there's just a lot more information. You've just gotta keep learning and keep growing."

**Brock Holt makes 'unreal' play overturned in Boston Red Sox's favor; 'If there's no replay, I get thrown out of the game,' Alex Cora says**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — With the go-ahead run at third, shortstop Brock Holt ranged four or five steps to his right toward third baseman Rafael Devers for a ground ball off Ramon Laureano's bat.

He turned and fired in the air to a fully stretched-out first baseman Mitch Moreland, throwing out Laureano for the final out of the eighth and keeping the score tied 3-3 between Boston and Oakland.

"That was unreal," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Laureano initially was called safe. But a challenge overturned the call in Boston's favor.

The Red Sox scored three times in the top of the ninth to win 6-3 over the A's here at Oakland Coliseum.

"If there's no replay, I get thrown out of the game," Cora admitted. "If it was before replay, I get thrown out of the game. I mean, we were pretty sure he was out there."

Holt said he knew he needed to release the ball quickly because of Laureano's speed down the line.

"I threw it and my momentum was going toward third base," Holt said. "I didn't see the play. Once I threw it, I thought I had him. And then when he said 'safe', I didn't know. I figured he was out. But once they showed the replay, he looked pretty out. So yeah, just trying to help out however I can. It was good to make that play, get back in the dugout tied up. And then our guys did a great job of scoring some runs."

Holt played only four innings at shortstop all spring training.

"I think I've played enough at each spot to feel comfortable there," Holt said. "Whenever I'm not playing, I normally take my groundballs there. So for me, that's probably one of the toughest positions on the field."

So I get a lot of work there when I'm not playing there. So I feel pretty comfortable up the middle at each spot."

### **Alex Cora once coached Boston Red Sox killer Ramon Laureano, who has thrown out Xander Bogaerts twice in series; 'I'm very proud of him'**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Ramon Laureano has been a Red Sox killer the past two days.

Xander Bogaerts belted a 400-foot double off the wall in left-center field in the ninth inning with Boston losing 1-0 to the Athletics on Tuesday. It deflected back into center field. Laureano ran it down and fired a rocket to third base to throw out Bogaerts who tried to extend his hit into a triple.

It was the second time in two days Laureano, who has one of the top outfield arms in baseball, threw out Bogaerts. He also fired a strike to home plate in a scoreless game Monday.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora is quite familiar with the Athletics center fielder.

"He's a game-changer," Cora said here at Oakland Coliseum on Wednesday. "I hate what he is doing right now, but I'm very proud of him. He was with us in 2017 in big league camp with the Astros. And he was that guy that wherever I was in the dugout, he was right next to me the whole time. Asking questions. Asking about pitchers. Asking about defense and all this stuff. Just think about it, he got here on a trade that nobody talk about."

The Astros traded him to the A's on Nov. 20, 2017, for minor leaguer Brandon Bailey.

"Obviously on the other team (the Astros), there was not much room for him to play with George (Springer) and (Josh) Reddick," Cora said. "But he's a good a player. He's kind of like (Matt) Chapman on the infield. They do an outstanding job catching the ball and he shuts down the running game."

Laureano has 11 assists in 55 big league games.

The 24-year-old also impressed offensively in 48 games as a rookie last year. He slashed .288/.358/.474/.832.

"Physically, he's a great athlete," Cora said. "And his baseball IQ is a good one. He was just waiting for his chance. He knew with the Astros it was going to be tough because of the talent that they have. But he never stopped working. He worked hard and kept going and kept going and kept going. And since he got here, he changed what they do. This is a very spacious ballpark and you have to go get them. And he does."

### **Red Sox's Alex Cora on Chris Sale's velocity: 'I do feel it will come back. It's just a matter of when'**

Christopher Smith

Add Red Sox manager Alex Cora to the list of people not concerned with Chris Sale's velocity through the lefty's first two starts. Appearing on WEEI Wednesday afternoon, Cora said he expects Sale's fastball to tick up as the season progresses.

"I do feel that his velocity will come back," Cora said. "It's just a matter of when."

Cora cited a stretch when Sale was with the White Sox where the lefty saw a decrease in strikeout numbers. It appears he was referencing Sale's first five starts of 2016, when his 7.6 K/9 rate was markedly lower than his career mark of 10.8.

“I think he has some history. If you go back to the White Sox, I want to say his last year there or the second to last, there was a time there that he was actually pitching to contact,” Sale said. “I don’t know velocity-wise, but I know it was down from 97-98 mph. He was getting a lot of people out.”

Sale was 5-0 with a 1.66 ERA in that 2016 stretch with his four-seamer averaging 93.8 mph (per Brooks Baseball). It has been slower this year, coming with an average velocity of 92.8 mph on Opening Day and 89.9 mph Wednesday night. Cora said the team has not asked Sale to hold anything back this early in the season but believes the team’s ace is trying to follow the organization’s plan of having him come along slowly.

“They understand where we’re at and how we want things to run. Coming into this situation, everything I heard from previous years, it was like Chris was throwing 97-98 mph from the first day of spring training and that’s why he got hit against the Houston Astros,” Cora said. “We’re trying to be disciplined in what we believe and the program that we have. He gave us six yesterday, so that’s a good start.”

Cora cited a May 6 start in Texas as the moment Sale’s velocity began to click last season. After averaging 93.5 mph and maxing out at 96.2 mph with his fastball in a May 1 start against the Royals, Sale averaged 96.6 mph against the Rangers and threw his hardest pitch at 99.2 mph. After that, Cora said, Sale was “amazing” for a two-month period before hitting the disabled list with shoulder discomfort.

Cora isn’t concerned with Sale’s health and believes he made positive strides between Opening Day and his second start of the year. Sale’s mechanics were much better over six innings against the A’s.

“I do feel he understands his body. He understands his windup, too,” Cora said. “He was way off in the first outing and yesterday he was under control. He was able to locate his slider and use his changeup, which he didn’t do in Seattle. I think they took advantage of that. He was actually a lot better than the first one yesterday.”

**Jenrry Mejia, ex-Mets closer now with Boston Red Sox, will begin 2019 at Pawtucket and Alex Cora says he’s someone he’ll ‘keep tracking’**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Jenrry Mejia will begin the 2019 season with Triple-A Pawtucket after he competed for one of the final Boston Red Sox Opening Day bullpen spots during spring training.

Mejia recorded 28 saves and a 3.65 ERA in 93.2 innings for the Mets during 2014.

The righty received a permanent ban from Major League Baseball in February 2016 after a third positive PED test. But MLB accepted his appeal for reinstatement in July 2018. The Red Sox signed him to a minor league contract this past offseason.

“I think the story got bigger (during spring training) because of what happened in the past with him,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Because if it was just Mejia and nothing in the past, nobody would have noticed it. But he pitched well. He’s got a good cutter, a good slider. Good tempo. He’s been there before. He’s one of those guys that we’re going to keep tracking and see what happens.”

There are three open spots on 40-man roster, including Steven Wright’s spot. Wright is on the restricted list because of a PED suspension. With three open spots, anyone pitching well in the minors has a better chance to earn a promotion to Boston.

Erasmus Ramirez and Ryan Weber join Mejia as non-40-man roster members with major league experience at Pawtucket. Marcus Walden and Bobby Poyner, who are on the 40-man roster, have major league experience as well.

The PawSox pitching staff also includes 40-man roster members Travis Lakins, Chandler Shepherd and Josh Taylor. Meanwhile, starting pitching prospect Mike Shawaryn has a chance to make his major league debut in 2019 as either a starter or reliever.

“They show at the end they’re capable of coming up here and getting people out,” Cora said about the depth at Triple A. “That’s something with usage and the way the season goes, that’s going to be very important for us.”

### **Steve Pearce injury: Boston Red Sox 1B will return Thursday vs. Athletics**

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox first baseman Steve Pearce will likely be activated for Thursday’s game against the Athletics, manager Alex Cora said during a WEEI appearance Wednesday afternoon. Pearce will fly from Fort Myers to Oakland Wednesday night and re-join the team for the series finale.

Pearce suffered a left calf strain in a spring game on March 17 and began the season on the 10-day injured list. That stint was backdated three days to March 25, meaning he is eligible to be activated after seven games.

Pearce played seven innings an extended spring training game Tuesday, getting three at-bats and playing first base. He has been rehabbing in Fort Myers throughout the team’s west-coast trip.

First baseman Sam Travis will be optioned to Pawtucket to make room for Pearce when he returns. Travis is 2-for-7 in two games so far this season.

## **\* *The Pawtucket Times***

### **PawSox have plenty of questions to answer early in season**

Brendan McGair

PAWTUCKET – The 2019 season for the PawSox is upon us and with it brings the promise of intrigue and discovery. Who will produce enough to get summoned to Boston? The answers will start to reveal themselves beginning with Thursday afternoon’s opener at Syracuse.

Until the results from the dark room begin to trickle in, here are five items one scribe plans to closely monitor in the early going:

#### 1). Corner conundrum

Once last year’s World Series MVP (Steve Pearce) is activated from the injured list, the likely transaction figures to feature the return of Sam Travis to the minors. Once that happens, what will that mean in terms of divvying up playing time at first base for Travis and Josh Ockimey, who figures to get most of the reps at first while Travis remains in Boston.

There was some talk of letting Michael Chavis, the top prospect on this year’s Pawtucket roster, factor in more at first, yet the safe bet is to leave him to patrol third base – his primary position in the minors – while letting him receive reps at second base every now and again. Chavis did see time at second during spring training.

Should Bobby Dalbec get off to a hot start with Double-A Portland, the PawSox could be in line to receive another player whose primary position in the field happens to involve the hot corner. Talk about your options.

## 2). Who in the 'pen will prove mighty?

On paper, the strength of the PawSox Opening Day roster is the bullpen. It's a nice blend of proven arms (Jenrry Mejia) and promise (Travis Lakins) with 40-man roster options like Bobby Poyner and Marcus Walden also figuring in prominently. Keep an eye on lefty Josh Taylor, who was the pitcher the Red Sox acquired in last spring's trade that sent former Pawtucket infielder Deven Marrero to Arizona.

"You always want to make sure you have guys available in case there is a need," said PawSox pitching coach Kevin Walker.

## 3). Call to (starting) arms

You won't find a Jon Lester-type prospect among this year's PawSox starting rotation. The question is whether or not someone will pitch well enough to merit consideration in the event a need arises with the parent club.

Last year, the Red Sox turned to Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez – both former PawSox – to make starts. Both were already on the major-league roster and specifically stationed in the bullpen as long relievers. Boston did turn to Pawtucket and specifically Jalen Beeks to make a start, hence that should give plenty of incentive for the all-right handed, five-man rotation the PawSox will open the season with. Mike Shawaryn draws the nod in the opener and will be followed by Chandler Shepherd, Josh Smith, Ryan Weber and Erasmo Ramirez.

"I think the starting rotation is solid. You have guys with different styles who offer different looks," Walker said. "At the end of the day, these guys know about themselves and are going to give us a chance to win games."

## 4). New sheriff in town

There is so much player turnover in a minor-league club that often, the team's personality reflects how the manager has a handle on all the comings and goings. First-year PawSox skipper Billy McMillon understands this as well as realizing he has some pretty big shoes to fill. Many of those tasked with managing in Pawtucket have been able to parlay their work ethic and communication skills into big league coaching gigs.

The 47-year-old McMillon now gets his shot in Triple-A after spending the past three seasons as the Red Sox minor-league baserunning/outfielder coordinator. Before that, McMillon managed Boston's MiLB affiliates in Portland, Salem and Greenville.

"Playing hard every single day and having guys play to their potential is what we're going to shoot for," McMillon said.

Fortunately for McMillon, he has Walker along with hitting coach Rich Gedman and coach Bruce Crabbe during this period of transition. All three worked in Pawtucket last season under previous manager Kevin Boles, who's now managing the Double-A Binghamton franchise.

## 5). Come on out

The clouds of stadium controversy have been lifted, giving way to two more seasons of PawSox baseball at McCoy Stadium before the operation relocates to Worcester. PawSox principal owner/chairman Larry Lucchino has stated repeatedly that the team has no plans to "mail it in or phone it in" over the next two seasons. There's no question that the Pawtucket front office is carrying on per usual, starting with all sorts of promotions and giveaways that were done in hopes of luring fans to McCoy.

What remains to be seen is whether the organization's message will be well received by the public, who at the end of the day hold the key to once again making the PawSox a popular spring and summertime attraction.

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

### **Fortuitous Mookie double snaps Sox's skid**

Ian Browne

OAKLAND -- The Red Sox needed some good fortune, and they got it. They also needed some clutch hits, key bullpen outs and a top defensive play by shortstop Brock Holt, and they got those, too.

Just like that, the defending World Series champions snapped a four-game losing streak (longer than any they had last season) with a clutch, 6-3 win over the A's on Wednesday night at the Coliseum.

Mookie Betts, the reigning American League Most Valuable Player, got his reeling team off the mat when he hit a two-run double off the third-base bag and into left to snap a tie with two outs in the top of the ninth.

For those who watch the Oakland Athletics, it is a known fact that the only realistic way to reach base on a ball hit down the third-base line is for it to strike the base. Matt Chapman is that good. He makes every play. And he would have made this one.

"It has to hit the bag, if not he makes the play," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "That kid is amazing at third base. At least we found a way for him not to make a play."

There will be times this season when Betts will be impossible to stop in situations like these. But that time hasn't arrived just yet. Betts, hitting .226, needed some help after he tapped a 3-2 Fernando Rodney changeup on the eighth pitch of the at-bat Chapman's way.

Per Statcast, the 89.4 mph grounder had an expected batting average of .180.

What was Betts thinking at the point of contact?

"Honestly, just hit the base. Pretty much the only way you're going to get it by Chapman," said Betts. "He's one of the best, if not the best, at third."

Perhaps it is a sign that fortunes are about to change for the 2-5 Sox.

"A break? Yeah," said Betts, when asked what it felt like. "You know, yesterday was one of those things where we're a foot away from a home run tying the game up and a couple of reviews that didn't go our way. Just to get a bounce our way was huge."

And here is a look at the other elements that made this "huge" win a reality.

Holt in the hole

Before Betts and the Sox got their lucky break in the ninth, the A's nearly took the lead in the bottom of the eighth. Ramon Laureano, a complete tormentor of the Red Sox in this series, tapped one deep into the hole. With Xander Bogaerts taking a night off, Holt made a jump throw and first baseman Mitch Moreland corralled it. The only problem is that first-base umpire Nic Lentz called Laureano safe and the A's had a 4-3 lead, or it least it seemed so. Cora couldn't believe it, so he issued a challenge. The call was overturned and the game remained tied.



“Yeah, I mean, if there’s no replay, I get thrown out of the game,” Cora said. “If it was before replay, I get thrown out of the game. We were pretty sure he was out. By the way, Brock made a great play. That was unreal.”

Blake’s birthday blast gives offense life

The Red Sox trailed, 3-0, when Blake Swihart stepped to the plate with two outs in the top of the fifth. Aside from the deficit, Boston had gone 22 innings without scoring a run.

But Swihart celebrated his 27th birthday by roping a solo shot to right-center.

“Yeah, I think we felt it kind of when Blake hit that home run,” Betts said. “Something to get us going. We needed something to get us going, and seeing one [run] go across the plate was definitely big for our team, for sure.”

“Just a sigh of relief,” said Holt. “We finally got on the board. We were joking in the shower that if Blake doesn’t hit that home run, we probably don’t score tonight either.”

The momentum from the homer by Swihart carried over an inning later when Moreland won his left-on-left matchup against Ryan Buchter with a two-run double to tie it.

Bullpen mastery

Because the Red Sox have trailed in most of their games, there has remained some mystery about Cora’s plan for the bullpen. The first clue came on Friday night when Matt Barnes was entrusted for the save and delivered. But on Wednesday, Cora used Barnes in a huge situation in the bottom of the seventh with the dangerous Khris Davis at the plate. Barnes got the slugger swinging on a nasty curve.

Barnes also got three more outs for the eighth, and this time it was Ryan Brasier who got his first career save in the ninth.

Translation: Cora will not be going with a set closer. He will bring in his most trusted reliever (Barnes) for what he perceives as the biggest situation in the game.

“We just need outs,” said Cora. “We saw the matchup we wanted. We didn’t hesitate.”

And after the eventful night was over, there was finally music playing in the postgame clubhouse again.

“We’ve been struggling this whole road trip so far,” said Betts.

“Like I said, wins are hard to come by, so every win is precious at this point.”

### **Pearce to return for Red Sox's finale in Oakland**

Ian Browne

OAKLAND -- The Red Sox are expected to welcome a key piece back to their roster and lineup for Thursday’s finale of this four-game series against the Athletics, when 2018 World Series MVP Steve Pearce is activated from the injured list.

Pearce suffered a left calf strain on March 17 in a Grapefruit League game, delaying the start of his first full season with the Red Sox.

The right-handed hitter certainly made the most of his time last year after his acquisition on June 28, posting a .901 OPS and seven homers in 15 regular-season games. In the World Series against the Dodgers, Pearce hit .308 with three homers, eight RBIs and a 1.667 OPS, helping the Red Sox win in five games.

With lefty Brett Anderson starting on Thursday for the A's, Pearce should be thrown right into the mix.

Pearce specializes against lefties and had a .304/.400/.559 line against them in 2018.

To make room for Pearce on the roster, the Red Sox are likely to option first baseman Sam Travis to Triple-A Pawtucket.

Given the slow start the Red Sox got off to, losing five of their first six games, Pearce's return comes at a good time, given the way he balances out the roster.

"You bring Steve now, his experience, it starts giving us options late in the game," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "Everybody knows he hits lefties, but at the same time he's a good at-bat against righties. It's good to have him back and start giving us balance to do the things we did when we got him last year. Early [last] season, we had Hanley [Ramirez], then didn't have him for a while. At that point, we were unbalanced roster-wise. Now we got Pearce. He gave us options. I think it's great to have him around."

Bogaerts sore, but should return Thursday

Lost in the shuffle of Xander Bogaerts getting thrown out at third in the key play of Tuesday's 1-0 loss is that the shortstop drilled a foul ball off his left foot just before that. Bogaerts was out of the lineup on Wednesday, as Cora said he was looking to get him a day off on the road trip anyway. Brock Holt made the start at short.

Cora said Bogaerts should be back in the lineup on Thursday afternoon.

Asked how his foot was feeling, Bogaerts said, "So so."

Cora 'proud' of Laureano

Though Cora didn't enjoy watching Ramón Laureano help prevent his team from winning with two spectacular throws in the first two games of this series, Boston's manager has fond memories of Oakland's center fielder.

When Cora was the bench coach for the Astros in 2017, Laureano was in Spring Training trying to win a spot on the roster. After playing the '17 season in the Minors for Houston, Laureano was traded to Oakland.

"He's a game-changer," Cora said. "I hate what he's doing right now, but I'm very proud of him. He was with us in 2017, in big league camp with the Astros, and he was that guy wherever I was in the dugout, he was right next to me the whole time asking questions, asking about pitchers, about defense, and all this stuff."

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

### **We finally have the Red Sox' bullpen blueprint**

Rob Bradford

OAKLAND -- Matt Barnes had just finished what has become his daily postgame treadmill session, still donning a headband and a fair amount of sweat. This time, however, the media gathered around the reliever wasn't there to talk about closing out a game. This was simply about coming in.

After answering all the kind of questions a closer might be posed just a few days earlier, Barnes was now explaining how it felt to come in during the seventh inning.

More so than what unfolded in Seattle during the Red Sox only other win, this seemed like a much better look into what will be the team's bullpen blueprint.

"Do we?" said Barnes with a wry smile when asked if we did, indeed, now have the plan for how the Red Sox' relief pitching will be presented.

It sure seems that way.

Did it feel good for Alex Cora to finally get a chance to implement this bullpen strategy? "Which one?" This one, he was informed. "To get outs? They're good, they're throwing the ball well," was all that the manager would offer.

While the participants might continue to be coy the Red Sox' 6-3 win over the A's offered telling insight into what Cora is dealing with. (For a complete recap, [click here](#).) First came the willingness to use newcomer Colten Brewer in a fairly high-leverage situation, being brought on in the sixth inning with the game knotted up at 3-3.

Brewer -- who some in the Sox organization have started to see similarities to Houston's Lance McCullers - pitched with confidence and purpose, allowing just one baserunner in his 1 2/3 innings. But when American League home run champ Khris Davis came to the plate with two outs in the seventh, it was Cora's time to send a message. Even with seven more outs to get, this was the kind of scenario where you are going to see Barnes.

The designated pitcher got the better of the designated hitter, ending the seventh with a strikeout.

"It's going to be fun," said Barnes who stayed on to pitch a scoreless eighth, ultimately earning him a win. "I've kind of done a little bit more of that over the last year, too. Moving forward, it's fun. It really is. Those are the moments you really get fired up for, you get jacked up for. Coming in a big spot and being able to do your job and help the guys win. That's the most important thing."

Then came the ninth.

Both Ryan Brasier and Tyler Thornburg were warming up to prepare for life after Barnes. If the game remained tied, the likelihood would be Thornburg -- who is coming off two straight impressive one-inning stints -- would come on in. But the Red Sox look the lead, so it was the other closer, Brasier.

The result was Brasier's first career save and a peek into how things are going to unfold in this life after Craig Kimbrel.

"Relievers now, that's what they do," Cora said. "They close games, get people out. We just need outs. We saw the matchup we wanted. We didn't hesitate. He did a good job against Davis. Then he didn't panic when we threw the ball away and there's a runner at third. ... Brewer was outstanding. Brasier was good too."

"We'll see how it works moving forward," Barnes said. "They have a great idea of what they want to do. We've all bought in. So we'll keep rolling with it that way."

### **Ten other Red Sox teams started 1-5, and you don't want to know how they finished**

John Tomase

Baseball is big on sample sizes, and six games isn't much of one, so make of this what you will, but the 1-5 start of the Red Sox does not bode well, if history is any guide.

Ten other times the Red Sox have started this poorly, and each season share one trait -- it did not end in the playoffs.

The closest the Red Sox have come to reaching the postseason after this poor a start came in 2011, when they opened 0-6 (en route to 2-10) before getting their act together and taking a half-game division lead and seemingly insurmountable nine-game wild card lead into September. These were the chicken-and-beer Red Sox of the burned-out Terry Francona and the one-foot-out-the-door Theo Epstein, however, and we know how that season ended -- in heartbreak after the wildest set of Game 162s in history.

That's the only club to sniff the playoffs, as the chart below illustrates. Of the other nine teams, only the 1996 and 1942 squads finished with winning records, the former falling three games shy of the wild card after a huge second half surge. The '96 Red Sox went 38-18 down the stretch and watched Roger Clemens record his second 20-strikeout game in the last win of his Red Sox career, but they had dug themselves too big a hole to overcome the Orioles for the wild card.

The second wild card that exists today obviously mitigates the impact of slow starts by creating another avenue to October, but the Red Sox would be wise to head the lessons of 2011 and beyond -- losses in April can exact a heavy price in September.

Year	Start	Record
2011	0-6	90-72
1945	0-6	71-83
1927	0-6	51-103
2019	1-5	?????
2012	1-5	69-93
1996	1-5	85-77
1966	1-5	72-90
1942	1-5	79-75
1932	1-5	43-111
1928	1-5	57-96
1925	1-5	47-105

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

### **Alex Cora shows his hand with bullpen usage in comeback win**

Sean McAdam

Very little about the first week of the season has made much sense for the Red Sox.

Their starting rotation, thought to be a strength, has been horrid with no wins and one quality start in the first seven games.

The lineup, the best in baseball last season and unchanged from a year ago, recently went two and a half games without scoring so much as a single run.

And, in perhaps the most unpredictable development of all, the bullpen, widely seen as a potential weakness, has instead flourished. On Wednesday night, with a four-game losing streak in danger of growing, the bullpen came to the club's rescue.

After the Sox could get just five innings from an inefficient (96 pitches) Nathan Eovaldi, three Red Sox relievers combined to turn in four shutout innings, buying time for a ninth-inning comeback that produced a 6-3 win over the Oakland A's.

The fine relief work wasn't anything limited to Wednesday night, however. Over the last 22 innings, the Sox bullpen has allowed just three earned runs, a stretch of dominance that few anticipated.

It wasn't just how the bullpen performed; it was also how it was deployed.

With Eovaldi nearing the 100-pitch mark, Colten Brewer breezed through the sixth, then returned for the seventh when he got two more quick outs before issuing a two-out walk to Stephen Piscotty. That brought cleanup hitter Khris Davis to the plate, with the game tied.

Alex Cora called on Matt Barnes, his best relievers, to face Davis, who couldn't hold his swing on a hellacious curveball, stranding Piscotty at first.

That Cora would go to Barnes in the seventh inning of a tie game was both illuminating. Barnes, of course, had been given the ball last Friday night in the bottom of the ninth after the Red Sox had surged ahead in the top of the inning, prompting some to see the move as evidence Barnes would be the team's designated closer.

Cora, of course, was saying no such thing. What Friday proved was that in conventional settings — where the Sox have a lead to protect in the ninth — Barnes is his most trustworthy option.

But as Wednesday demonstrated, Cora isn't afraid to be a bit unconventional with his relievers. In a tie game in the seventh, he didn't go with Heath Hembree or Brandon Workman, his traditional choices for the seventh. Instead, he seized the moment and opted for his best reliever for what was then the biggest out of the game.

There was no sense holding Barnes back for a save opportunity that might not have materialized. That's so 20th century when it comes to strategy.

Instead, Cora got the matchup he wanted: his best reliever, a righthander to boot, to face the A's most dangerous hitter, also righthanded.

That at-bat likely was the key to the game, and Cora wasn't holding anything back. So the same guy who got the ball in the ninth with a lead also was summoned in the middle of the seventh.

Smart call. And not just because it worked out in his favor.

Cora then sent Barnes back out for the eighth and stayed with Barnes even when the A's — thanks to a throwing error by Blake Swihart — had to potential go-ahead run 90 feet from home plate. Once again, a critical at-bat, and once more, his best reliever on the mound.

Never mind the ninth, never mind the save opportunity. This was Cora showing a willingness to deploy his bullpen the right way, rather than the conventional one.

Once more it paid off, with Barnes getting Ramon Laureano to hit into an inning-ending chopper to short— with considerable help from Brock Holt, who ranged into the hole and made a strong throw to nip Laureano at first.

The ninth? That took care of itself, with Ryan Brasier coming in with a three-run lead and, following a plunking of leadoff man Chad Pinder, quickly recorded three outs for his first career save.

It won't always lineup as neatly as it did Wednesday night. There will be times that Cora might spot Barnes (or Brasier) in a high-leverage jam, and be left without the matchup he wants later in the game.

But Wednesday represented the blueprint for the season. Ignore tradition. Forget the save opportunity. And manage so that you have your best pitcher on the mound for the most critical out(s).

And if it looked a little unorthodox, that's OK, too. Nothing else about this Red Sox season has gone according to plan, either.

## **BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 6, Athletics 3 – Late rally snaps losing streak**

Sean McAdam

Defense plays a part: When a team has lost four in a row and is desperate for a win, sometimes it's the little things that matter most. Defensively, the Red Sox got a huge game-saving play from their backup shortstop Brock Holt, which came, ironically, immediately after a pair of defensive miscues on the part of the Red Sox. In a 3-3 game in the bottom of the eighth, A's shortstop Marcus Semien tried to steal second. Blake Swihart, getting his second start behind the plate, threw down, but the throw tailed to the second base bag and rolled into center, with a throwing error on Swihart. Jackie Bradley Jr. charged the ball and appeared to have a play at third, but juggled the ball on the transfer, then fumbled it out of his glove, enabling Semien to reach third, representing the go-ahead run. Ramon Laureano then hit a ball into the shortstop hole, which Holt fielded, and off-balance, made a strong throw to first. Laureano was initially ruled safe, but the Sox challenged and got the call reversed, ending the inning. The Sox then went on to score three in the top of the ninth to snap the tie, but the game would have unfolded far differently had Holt not made that play.

Betts has his first MVP moment of the season: Mookie Betts has begun the year slowly at the plate. He had a homer in Seattle and a three-hit performance on Opening Day. In fact, as he came to the plate in the ninth, he was 1-for-11 in this series. But Betts fought off a number of tough changeups from ageless wonder Fernando Rodney before turning on a pitch down the third base line. Just as all-world infielder Matt Chapman looked poised to make the play, the ball hit the third base bag, kicked up and bounded past Chapman into shallow left, scoring Blake Swihart and Bradley with the go-ahead runs. It was the kind of moment that Betts seemed to specialize in during his historic season last year and qualifies as his first impact contribution this season. For a struggling team, it couldn't have been better-timed, even if it was a bit fortuitous.

Eovaldi struggles again: Nathan Eovaldi had a sub-par outing, falling behind 3-0 and lasting just five innings, by which time his 96 pitches forced the Sox to go to the bullpen earlier than planned. Eovaldi had real difficulty with his command walking four in just five innings while also hitting a batter. His velocity was ramped up as always (97-98 mph with his fastball), but too often, Eovaldi couldn't keep the ball in the strike zone. Two singles and a walk loaded the bases in the second and a line single that literally took Rafael Devers' glove off scored one run, while a poorly executed curveball in the fourth to Laureano resulted in a two-run homer. In three of his first four innings, Eovaldi threw more than 20 pitches, making for a short night and though seven games, the Red Sox have just one quality start from a starter.

### **TURNING POINT**

The Red Sox got handed a gift by Oakland second baseman Jurickson Profar in the sixth inning. With a runner at first and one out in the fifth, Devers had a routine grounder to second, setting the A's up for a simple 4-6-3 double play. But Profar overthrew second base wildly, and the Sox had runners at the corners with one out instead of being out of the inning. Two batters later, Mitch Moreland ripped a two-run double to the right-field corner — courtesy, partly, of Profar.

### **TWO UP**

Blake Swihart: Although he had the potentially costly throwing error, Swihart enjoyed a big night at the plate. He homered in the fifth to snap the team's scoreless streak at 22 innings, then singled in the seventh and singled again in the ninth, part of the Red Sox' three-run rally.

Mitch Moreland: You could make the case that, through the first seven games of the season, Moreland has provided the two biggest hits of the season to date for the Sox. He delivered a three-run, pinch-hit homer in Seattle to give the Sox their only win from that series, then provided the game-tying double Wednesday night, giving the Sox a chance to win the game later.

### **TWO DOWN**

Eduardo Nunez: Nunez very nearly cost the Sox in a big way when he got caught too far off first base following a leadoff single in the ninth.

Jackie Bradley Jr.: He had a single to keep the ninth inning going, but previously, was 0-for-3 with two strikeouts and also had that poorly timed juggle in the outfield on the stolen base by Semien.

#### QUOTE OF NOTE

“Hoping it would hit the base — that’s pretty much the only way to get the ball by Chapman.” Mookie Betts on his go-ahead ninth-inning double.

#### STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Sox bullpen continues to get the job done and has allowed just three runs over their last 22 innings. The triple by Andrew Benintendi in the ninth, which produced an insurance run, was his first extra-base hit of the season.

Ryan Brasier earned his first career save in the ninth inning.

J.D. Martinez singled in the second to extend his hitting streak to seven straight.

#### UP NEXT

The Red Sox and A’s wrap up their four-game series with a 3:35 (ET) start as LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (0-1, 10.38) vs. LHP Brett Anderson (1-0, 0.00).

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

**‘Just a sigh of relief’: Red Sox end skid, finally look closer to team they expect to be**

Chad Jennings

OAKLAND – For their next trick, the Red Sox will try to win a game without needing a dramatic at-bat in the ninth inning, but for the time being, what happened Wednesday night was enough to crank a Pitbull song on the clubhouse sound system and make jokes in the shower. It was enough to feel like a winning ballclub again.

“The energy was better today the whole day,” Alex Cora said.

With two outs and the game tied in the ninth, Mookie Betts hit a game-winning double off the third base bag, then Ryan Brasier got the first save of his career, and the Red Sox had their second win of the season, 6-3. Hard to feel good about a 2-5 record, but it sure beats 1-6.

At some point, the Red Sox expect to be better than this. They expect Nathan Eovaldi to pitch more than five innings, they expect Rafael Devers to finally drive in a run, they expect Brock Holt to finally get a hit, and they expect a whole game to go by without a Red Sox player making an out on the bases. They expect to be good. They do not expect to win by the skin of their teeth.

But Wednesday – and to a lesser extent Tuesday, when they lost 1-0 – was a game they could feel good about, a game that showed signs of the fog lifting, the ice melting, and the defending champs playing like they’re actually capable of winning another ring.

For at least one night, the Red Sox finally had many of the things they’d been missing since the start of the regular season.

A struggling starter who didn’t implode

That first series in Seattle, the Red Sox rotation never gave them much of a chance. Chris Sale gave up seven runs in the opener. Eovaldi gave up six the next night. Eduardo Rodriguez couldn't get through the fifth inning in Game 3, and Rick Porcello couldn't get through the third inning in Game 4. If not for the bullpen and a huge home run by Mitch Moreland, the Red Sox would have been swept in Seattle, and it would have been largely due to the rotation not limiting the damage.

But these first three games in Oakland have been a different story. David Price gave up three home runs on Monday, but he at least got through the sixth inning. Sale was nowhere near his best stuff on Tuesday, but he held the A's to just one run.

On Wednesday, Eovaldi's command was a mess. Only 51 of 96 pitches were strikes. He walked four guys. But a bases-loaded, no-outs jam in the second ended with just one run. First turn through the rotation, that inning would have been a disaster. On Wednesday, it was ugly, but manageable.

"That's how we're going to get going," Cora said. "With our pitching staff."

A hard-hit ball that took a lucky bounce

Tuesday night, Xander Bogaerts missed a game-tying home run by feet, if not inches, and wound up thrown out at third base. Monday night, Bogaerts had a chance to give the Red Sox an early lead and was thrown out on a close, hard-to-tell play at the plate. These were not plays the Red Sox deserved to have go their way, but they were certainly plays that could have gone their way.

With two outs and the game tied at 3 on Wednesday – in an inning when Eduardo Nunez had already been thrown out on the bases, and Holt had struck out with a non-competitive swing — Mookie Betts fought through an eight-pitch at-bat to finally scorch a ball down the third-base line. It hit the bag and popped over Matt Chapman's head, pretty much the only way to assure the game's best defender wouldn't make the play.

"I wouldn't have beaten it out," Betts said.

Off the bag, though, both Blake Swihart and Jackie Bradley Jr. scored. Betts had a double, and Andrew Benintendi drove him in with a triple. Betts is hitting .226 this season. That double was the first time he drove in a run that wasn't a solo homer. The MVP came up in a big spot, and he finally came through.

"I think, when he started fouling off pitches, he's getting close," Cora said. "He's getting very close. Better takes. On time. Seeing the ball better.... After that first at-bat he gave me the feedback, he's like I'm getting there. Just have to be patient. We know he's going to start hitting."

A bullpen plan that finally mattered

After all the hand-wringing about who would take over as closer, whether there would be a closer, and whether the Red Sox needed a closer – there really hadn't been much need for a closer in the first week of the season.

Cora and his coaching staff had a seemingly radical idea of mixing and matching in the late innings, but there weren't many leads worth protecting. The Red Sox weren't competitive enough for any bullpen strategy to matter.

On Wednesday, it mattered. Matt Barnes, who had the only save of the season up to this point, came into the game in the seventh inning to strike out cleanup hitter Khris Davis. He stayed in the game for the eighth inning. It was Brasier, once the Red Sox took the lead, who got the save opportunity.

That's the way the Red Sox drew it up, and frankly, their bullpen has been their greatest strength up to this point. Barnes, Brasier, Colten Brewer and Brandon Workman have combined for 11 appearances without an earned run. Brian Johnson's pitched 4 1/3 innings with only one run. The bullpen has been great, and at last, the Red Sox played a game in which it meant something.



“Those are the moments you really get fired up for, you get jacked up for,” Barnes said. “Coming in a big spot and being able to do your job and help the guys win, that’s the most important thing.”

A run where all those zeros had been

It was Blake Swihart’s 27th birthday on Wednesday, and he came to the plate in the fifth inning with his team stuck in a 22-inning scoring drought. They put nothing but zeros on the board since Sunday’s meaningless ninth-inning run in Seattle.

The backup catcher changed that with a solo home run, one of his three hits in the game.

“Just a sigh of relief,” Holt said. “We finally got on the board. We were joking in the shower that, if Blake doesn’t hit that home run, we probably don’t score tonight either.... That home run kind of lightened the mood a little bit. It was like, all right, we scored, now let’s try to score some more. That was a big hit for us.”

How big can it be if it simply put the Red Sox on the board in the seventh game of the season? Maybe not all that big in the grand scheme of things. Maybe we’ll forget all about it in a week or two. But for one night, when the team needed something to feel good about, Swihart’s home run was a nudge in that direction. Just like Eovaldi limiting the damage in the second. Just like Moreland getting another big hit in the sixth. Just like Barnes getting out of that jam in the seventh. Just like Holt making a terrific play at shortstop in the eighth. Just like Betts hitting one off the bag in the ninth.

The Red Sox expect to be better than this. They believe they will be better than this. They trust that, sooner rather than later, their starters will do the heavy lifting, their bullpen will get the big outs when it matters, and their lineup will make those late innings more of a formality than a nail-biter.

But they’re not there yet, and so on Wednesday night, they turned up the music and celebrated what they needed most. A win they could feel good about.

## **\* *The East Bay Times***

### **Jurickson Profar’s defense an issue in A’s loss to Red Sox**

Martin Gallegos

OAKLAND — Marco Estrada is becoming an early candidate for the A’s hard-luck loss pitcher on the staff.

For a third consecutive start, the right-hander allowed three runs or less in a start that resulted in an A’s loss, this time defeated 6-3 by the Boston Red Sox Wednesday night.

Estrada appeared to induce an inning-ending double play ball against Rafael Devers that would have preserved a two-run lead, but an errant throw by second baseman Jurickson Profar that was intended for Marcus Semien instead sailed into left field to keep the inning alive. Estrada walked J.D. Martinez next and was removed for left-hander Ryan Buchter, who on the first and only pitch he threw gave up a game-tying to run double to Mitch Moreland.

Estrada finished the night allowing just three runs, two earned, over his 5 2/3 innings of work.

“For a guy that’s a fly ball pitcher, he seems to know how to get a ground ball when he needs one,” A’s manager Bob Melvin said of Estrada. “It just got away from us today.”

Though Profar’s error led to an unearned run, Estrada refused to place any blame on his teammate. He was instead more upset about walking Martinez the next at-bat.

“That’s not frustrating. What was frustrating for me was that I didn’t pick my guy up,” Estrada said. “Usually when stuff like that happens I put it in my head to pick him up and get the next guy out. I didn’t do that.”

J.B. Wendelken came on in relief of Buchter and got out of the inning with the game still tied, but more defensive woes by Profar later in the game resulted in the Red Sox taking their first lead of the series.

Fernando Rodney came on in the ninth and recorded the first two outs before a hard grounder got past Profar and into right field to keep the inning alive. The ball took a tough hop on Profar and he did not make contact with it, so it was not ruled an error, but it was a play Profar usually makes.

Boston (2-5) took advantage of the extra life as Mookie Betts later hit a chopper that bounced off the third base bag and into the A’s bullpen for a double that drove home two runs.

“It was a ground ball to third and Chapman was going to get him,” Melvin said. “It’s just unfortunate that it hits the base and ends up being two runs. Rodney really did make a good pitch. A changeup down for weak contact, it just ends up hitting the bag. That’s the way it goes sometimes.”

Ramón Laureano blasted a two-run home run off Nathan Eovaldi in the fourth to extend the A’s lead to 3-0 at the time, but the A’s failed to take advantage of several opportunities. The A’s (5-4) finished 1 for 6 with runners in scoring position and left nine runners on base.

Here are some takeaways after the A’s win streak was snapped at four games:

#### 1. Profar’s defense might be an issue

This was not the first time Profar has made a costly mistake this season. In the A’s extra-innings loss to the Mariners at the Tokyo Dome last month, Profar made a high throw to first base that pulled Chad Pinder off the bag for the go-ahead and eventual winning run. It was not ruled an error, but it was a throw Profar had time to make.

Profar led all of Major League Baseball with 25 errors in 2018 as a utility man with the Texas Rangers. The A’s are hoping sticking to one position will help Profar in that aspect, but early on the problems are still there.

Profar said his error in the sixth was a result of not having a good grip on the ball.

“I think I had more time to grab the ball well,” Profar said. “If we turn that double play, we have a good chance to win the game.”

“It was in front of me. I had a good view of it. I just didn’t grab the ball well. I should have done a better job.”

The ninth-inning play where Swihart’s hard grounder got past Profar for a single is a different story. He said that play was tougher, with really only two options available.

“It was a hard hit. It’s do or die,” Profar said. “Either I get in front of it and it’s going to hit me or I do that. I gave myself a chance, but it didn’t hit the glove.”

Profar is also struggling at the plate early on now hitting just .139 after a 1 for 4 night Wednesday. Coming off a career year on offense with Texas in which he belted a career-high 25 home runs in 2018, Profar said he will get things turned around soon.

“It’s just a slow start,” Profar said. “I know I got it. I know I’m going to get back on track.”

A's manager Bob Melvin said Profar might be pressing at the plate, but not to the point where he is going to start panicking.

"Early on he was kind of a tough-luck guy. He's going to hit," Melvin said. "When you're with a new team, you want to impress. Just not getting the results right now."

Laureano might be getting hot

After tormenting the defending World Series champions with incredible throws, the A's outfielder got it done with the bat in Wednesday night's 3-0 win over the Red Sox. It was the A's fifth straight victory and sixth in their last seven games.

Laureano blasted a two-run home run to dead center off Nathan Eovaldi in the fourth inning, his second of the season to put the A's ahead by three. It was the first home run Eovaldi had allowed against the A's in seven career starts.

Laureano has now homered in two of the past three games.

Matt Chapman's hand is something to monitor

Chapman was hit by a slider from Eovaldi in the first inning and was checked on pretty heavily by A's trainer Nick Paparesta before taking his base at first. The Gold Glover played the rest of the game without any issue and even made a few highlight-reel plays on defense, but his final three at-bats were weak infield ground outs.

Having dealt with hand issues in the past, the A's will likely be extra cautious with Chapman overnight.

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

### **Betts' grounder hits 3B bag, Bosox end 4-game skid, beat A's**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Boston ended a long scoreless drought with a big swing from birthday boy Blake Swihart. Mookie Betts then helped the Red Sox snap a four-game losing streak with an even more important -- yet, strange -- hit.

Manager Alex Cora is just thankful things finally broke the right way this season for the World Series champs after a 1-5 start that included back-to-back shutout losses.

Betts' two-out grounder hit the third base bag and popped into the outfield for a tiebreaking, two-run double in the ninth inning, and the Red Sox beat the Oakland Athletics 6-3 on Wednesday night.

"It has to hit the bag," Cora said. "If not, (A's third baseman Matt Chapman) makes the play. That kid is amazing. At least we found a way for him not to make a play."

With two outs in the ninth and the score 3-all, Blake Swihart and Jackie Bradley Jr. both singled and advanced on a wild pitch by Fernando Rodney (0-1). Betts then hit a grounder down the line and, with Chapman in position to make a backhanded play, the ball struck the base, bounced high in the air and landed in the outfield grass.

Betts wound up on second, and the AL MVP scored on a triple by Andrew Benintendi.

"That's pretty much the only way you're going to get it by Chapman," Betts said. "He's one of the best, if not the best at third. I was just hoping it hit the base. It's huge. This was definitely a big win."

One that left A's manager Bob Melvin stunned.

"It was a groundball to third and Chapman was going to get him out," Melvin said. "It's just unfortunate that it hits the base and ends up being two runs. That's the way it goes sometimes."

Swihart finished with three hits, including his first home run of the season. Mitch Moreland had a key two-run double while J.D. Martinez singled to extend his hitting streak to seven games.

Boston avoided its longest losing streak since 2015 after being shut out in the previous two games. Holt helped preserve the 3-all tie in the eighth with a sharp play on a grounder in the hole.

Matt Barnes (1-0) retired four batters. Ryan Brasier pitched the ninth for his first save.

"The guys kept grinding and doing what we needed to do," Barnes said. "It was a big win."

Ramon Laureano homered for the A's.

The Red Sox fell behind 3-0 before rallying.

Oakland scored its first run on a bizarre play when Nick Hundley hit a sharp, one-out liner that knocked the glove off Red Sox third baseman Rafael Devers' left hand. As his mitt lay on the dirt, Devers fielded the ball barehanded and made a one-hop throw home to Swihart, but the catcher couldn't hang on as Kendrys Morales slid in safely.

#### STOPPING THE SKID

The Red Sox avoided their longest losing streak since July 2015 when they lost eight straight. Boston was the only team in 2018 to not have a losing streak longer than four games.

#### ARE THEY AIMING AT HIM?

Umpire Kerwin Danley has had a rough series, literally. While manning second base, Danley was hit by a throw from the outfield by Bradley following a single by Jurickson Profar in the second inning. On Tuesday, Danley was at third when he was hit by a line drive by Oakland's Stephen Piscotty, one day after being hit by foul ball while working behind the plate.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: 1B/OF Steve Pearce has rejoined the team and is likely to be activated off the injured list before Thursday's game. Last year's World Series MVP has been out since March 25 with a left calf strain. ... SS Xander Bogaerts was held out of the lineup a day after fouling a ball off his foot, although Cora said Bogaerts was due for a planned day off regardless.

Athletics: Chapman was hit on his left wrist by a slider from Boston starter Nathan Eovaldi in the first inning but stayed in the game.

#### UP NEXT

Oakland's Brett Anderson (1-0, 0.00) takes a 34 1/3-inning scoreless streak at the Coliseum into Thursday's series finale and will oppose Boston's Eduardo Rodriguez (0-1, 10.38) in a matchup of lefties. Rodriguez has allowed three earned runs or fewer in four career starts against the A's.