

## ***The Boston Red Sox Friday, April 5, 2019***

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

**A huge outfield mistake pretty much sums up who the Red Sox are right now**

Peter Abraham

OAKLAND, Calif. — That it's difficult to select a low point through the first eight games the Red Sox have played this season illustrates just how poorly they have played.

But there was no better demonstration of what has gone awry with the defending World Series champions than the inexcusable mistake made in the fourth inning of Thursday's 7-3 loss against the Oakland Athletics.

With the Sox down by a run, the Athletics had two runners on base with two outs when Stephen Piscotty sent a fly ball to right center.

The only question was which Gold Glove outfielder would catch the ball, center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. or right fielder Mookie Betts?

Major League Baseball's Statcast software, which tracks such things, gave Bradley a 99 percent chance to catch the ball and Betts a 95 percent chance.

But Betts and Bradley jogged slowly toward the ball and by the time they sped up it was too late. It landed between them on the warning track and bounced over the fence for a double.

Two runs scored as pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez looked back at his outfielders in disbelief.

"That's on me. The play's got to be made," Bradley said. "I'm the leader out there. The play's got to be made."

Part of what has made Betts and Bradley such good outfielders is their ability to communicate on balls in the gap. But this time neither called for the ball.

"One of us should have talked for sure," Betts said. "For any outfield that ball is catchable."

The Red Sox are 2-6 and have three games against the Diamondbacks in Arizona starting on Friday before the home opener on Tuesday afternoon. But the team's record is less of a concern than it's lack of purpose.

"Stuff like that can't happen," said Alex Cora, who was outwardly angry following a game for the first time in his tenure as manager. "That's a reflection on us. I'm accountable. I'll expect better things out of the group."

"You didn't see that last year. But last year was last year."

The Sox had a 3-0 lead before the Athletics rallied to win for the third time in a four-game series.

Xander Bogaerts and Brock Holt drew bases-loaded walks off Brett Anderson in the first inning, and J.D. Martinez homered to right field in the third. But Rodriguez (0-2) wilted with the lead.

No. 9 hitter Josh Phegley doubled to lead off the third inning. Rodriguez then walked Marcus Semien before falling behind Piscotty, 2 and 0, and throwing a non-competitive fastball down the middle.

Piscotty, who finished 4 for 4 with five RBIs, pounded it to center for a home run.

“I tried for a fastball away and I missed right over the plate,” Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez walked Ramon Laureano in the fourth inning before Phegley singled. Robbie Grossman doubled to right field to drive in Laureano before Piscotty’s fly ball fell between Bradley and Betts.

Rodriguez allowed six runs on eight hits over 3⅔ innings. The lefthander has given up 11 earned runs on 16 hits over eight innings in two starts.

Those spring training stories about this finally being his year should be stricken from the record.

“If you fall behind in the count, that’s going to happen,” Rodriguez said.

The well-compensated Red Sox rotation has a 9.08 earned run average. There has been one quality start.

The Sox had another uncharacteristic blunder in the ninth inning.

Betts drew a walk before Andrew Benintendi dumped a single into center field. Betts took off for third base, challenging the strong arm of Laureano.

Laureano, who threw Xander Bogaerts out on the bases in the first and second games of the series, did it again. That the Sox were down by four runs compounded the mistake.

“It’s a bad decision and he knows it,” Cora said.

Said Betts: “I should have known. He’s pretty much thrown everybody out. That’s what my instincts told me to do. I should have let myself know before anything happened that my run meant nothing.”

There’s not much denying what is obvious. The Sox are a bad team right now.

“It’s not good. It’s not good team baseball,” Bradley said. “We’re not panicking; we’re not worried. We know we have to play better.”

### **Not to pile on, but the Red Sox losses are piling up**

Dan Shaughnessy

OAKLAND, Calif. — Take heart, Sox fans. The manager is as mad about the Sox sloppy play as you are.

“I pay attention to details,” Alex Cora said after bad baserunning, a missed flyball, and another crummy performance by a starting pitcher created a 7-3 Red Sox loss to the A’s Thursday. “I love paying attention to details and that’s something I took pride in last year and right now we’re not paying attention to details. That’s on us. That’s on me. That’s on the staff. I know there have been mistakes, but at the same time . . . it gets to a point where honestly, today I was watching and there were a few things that were great last year that we’re not doing so good right now. It’s early enough that we can clean it up, but that’s on us.”

A routine flyball dropped on the warning track between Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. Eduardo Rodriguez coughed up a 3-0 lead and couldn’t finish the fourth inning. Betts made a boneheaded baserunning decision in the ninth, getting gunned down going to third with no outs and the Sox trailing by four.

“It’s a bad decision and he knows it,” said the manager “That one can’t happen and he knows it.

“It’s not that we’re going to be doing fundamentals every day and all that, but obviously we’re going to talk a little more about the game. We got to get it going. Regardless of the results — you win or lose — but stuff like that can’t happen and that’s a reflection on us. I’m accountable and I expect better things out of the group.”

“You didn’t see that last year, Last year was last year. We didn’t play well in Seattle. We didn’t play well here. We have to play better. That’s the bottom line. I take pride in that stuff. Details win ball games. And for four games they (Oakland) did a lot of good things . . . That was a reflection of who we were last year. I know we can get to that level, but we have to start getting after it.”

There’s no sugar-coating this. The start of the Red Sox season has been a big bowl of bad. Six losses in eight games. Last place in the AL East. I find myself starting a lot of sentences with “Not to pile on, but . . .”

Only the Arizona Diamondbacks can save the first-to-worst Red Sox before they stagger home for the Fenway Opener on Tuesday.

Not to pile on, but the Red Sox starting rotation has been hideously bad. “He’s The Ace” has turned into “Bum Of The Day Club. Staked to a 3-0 lead, Rodriguez gave up three in the third, and three more in the fourth, including the obligatory home run. Red Sox starters have given up 14 homers in eight games. At least one in every game. The pitching line for the “best rotation in baseball”: 35.2 innings, 36 earned runs on 48 hits and 22 walks. They are an aggregate 0-6 with a 9.08 ERA.

Rodriguez is driving Cora crazy. The manager has done everything he can to cajole consistency and maturity from the lefty, but it just gets more and more frustrating.

You know you are going bad when the key play in a loss is a can-of-corn that drops on to the warning track between two Gold Glove outfielders. It was still a 4-3 game and it looked like Rodriguez was out of a jam when Stephen Piscotty flied to right with two out in the fourth. But Betts and Bradley Jr. both pulled away. Nobody called for it. The ball landed for two extra runs.

The Sox ran into four outs on the bases in four games in Oakland.

Not to pile on, but they could easily be 0-8. They trailed 6-1 in the fifth in their one win in Seattle and got a ton of breaks after trailing 3-0 when they won in Oakland. They already have a four-game losing streak. They did not have a four-game losing streak during their 176 games in 2018. At minus-19, the Sox have the worst run differential in baseball.

Bradley is hitting .194, Benintendi .207, Betts .235, Christian Vazquez .190, Eduardo Nunez .130, Rafael Devers, .233. The Sox have hit eight homers and given up 18. They’ve committed eight errors.

Not to pile on, but here’s what one Hall of Fame pitcher e-mailed me after Sale’s second outing: “If you want to look at what Sale’s 5-year, \$145 million deal should look like check out Blake Snell’s 13 K performance. Why the hurry (extending Sale)? Plus, in spite of what the Sox say, you’ve got to get ready not only physically, but mentally for defending your World Championship. Can’t do it on back fields with your starters.”

It’s still early. Keep telling yourselves that. But these Red Sox thus far are Boston’s biggest sports disappointment since the 2018-2019 regular season Celtics.

The manager knows it’s time to start playing better baseball.

Not to pile on, but the idea of saving bullets for October would look arrogant and foolish if this team somehow doesn’t make it to October.

**Alex Cora says Arizona interview helped guide — and push — his career**

Peter Abraham

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Red Sox play a three-game series in Phoenix against the Arizona Diamondbacks starting on Friday. Had things worked out differently, Alex Cora could have been managing the home team.

Cora interviewed with the Diamondbacks and general manager Mike Hazen after the 2016 season. He was an ESPN analyst at the time.

Within the industry, it was widely assumed that Hazen, a former Red Sox executive, would hire Red Sox bench coach Torey Lovullo as his manager. But Cora wanted to be considered, if only for the experience.

“So I went from Puerto Rico to Phoenix. That’s a long ways, you know?” Cora said Thursday before the Sox lost to the Oakland Athletics, 7-3. “I interviewed the whole day. I knew the odds were very slim. There was a favorite.”

Lovullo proved to be the choice and when Hazen broke the news to Cora, it was with the advice to gain some experience as a coach.

A few days later, Houston Astros manager A.J. Hinch called Cora with an offer to become bench coach. Lovullo also offered the same job with the Diamondbacks.

Cora chose the Astros. He wanted a chance to win and believed he could learn more about using analytics from Hinch and the Houston front office. Cora helped the Astros win the 2017 World Series then was hired by the Red Sox. He credits Hazen with giving him a push.

“Mike was the one [who said] ‘Hey, just be on the field and things are going to happen quick.’ He was right,” Cora said. “They’re good people. Very professional; they know what they’re doing. I was glad that they called me to interview.”

The Diamondbacks have a number of former Red Sox executives working under Hazen including assistant GMs Jared Porter and Amiel Sawdaye and special assistant Craig Shipley.

Former Sox righthander Daniel Bard works for the team as a “minor league player mentor.” Jonny Gomes of the 2013 World Series champion Red Sox is the minor league outfield and base-running coordinator.

The Sox are 12-6 against the Diamondbacks in six series since 2002. But thanks to the vagaries of interleague scheduling, this weekend will be only the second time the teams play in Arizona.

The Sox took two of three from the Diamondbacks from June 8-10, 2007. The series drew 136,883 fans.

Friday’s game, which is Arizona’s home opener, is close to a sellout. Big crowds are expected Saturday and Sunday.

Pedroia goes 2 for 3

Dustin Pedroia started a rehabilitation assignment with Single A Greenville Drive. Facing West Virginia, Pedroia was 2 for 3 with a walk and a double. He played nine innings at second base and turned a double play.

Pedroia, who is recovering from surgery on his left knee, is scheduled to play for the Drive again on Friday, take Saturday off and play Sunday. From there the Sox will determine if he is ready to be activated.

Pedro is on board

Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez agrees with the cautious approach the Red Sox have taken with Chris Sale.

Sale appeared in only two spring training games and through two regular-season starts has dialed back significantly on his fastball velocity. Pitching coach Dana LeVangie has said that's by design.

"After the '04 World Series, I went to the Mets and I felt great. The feel for pitching came right back, but I did not have enough time to rest. I started off really well that year and then I hit a wall," Martinez said on MLB Network.

"I can really understand what these guys are going to go through, and I was researching myself some of the results that you get after the hangover from the World Series. A lot of starters went to the DL the very next year.

"It happens because you don't have enough time to rest, you're rushing, you go to spring training, you feel great, you gas it up right away, and before you know it, something is aching or you hit a wall, you're tired, and you need that little time.

"For the Red Sox, I think it's important that they rest those guys early and then ride them out as they go, because that team is always going to be in contention."

Martinez is a special assistant with the Red Sox in addition to his media work. He helped instruct a number of pitchers during spring training.

#### Oakland woes

There is no California love for the Red Sox against the Athletics. The Sox have lost nine of their last 12 games at Oakland Coliseum. They were outscored, 18-9, in the series that ended Thursday.

Unfortunately for the Athletics, the series drew only 54,440 fans.

The Sox are 3-13-1 in their last 17 series in the Coliseum. They also are 3-7 against Oakland the last two seasons.

#### Pearce returns

Steve Pearce was activated off the injured list and started at first base with Oakland starting lefthander Brett Anderson. He was 1 for 4 with three strikeouts. Pearce had a single in the third inning but was thrown out trying for second base. Sam Travis was optioned to Triple A Pawtucket . . . J.D. Martinez has hit safely in all eight games . . . The Sox will use a No. 6 starter in Arizona on Sunday to give the starters an extra day off. With Hector Velazquez working 2⅓ innings of relief on Thursday, Brian Johnson is the likely choice . . . Major League Baseball made a scoring change from the March 29 game in Seattle. An error on Rafael Devers in the fifth inning was changed to an error on Travis for dropping the throw from Devers . . . The Red Sox had a little fun before the game, presenting Rick Porcello and David Price with cakes in honor of reaching 10 years of major league service time. Price hit the mark on Thursday and Porcello last week. "Congrats on Tenure" it said on Price's cake.

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

### **Mookie Betts' mental mistakes costly in Red Sox' loss to A's**

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — Before the cameras turned on after the Red Sox' loss Thursday afternoon, Alex Cora brought both hands to his face and pushed hard against his cheeks. He wiped his eyes and looked up.

Someone asked about what happened on the field.

Cora looked down, took a deep breath and waited about five seconds before answering.

This West Coast road trip has been exhausting for the manager and his team, which fell to the Oakland A's in a 7-3 defeat that showcased how unfocused and sloppy the Red Sox have played during the beginning of their World Series title defense.

"I pay attention to details, I love paying attention to details and that's something I took pride last year," Cora said. "Right now, we're not paying attention to details. So that's on us. That's on me. That's on the staff. I know they have made mistakes, but at the same time, I think it gets to a point that we have to keep teaching the game and putting them in spots that they're going to take advantage of certain situations."

Getting beat is one thing; beating yourself is another. The Red Sox starters have pitched horribly (9.08 ERA to start the year), the baserunning has been dubious and the mental errors are starting to rack up.

The Sox are 2-6 and open up their season in last place in the American League East.

"Honestly, you know, today I was watching and there were a few things that we were great last year and we're not doing right now," Cora said. "It's early enough that we can clean it up, but that's on us. That's on me. I'm the manager of the team, so it's not that we're going to be doing fundamentals every day and all that, but obviously we're going to talk a little more about the game."

"We've got to get it going. Regardless of the results – you win or lose – but stuff like that can't happen, and that's a reflection on us. I'm accountable, and I expect better things out of the group."

Mistakes were a plenty all series, but none more glaring than the ones made by the Red Sox' best player and reigning MVP Mookie Betts, who had one of his worst games in recent memory.

Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. let a routine fly ball drop in right-center field that led to two big runs in the fourth inning, then Betts tried running first to third on Ramón Laureano, who has the best outfield arm in baseball since coming up the majors last year. He was thrown out, making the first out at third base in the ninth inning when the Sox were down four, and the team looked deflated.

"He came up to me, and for how great of a player he is, he makes mistakes and he owned it," Cora said. "He came up to me like, 'That's my fault.'"

To see two Gold Glove winners watch a routine fly ball drop right in front of them in the fourth inning was particularly bizarre.

Betts and Bradley each jogged toward right-center for a long fly ball, but neither went after it and the ball bounced over the wall for a ground-rule double off the bat of Stephen Piscotty. Two runs scored.

"One of us should have caught it," Betts said. "Just one of those things, right dead in the middle. One of us should have talked for sure."

Neither Betts nor Bradley would say if either of them called for the ball.

"It doesn't matter," Bradley said. "The play has to be made. It's the last out. It's a big momentum swing. It's on me. ... I'm the leader out there. The play has to be made. It's a catchable ball. I've got to take control."

It was the second time this season Bradley and Betts failed to communicate on a fly ball between them. Neither one heard each other on an Opening Day play in Seattle, on which Betts made the catch after stepping on Bradley's foot and knocking him to the ground.

Asked how the team is playing early this season, Bradley said, "Not good. It's not good. It's not good team baseball. We're not panicking. We're not worried. We know we have to play better. We've played some teams that are really executing. It's not what we are doing. We have to execute better and play a lot better."

The Sox also left a run on the bases in the first inning, when Steve Pearce mistakenly tried for second on a bullet off the left-field wall and was thrown out by a mile. J.D. Martinez hit a home run the very next at-bat. It was Martinez' third of the year.

Cora had hoped his team turned a corner Wednesday, when Blake Swihart's offensive performance woke them up for a 6-3 win.

"We're getting close," Cora said Wednesday.

But the very next day Eduardo Rodriguez disappointed, getting smacked around for six runs (though two were a direct result of the misplay in right-center). His final pitch in the fourth inning was the third ball to Khris Davis, then Cora pulled the plug in the middle of the at-bat, calling for an intentional walk as he made his way to the mound and took the ball out of Rodriguez' hands.

Sox starters have allowed 14 home runs through eight games.

Neither players nor coaches are ignoring the poor play so far. They're seeing the same thing everyone else is.

"Not very good," Betts said. "But it's a long season and teams go through these stretches. Obviously ours is right from the beginning. It sucks but you've just got to continue to play."

### **Red Sox make another baserunning mistake against Ramón Laureano**

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — As bold as it was, the Red Sox tried running on Ramón Laureano again.

And for the third time in the series, Laureano made them pay with a perfect throw and a momentum-changing out on the bases as the Sox took a 7-3 loss to the Oakland A's on Thursday to begin the year 2-6.

After the game, manager Alex Cora talked about how the coaching staff was just as responsible as the players for the Sox' poor start. Cora said they needed to be better.

Did the staff prepare the players ahead of time and discuss how aggressive they wanted to be on Laureano, who now has 12 outfield assists in 58 major league games, more than double any other player since he arrived in the big leagues?

"Yeah, we did," Cora said. "The three plays were bang-bang plays, but that one today can't happen. And he knows it."

Red Sox baserunning coach Tom Goodwin said the team talked about Laureano before the series, but didn't prepare for what was to come.

"He's obviously very good," Goodwin said. "And we knew he had a good arm coming in. But when you get out there and it's the competition side of you that takes over, we're not running thinking we can't make it. It comes down to, 'I think I can make it and we're going to make him prove us wrong.' This week, he proved us wrong three times."

Did the Sox not give him enough credit by pushing him three times?

"We knew he had a good arm," Goodwin said. "You don't really prepare for hitting a ball off the wall and he jumps up against the wall, comes up and makes an off-balance throw but it's on target. You don't really prepare for that. You prepare for if he's coming straight in and has a good angle, we're going to stop. But other than that, we're going to make him make plays. Hats off to him, he made the plays."

Betts said he was properly prepared, but couldn't help himself.

"Yeah, I should have known," he said. "He's pretty much thrown everybody out. That's what my instincts told me to do and I should have let myself know before anything even happened that my run meant nothing.

"I mean, yeah, he's obviously a great thrower and everything but we don't want to play passive either. You have to make him make those plays and he made them all. Tip your cap. He did an excellent job."

The Sox have been aggressive all season on the bases, just like last year, and don't plan to change.

"We're going to push the envelope," Goodwin said. "Mookie's is the one we shouldn't do. We're just looking for baserunners right there. We don't need him at third base, we just need guys on base. That's something Mookie understood. It's one of those things that competition sometimes it takes over, it doesn't allow you to make the play you should make, you try to make the play you want to make. Sometimes it burns you."

### **Red Sox embrace closer by committee approach**

Jason Mastrodonato

OAKLAND, Calif. — Could the traditional closer soon be a thing of the past?

The Red Sox deployed Matt Barnes in the seventh inning to face the A's most dangerous hitter, Khris Davis, in their 6-3 win on Wednesday night.

Barnes also pitched the eighth, then manager Alex Cora used Ryan Brasier against the top of the A's order for the save in the ninth inning.

Though Cora used Barnes for the save in the first win of the season last week, he wanted Barnes in what he perceived was the highest-leverage spot in Wednesday's game. He liked the matchup, with Barnes' big curve giving Davis trouble (Davis struck out). And now it's clear the Red Sox will be going with a closer-by-committee approach in 2019.

"The game will dictate what we do, and every game is different," Cora said Thursday morning. "We'll adjust."

Take a look around the majors and there are at least a half-dozen teams with no sure closer. Could the role become extinct?

"I don't think so," Cora said. "Obviously there's a lot of teams out there, they're using guys, they've got a closer. It seems like the Rays now have a closer. I don't know. I guess in our situation, our guy last year (Craig Kimbrel), he was a closer. But at one point in his career he had no saves. He evolved into that. It all depends on what you've got. The weapons you have and how you feel about that. There's teams that I think they'll still have it. I don't know how many. I'm not saying every team will have it, but there's still going to be a few teams out there that are going to have one."

Kimbrel, still a free agent, was rarely used in a versatile way last year. He was almost always deployed as a regular closer in the ninth and often struggled when called upon in non-save situations.

"I mean, I do feel like last year, what happened was spring training and the situation that Craig (being home with his ill daughter) went through," Cora said. "We had to adjust. I go back to when it really mattered, and we used him for two innings. Obviously having Barnes kind of like a situational guy, we felt very comfortable with him throughout the season. Nothing against Craig, but he's still good, you know?"



“Now we have the luxury of having Brasier and we have Barnes. He understands that. As long as we communicate and they know coming into a series where they fit and how we’re going to use them, I don’t see a problem. So far, so good.”

#### LINEUP BACK IN ORDER

Xander Bogaerts was back in the Sox’ lineup on Thursday afternoon and went 1-for-2 with two walks. He missed Wednesday’s game with a sore left leg after following a pitch off himself on Tuesday night. Rafael Devers got a routine day off at third base and the Sox will continue giving days off to regulars this weekend.

Steve Pearce was activated from the injured list and started at first base for the first time since the World Series, going 1-for-3 with three strikeouts. Sam Travis was sent back to Triple-A Pawtucket.

The PawSox opened their season on Thursday and notably had prospect Michael Chavis playing first base. He was 3-for-4 with a home run. Chavis has played mostly third base previously and the Sox also wanted to see him at second at some point. Former Mets closer Jennry Mejia had the save in the PawSox’ win.

There’s still no news on who will start Sunday’s game from the mound as the Sox look to use a sixth starter and give the regular rotation some extra rest. The Sox are also off on Monday and Wednesday next week. Brian Johnson and Hector Velazquez are options to start Sunday’s game.

#### ONE-TWO PUNCH NOT HOT YET

Mookie Betts is hitting .235 with a .698 OPS to start his MVP title defense, but Cora saw good things from Betts on Wednesday night.

“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. That was a tough at-bat (in the ninth inning). That 2-2 was a fastball to the backstop. He has to hang in there with off-speed stuff, off-speed stuff. He worked hard. His swing and 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.”

Out of the two-hole, Andrew Benintendi is also struggling, hitting .207 with a .549 OPS to start the year.

“He’s chasing pitches up in the zone,” Cora said. “He’s not comfortable in the strike zone, that’s about it. When you chase pitches that’s what happens. Right now, that’s what he’s doing.”

#### AN INTERVIEW TO FORGET

With the Sox traveling to Phoenix to play the Diamondbacks, Cora reflected on his interview to be the D-backs manager back in October, 2016, just before Arizona hired former Red Sox bench coach Torey Lovullo to be the manager.

Cora was a little annoyed with former Red Sox general manager and current D-backs GM Mike Hazen following the interview process.

“So I went from Puerto Rico to Phoenix,” Cora said. “That’s a long ways. I interviewed the whole day. I knew the odds were slim. There was a favorite in Vegas (Lovullo). When I got home a few days later, Mike calls me and he’s like, ‘We’re going in a different direction. We feel like you need to gain experience.’ Jokingly, sarcastically, but actually being honest I said, ‘You thought I was going to gain experience from San Juan to Phoenix?’”

Cora had no major league coaching experience at the time, but it wasn’t like Hazen didn’t already know that when he interviewed him.

“Then the conversation became serious,” Cora said. “And he’s like, ‘Alex, all you have to do is get back on the field. Get in uniform, gain that experience and you’ll be OK.’ I was in Bristol (working for ESPN) when that happened. It was during the playoffs, October, and two days later (Astros manager) A.J. Hinch called me and offered me the bench coaching job.

“A day later after that call, Torey called me for the bench coach job in Arizona. I was like, ‘it’s the trendiest organization, sabermetrics, the way they do things, and the chance to win. It was right there with the Astros.’ But Mike was the one that said just get on the field and things are going to happen quick. He was right.”

Cora said he still stays in touch with Hazen and has a good relationship with the GMs he previously interviewed with before getting hired in Boston.

“Well, most of them,” he said.

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

### **Athletics 7, Red Sox 3: Boston’s stumbling start continues**

Bill Koch

OAKLAND — Mookie Betts lodged a rare argument of a called third strike. Alex Cora ventured out of the dugout, risking his first ejection of the young season. Andrew Benintendi went down looking and slammed his helmet without leaving the batter’s box.

All of this happened within a six-pitch span in the top of the sixth inning on Thursday afternoon. The Red Sox were on their way to a second defeat in as many four-game series this season, their frustrations threatening to boil over.

Not that the Athletics seemed to mind all that much. Oakland extended its mastery of Boston at this venue thanks to a 7-3 victory.

Stephen Piscotty’s three-run homer in the bottom of the third erased a 3-0 deficit and the Athletics were off and running at Oakland Coliseum. Robbie Grossman’s RBI double and a bizarre ground-rule double by Piscotty accounted for three more runs in the fourth, chasing Boston starter Eduardo Rodriguez. The Red Sox find themselves limping to Arizona to close out what has been a difficult season-opening road swing.

“We didn’t play well in Seattle,” Cora said. “We didn’t play well here. Now we go to Arizona, it’s a three-game series and we have to play better. That’s the bottom line.”

Rodriguez was relatively sharp early before hitting the wall in the third. Josh Phegley’s double to left and Marcus Semien’s walk set the stage for Piscotty, who lifted a towering drive to center that cleared the wall at the 400-foot mark. It was a brand new game at 3-3 and the 14th home run allowed by Boston’s starting rotation.

“If you fall behind in the count that’s what happens all the time,” Rodriguez said. “I tried to throw a fastball away and I missed it right down the middle of the plate.”

More trouble followed in the fourth. Grossman sent a liner to the corner in right to break the tie and Piscotty followed one batter later with a lazy fly to right center. Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. failed to communicate and the ball hit on the warning track, bouncing high over the wall for a ground-rule double that made it 6-3.

“One of us should have caught it,” Betts said. “It was one of those things where it was right dead in the middle. One of us should have talked for sure.”

“In the moment I’m thinking the ball has to be caught regardless of who it is,” Bradley said. “It doesn’t really matter. I have to make that play.”

Khris Davis added the extra point with an RBI single to center in the sixth, but by then the game was well out of reach. Oakland’s bullpen combined for four strikeouts and conceded just a pair of singles. It was the 38th victory for the Athletics over the Red Sox in their last 54 meetings here.

“Right now we’re not paying attention to details,” Cora said. “That’s on us. That’s on me. That’s on the staff.”

Brett Anderson was on the brink early for Oakland, as the left-hander’s home scoreless string of 34 1/3 innings didn’t last through the first. Xander Bogaerts and Brock Holt each drew a bases-loaded walk to make it 2-0 in the first, but Christian Vazquez grounded into a fielder’s choice to stop the rally.

J.D. Martinez drilled a solo homer to right in the third and Boston nearly produced an immediate answer in the fourth. The Red Sox loaded the bases with two outs before Anderson struck out Steve Pearce on a breaking ball down in the zone. Boston put just one more runner in scoring position over the last five innings.

“We’re playing against some teams that are really executing, and that’s not what we are doing,” Bradley said. “We have to execute better and play a lot better.”

The final indignity came in the ninth, a second curious play of the afternoon involving Betts. He drew a leadoff walk and attempted to reach third on a single to shallow center by Benintendi. Ramon Laureano recorded his third outfield assist of the series for the Athletics by throwing Betts out on the run.

“I should have known,” Betts said. “He’s pretty much thrown everybody out. That’s what my instincts told me to do and I should have let myself know before anything even happened that my run meant nothing.”

“Three plays were bang-bang plays, but that one right there can’t happen,” Cora said. “And (Betts) knows it. He came up to me. For how great a player he is, he makes mistakes. And he owned it.”

### **Red Sox Journal: Pearce picks up where he left off**

Bill Koch

OAKLAND — It was a week later than he would have preferred, but Steve Pearce celebrated his regular-season debut with the Red Sox on Thursday.

Pearce (left calf) reported to Oakland Coliseum on Wednesday and was activated off the Injured List the following morning. He batted third against the Athletics and left-handed starter Brett Anderson, occupying the role primarily responsible for Pearce’s nine seasons in the big leagues. Sam Travis was optioned to Triple-A Pawtucket to clear a spot on the 25-man roster.

“If I had started (on Opening Day) I could have played, but it probably would have lingered for a long time,” Pearce said. “It’s behind me and I’m ready to go.”

Pearce slashed a healthy .304/.400/.559 against left-handed pitching last season, piling up 15 extra-base hits in 120 plate appearances. He took over at first base for Mitch Moreland, who received the day off after ripping a two-run double off left-handed reliever Ryan Buchter in Wednesday’s 6-3 win.

“Nothing against Sam, but Mitch saw (Buchter) already,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Wednesday. “He had a pretty good idea. They’ve been talking about him for the last two nights.”

Pearce was at extended spring training in Fort Myers while Boston stumbled to a 1-5 start. The comeback victory upon his return made it feel like old times in the dugout, as Pearce earned Most Valuable Player honors for the defending World Series champions thanks to his performance last October against the Dodgers.

“For me it was picking up where we left off,” Pearce said. “It’s nice to see the fight we had last night. Some things weren’t going our way, but we battled through them. That’s what our team’s all about.”

Xander Bogaerts (left ankle) returned after a day off, a late addition to the lineup while battling some stiffness. He fouled a pitch off his lower leg late in Tuesday night’s 1-0 defeat and wore an ice pack that covered the sore spot each of the last two nights. Rafael Devers received the day off Thursday and Eduardo Nunez played third base.

#### Closing time

Ryan Brasier earned his first career save in Wednesday’s 6-3 win, and Cora revealed a bit more of what has been a secretive bullpen plan to this point.

The manager has declined to name a closer in place of the departed Craig Kimbrel, who remains a free agent. Matt Barnes came on in the seventh inning to strike out Khris Davis with a man on and stranded another base runner at third in the eighth. It was Barnes who earned the first save chance of the season in Seattle, closing out a 7-6 victory on Friday.

“We have the luxury of having Brasier and Barnes,” Cora said. (Barnes) understands that. As long as we communicate and they know coming into a series where they fit and how we’re going to use them, I don’t see a problem.”

Kimbrel was used primarily to record the final three outs in a given game. It’s hard to imagine him being brought into a scenario like the one Barnes faced on Wednesday, a more modern usage for high-leverage relievers that Cora seems to embrace. Colten Brewer also gave the Red Sox five outs as a bridge from starter Nathan Eovaldi to Barnes.

“If I didn’t feel that way I wasn’t going to say how comfortable I was,” Cora said. “Then you guys would crush me later on. But stuff-wise, with what we added in the offseason and what we saw in spring training, it was good.”

#### Around the bases

David Price celebrated 10 years of service time in the big leagues on Thursday. Boston clubhouse manager Tom McLaughlin commissioned a pair of sheet cakes for the occasion, honoring both Price and Rick Porcello for hitting the milestone within the last week. Price made his debut with the Rays late in the 2008 season and Porcello broke in with the Tigers in 2009 ... The Red Sox open their Interleague slate on Friday when they visit the Diamondbacks for a three-game series. Boston was 16-4 against National League clubs last season and is 37-9 over its last 46 Interleague games ... Dustin Pedroia (left knee) was scheduled to begin his rehab assignment at Class A Greenville on Thursday.

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

**Eduardo Rodriguez fails to hold 3-run lead, Boston Red Sox starting rotation’s ERA inflates to 9.08 in loss to Athletics; J.D. Martinez hits third homer**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Eduardo Rodriguez failed to make it out the fourth inning as his ERA raised to 12.38 and the Red Sox starting rotation’s ERA inflated to 9.08 Thursday here at Oakland Coliseum.

The Red Sox handed the lefty a 3-0 lead but he couldn't hold it. He pitched 3.2 innings, allowing six runs, all earned, eight hits and three walks while striking out two.

Boston lost 7-3 to the Athletics to drop to 2-6.

Stephen Piscotty's 108.7-mph, 406-foot two-run homer in the third inning tied the game 3-3.

The starters have allowed 42 runs, 36 earned runs, 48 hits, 14 homers and 21 walks in 35.2 innings.

Rodriguez's defense didn't help Rodriguez who only pitched 4.1 innings in his first start.

A lack of communication between center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. and right fielder Mookie Betts allowed a ball to drop between them. It went for a two-run ground-rule double in the Athletics' three-run fourth inning.

Betts capped off an ugly loss by being thrown out at third base in the ninth. He tested Ramon Laureano's arm in the ninth inning after the center fielder made two unreal throws earlier in the series to throw out Xander Bogaerts.

Laureano threw out Betts at third with no outs in the ninth. He was running on Andrew Benintendi's single after he had walked.

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.

Martinez crushes third homer

Boston Red Sox slugger J.D. Martinez belted a 104.1 mph, 394-foot home run against Brett Anderson in the third inning. He sent it opposite field to right. It marked his third home run of the 2019 season.

**Alex Cora: 'Right now we're not paying attention to details. That's on me. That's on the staff'**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — A flyball dropped right between Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts on Thursday and the Red Sox dropped to 2-6.

Bradley and Betts failed to communicate on Stephen Piscotty's 361-foot flyball to right-center field. The ball bounced over the wall for a two-run, ground-rule double as part of the Athletics' three-run fourth.

Boston lost 7-3 to the A's here at Oakland Coliseum.

"I pay attention to details," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said when discussing the play. "I love paying attention to details and that's something I took pride (in) last year. And right now we're not paying attention to details. So that's on us. That's on me. That's on the staff. I know they're going to make mistakes but at the same time I think it's important that we keep teaching the game and putting them in spots that they're going to take advantage of the situation. Honestly, today I was watching and there were a few things that were great last year and we're not doing so good right now. And it's early enough that we can clean it up. But that's on us. That's on me. I'm the manager of the team. So it's not that we're going to be doing fundamentals every day and all that. But we're going to talk a little bit more about the game.

"We've got to get it rolling," Cora added. "Regardless of the results, you win or lose, but stuff like that can't happen. That's a reflection on us. I'm accountable. And I'll expect better things out of the group."

Cora said the coaching staff will talk with Bradley and Betts about it and keep work on it.

“You didn’t see that last year,” Cora said. “But last year was last year. We didn’t play well in Seattle. We didn’t play well here. Now we go to Arizona. It’s a three-game series. We have to play better. That’s the bottomline. Like I said, I take pride in that stuff: details. Details win ballgames.”

Betts capped off an ugly loss by being thrown out at third base in the ninth. He tested Ramon Laureano’s arm in the ninth inning after the center fielder made two unreal throws earlier in the series to throw out Xander Bogaerts.

Laureano threw out Betts at third with no outs. He was running on Andrew Benintendi’s single after he had walked.

The Red Sox needed base runners. Betts can’t get thrown out in that situation.

“It’s a bad decision and he knows it,” Cora said.

The coaching staff discussed how aggressive they wanted to be against Laureano this series.

“The three plays were bang-bang plays,” Cora said. “That one right there can’t happen. And he knows it. He came up to me, and how great of a player he is, he makes mistakes. And he owned it. He came up to me and was like, ‘That’s my fault.’”

**Mookie Betts ‘owned’ bad base running decision in Boston Red Sox loss; ‘I should have known. (Ramon Laureano) has pretty much thrown everybody out’**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Behind by four runs in the ninth inning, the Red Sox needed base runners. They didn’t need Mookie Betts challenging Athletics center fielder Ramon Laureano’s elite arm with no outs.

But he tried ... and failed. Laureano threw out Betts trying to go from first to third on Andrew Benintendi’s single.

“I should have known,” Betts said. “He’s pretty much thrown everybody out. That’s what my instincts told me to do. And I should have let myself know before anything even happened.”

The Red Sox lost 7-3 at Oakland Coliseum.

Laureano already had made two unreal throws earlier in the series to throw out Xander Bogaerts.

“It’s a bad decision and he knows it,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts failed to communicate on a flyball that dropped into right-center field and bounced over the wall for a two-run, ground-rule double. It was part of the Athletics’ three-run fourth inning.

The coaching staff discussed how aggressive they wanted to be against Laureano this series. He has 12 outfield assists in 57 career big league games.

“The three plays were bang-bang plays,” Cora said. “That one right there can’t happen. And he knows it. He came up to me, and how great of a player he is, he makes mistakes. And he owned it. He came up to me and was like, ‘That’s my fault.’”

Betts added, “He’s obviously a great thrower and everything but we don’t want to play passive either. We have to make him make those plays. And he made them all. Tip your cap. He did an excellent job.”

The Red Sox dropped to 2-6.

“Not very good,” Betts said. “It’s a long season and teams go through these stretches. Obviously ours is right from the beginning. And it sucks but you’ve just got to continue to play.”

### **Dustin Pedroia rehab assignment: Boston Red Sox second baseman hits single, double in first game with Greenville**

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia was 2-for-3 with a single and double in his first rehab game with High-A Greenville on Thursday night. Pedroia walked and lined out to right field in his other two plate appearances.

Pedroia was perfect in the field, getting one grounder and two pop-ups while also turning a 6-4-3 double play. Though the game went to extra innings, he was removed after nine innings and replaced by Korby Batesole.

Thursday’s game was Pedroia’s first affiliated action since late May, when he played three major-league games before returning to the disabled list with left knee soreness. He has been rehabbing his surgically repaired knee in the months since and is close to returning to big-league game action.

Sox manager Alex Cora said earlier in the week that Pedroia would play nine innings on back-to-back days Thursday and Friday before getting a day off Saturday and playing a full game Sunday afternoon. At that point, the team will decide whether they’ll activate him for the home opener at Fenway Park on Tuesday.

### **Red Sox’s Jackie Bradley Jr. takes responsibility for ball that dropped between him and Mookie Betts; ‘I’m the leader out there’**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Jackie Bradley Jr. took full responsibility for the flyball that dropped between him and Mookie Betts with two outs in the fourth inning vs. the Athletics on Thursday.

Bradley and Betts failed to communicate on Stephen Piscotty’s 361-foot flyball to right-center field. The ball bounced over the wall for a two-run, ground-rule double. What should have been the final out of the fourth turned into a 6-3 Oakland lead.

The Red Sox lost again, 7-3, to the A’s at Oakland Coliseum.

“It’s on me,” Bradley said. “The play’s gotta be made.”

As the center fielder, Bradley understands he must take charge.

“I’m the leader out there,” Bradley said. “The play’s gotta be made. It’s a catchable ball. I’ve got to take control.”

Behind by four runs in the ninth inning, the Red Sox needed base runners. They didn’t need Mookie Betts challenging Athletics center fielder Ramon Laureano’s arm to reach third base with no outs.

Asked if either he or Betts called for it, Bradley said, “It doesn’t matter. The play has to be made. It’s the last out. It’s a big momentum swing. And there’s no excuse for it.”

The Red Sox dropped to 2-6. They lost three of four games at Seattle and three of four games here in Oakland.

“Not good, not good,” Bradley said. “It’s not good team baseball. We’re not panicking. We’re not worried. We know we have to play better ... We have to execute better and play a lot better.”

### **Steve Pearce’s dad deserved Boston Red Sox World Series MVP truck after he ‘fixed up’ his old Jeep Comanche, gave it to son for first vehicle**

Christopher Smith

OAKLAND, Calif. — Steve Pearce gave his World Series MVP truck to his father Steve Sr., who deserved it.

About 19 years ago, Steve Sr. fixed up his old Jeep Comanche and gave it to his son for his first vehicle. Pearce drove it during high school.

“It was just an old-model truck,” Pearce said. “It was a beast. I loved it. ...My dad had it. It was just on blocks like in our driveway forever. And then he fixed it up.”

As it sat there for years, the tires were flat. Pearce added, “This crap was always in it.”

How did his dad know how to fix up the truck and get it running?

“I don’t know. He’s my dad. He knows how to do everything,” Pearce said.

The Red Sox first baseman said his father “cherishes” the World Series MVP truck, a red 2019 Chevrolet Silverado Trail Boss.

“He takes really good care of it.”

Pearce said it was special to give it to him because of how much his dad does for him.

“I always joke around I bought a truck a couple years ago. And so I got that (MVP) truck and I was like, ‘Jeez. If I knew I was going to win a World Series truck, I wouldn’t have bought this truck,’” Pearce said. “But it was a special moment between me and my dad ... and I’m grateful for everything he’s done for me.”

Pearce is a truck guy.

“Obviously you need a truck,” Pearce said. “Especially guys and their trucks.”

Pearce added, “You don’t realize how much you need a truck until you don’t have one. I learned the hard way one time.”

How so? Pearce sold his truck when he bought a Chevrolet Camaro about five years ago. He quickly regretted the decision.

“You just want to throw stuff in the back of the bed,” he said.

He said even trying to fit golf clubs into his Camaro wasn’t easy.

“You have to take clubs out, put ‘em in there and put the bag in there efficiently because not a lot of stuff fits,” Pearce said.

### **Michael Chavis, Boston Red Sox power prospect, belts homer as part of three-hit day for PawSox; Sandy Leon goes 2-for-5**

Christopher Smith



Boston Red Sox power-hitting prospect Michael Chavis went 3-for-4 with a walk, homer and two runs to help Triple-A Pawtucket win its opener Thursday. The PawSox beat Syracuse 6-3.

Baseball America ranks Chavis the No. 2 prospect in Boston's system behind only Bobby Dalbec, another power-hitting third baseman. The 23-year-old, who the Sox drafted in the first round in 2014, is on the Red Sox's 40-man roster.

Chavis, who has spent most of his professional career at third base, played first base in the opener. He began playing some first base in the Arizona Fall League after the 2017 season when he belted 31 home runs between High-A Salem and Double-A Portland.

Sandy Leon, meanwhile, caught for Pawtucket and went 2-for-5 with two singles and two strikeouts. The Red Sox outrighted him to Pawtucket after he cleared waivers. He accepted an assignment there.

The Boston Red Sox acquired Josh Taylor for Deven Marrero last season. They added him to the 40-man roster in November.

Lefty reliever Josh Taylor, who the Red Sox added to the 40-man roster in November, pitched 2 scoreless innings to earn the win for Pawtucket. He allowed one hit, one walk and struck out three.

Former Mets closer Jenrry Mejia earned the save. He retired the side in order on just six pitches.

Other minor league notes:

~ Bobby Dalbec, who Baseball America ranks Boston's No. 1 prospect, went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts and one walk in Double-A Portland's 4-0 loss to Reading.

~ Reliever Zach Schellenger, a 2017 sixth-round draft pick out of Seton Hall, struck out three in a scoreless inning for Portland.

~ 2017 fifth-rounder Alex Scherff, 21, hurled 5 scoreless innings in Low-A Greenville's 1-0 loss to West Virginia. He allowed two hits and one walk while striking out four.

~ Jarren Duran went 3-for-5 with a triple, RBI and run in High-A Salem's 10-2 win over Wilmington.

The Red Sox drafted Duran, who turned 22 on Sept. 5, in the seventh round in 2018 out of Long Beach State.

He batted .348 with a .393 on-base percentage, .548 slugging percentage, .941 OPS, 10 triples, five doubles, two homers, 20 RBIs and 12 stolen bases in his first 37 professional games for Short Season Lowell.

He earned a promotion to Low-A Greenville where he slashed .367/.396/.477/.872 with nine doubles, one triple, one homer, 15 RBIs and 12 steals.

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

**New PawSox manager Billy McMillon had a front-row seat when Mookie Betts made the switch from second base to the OF**

Brendan McGair

PAWTUCKET – Let’s flash back to 2014. Dustin Pedroia was firmly entrenched as Boston’s starting second baseman. The previous summer, he signed an eight-year contract extension, hence Pedroia wasn’t going anywhere anytime soon.

Down in the Double-A ranks, the same exact player who a year ago took home American League MVP honors found himself in the process of unblocking his path to the big leagues.

May 18, 2014 is a date that should be on the tip of the tongue of every Red Sox fan. With Portland’s Hadlock Field as the backdrop, Mookie Betts made his first-ever professional start in the outfield. It was a big leap for someone who came up through the system as a second baseman, though it was a necessary one if Betts was going to find stable work with the parent club.

New PawSox manager Billy McMillon was piloting the Portland ballclub when Betts took the initial steps in making a position switch that has proven to work out for all parties involved. Looking back, McMillon felt Betts could handle the move thanks to his unique God-given abilities.

Still, forecasting Betts as one of the most decorated right fielders in today’s game? To McMillon, that might as well have been the equivalent to the way most folks prefer to enjoy their steak – rare.

“If you asked back then if I was looking at a three-time Gold Glove winner as an outfielder before turning 26 years old ... I wouldn’t have seen that coming. I don’t think anybody saw that,” said McMillon, who also managed Betts in 2013 at High-A Salem. “It was clear that his athleticism and his instincts for the game ... there was no denying that.”

The 2014 conversation that McMillon had with Betts was direct and straight to the point.

“The focus for me when I was talking to him was, ‘You want to be in a position where you can play the outfield?’ He said, ‘Yes, I want to get to the big leagues.’ He was all in,” McMillon recalled. “He has something inside of him that you can’t quantify. The athleticism he has helped to make the transition so much easier.

“But I still believe if Pedroia wasn’t in front of Mookie, he would have been Boston’s second baseman,” McMillon added.

As with any player who’s asked to expand his defensive repertoire, arriving at the ballpark for early work is paramount. As someone who played left field and center field for the vast majority of his pro career, McMillon spoke the language that the 2014 version of Betts was seeking to process and decipher.

“We would go out before the team came out to stretch. I would hit flyballs and groundballs to him and we would talk about it,” McMillon said. “Maybe we were trying to be under the radar before reporters came to the field, but it happened. There was a process. At that point, he was hitting the ball so well that the question was how we were going to get that bat to the big leagues.”

McMillon didn’t have Betts for very long in Portland after Betts started to better familiarize himself with life as a flyball chaser. Betts was promoted to Pawtucket on June 3, 2014 where his outfield education was dialed up several notches, all while continuing to tear the cover off the ball. Of the 45 games he played in for the PawSox in 2014, 37 saw him log time in the outfield. When Betts made his Red Sox debut for Boston inside Yankee Stadium on June 29, 2014, he was in right field.

To the minor-league manager who helped Betts oversee an important transition, it’s certainly a badge of honor.

“I think going from the infield to the outfield is a little easier because as a second baseman, Mookie knew how to position himself to receive the cutoff throw. Going to the outfield, he’s familiar with where somebody is supposed to be,” McMillon said. “The instincts he has are a testament to going through drills the right way. Whatever you tell him, he’s going to follow.”

## **\* RedSox.com**

**Cora: 'We're not paying attention to details'**

Ian Browne

OAKLAND -- It was a harmless flyball to the warning track in right-center, struck in between two elite outfielders who both won Gold Gloves last season for their excellence. Center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. moved toward it. Mookie Betts did the same. They both looked at the baseball, but neither tried to catch it.

It dropped between them, then plopped onto the dirt and landed over the wall for a two-run, ground-rule double by Stephen Piscotty. It was a costly moment in what wound up a 7-3 loss for the Red Sox, who are off to a 2-6 start.

If anything, the play was symbolic of a highly-frustrating road trip to open the season for the defending World Series champion Red Sox, in which seemingly anything can go wrong. Two outfielders who have filled highlight reels for several seasons made it onto a blooper reel this time. According to Statcast, Bradley had a 99 percent catch probability on the play. Betts had a 95 percent probability.

It was that kind of day. It has been that kind of week.

"It's on me," said Bradley. "It's a play that has got to be made. I'm the leader out there. The play has to be made. It's a catchable ball. I've got to take control."

Betts also took accountability.

"Oh, one of us should have caught it," Betts said. "Just one of those things, right dead in the middle. One of us should have talked for sure. I mean, I think for any outfield, that ball is catchable. It's just one of those things, it happened. There's nothing you can do about it. Just know going forward that somebody needs to say something."

Red Sox manager Alex Cora didn't point fingers at either outfielder, but he noted communication needs to improve and the team has to get back to paying attention to detail and communicating as they did throughout the World Series championship season of a year ago.

"The whole game, it was an issue," Cora said. "I pay attention to details. I love paying attention to details, and that's something I took pride in last year. And right now, we're not paying attention to details."

"So, that's on us. That's on me. That's on the staff. I know they have made mistakes. But at the same time, I think it gets to a point that we have to keep teaching the game and putting them in spots that they're going to take advantage of certain situations."

In the ninth, with the Sox trailing, 7-3, Betts was involved in another uncharacteristic mental lapse.

After leading off the inning with a walk, Betts tried to go first to third on a single up the middle by Andrew Benintendi.

There were two things wrong with that decision. The first is that when you trail by three runs, you never want to run into the first out of the inning at third base. The second is that, by now, all Red Sox players should know not to run on Laureano, who charged the single by Benintendi and fired on the run as he threw to third to nail Betts. It was Laureano's third assist of the four-game series.

“The three plays were bang-bang plays, but that one right there can’t happen,” said Cora. “And he knows it. He came up to me, and for how great of a player he is, he makes mistakes and he owned it. He came up to me like, ‘That’s my fault.’”

The fact that players are trying to do too much is probably natural given the way the season has started, particularly given the expectations.

“Yeah, I should have known,” said Betts. “He’s pretty much thrown everybody out. That’s what my instincts told me to do and I should have let myself know before anything even happened that my run meant nothing. I mean, yeah, he’s obviously a great thrower and everything but we don’t want to play passive either. You have to make him make those plays and he made them all. Tip your cap. He did an excellent job.”

The Red Sox, meanwhile, are out of sorts, and their manager knows it. This beginning is the polar opposite of 2018, when Cora’s team roared to a 17-2 start.

“You didn’t see that last year, but last year was last year,” Cora said. “We didn’t play well in Seattle; we didn’t play well here. Now we go to Arizona. It’s a three-game series. We have to play better. That’s the bottom line.

“Like I said, I take pride in that stuff. Details. And details win ballgames. And for four games, [the Athletics] did a lot of good things out there. A lot of good things. They threw to the right bag. They played good defense. They ran the bases. They grind out at-bats. That was a reflection of who we were last year. I know we can get to that level, but we’ve got to start getting at it.”

### **This Sox committee makes '03 a distant memory**

Ian Browne

OAKLAND -- "Closer by committee" is a three-word phrase that is commonplace in 2019, but one that brings back bad memories to die-hard Red Sox fans who followed the team 16 years ago.

But this is no longer 2003, and manager Alex Cora is confidently ready to give it another shot.

In Boston’s first save situation of the season last Friday, Cora went to Matt Barnes, who got the job done. When a save situation finally came around again on Wednesday, Barnes had already pitched the seventh and eighth, and Ryan Brasier got the call. He also got the job done.

Welcome to life in the Boston bullpen after Craig Kimbrel, who remains a free agent but isn’t on the radar of the Red Sox at all.

Cora was busy playing for the Dodgers in 2003, so he doesn’t know why this didn’t work the last time the Red Sox gave it a shot. But he has a pretty good idea.

“I think stuff was different back in the day. I don’t remember who was involved but I guarantee you it wasn’t 95 with cutters and breaking balls the way guys have now,” said Cora. “If you take a look at bullpens now, stuff is at a premium. I think compared to before I played and when I played and now, that’s a big difference. You wanted to get to the bullpen. You wanted to get to the righty who threw 87, 88 with a sinker and a slider. Those are the guys you wanted to face.

“Now, if you want to face a bullpen, it’s 98, 99, spin out of the zone. I think today’s bullpens are much better than back in the day.”

Back in the day, the Sox tried to mix and match with Alan Embree, Mike Timlin, Chad Fox, Ramiro Mendoza, Brandon Lyon and others. By late May, Theo Epstein made a trade for Byung-Hyun Kim, who was installed as the closer on July 1 as the Sox said good bye to their short-lived committee.

This committee should have more lasting power, with Barnes and Brasier most often being utilized in the ninth. As the season evolves, Tyler Thornburg, Heath Hembree and Colten Brewer are others who could get chances at times to pitch the ninth.

When the Red Sox decided they weren't bringing back Kimbrel, Cora almost immediately started to think about the committee approach, though he chose not to reveal his plans publicly until he started letting it play out in regular-season games.

"It's going to give us more flexibility," said Cora. "I wasn't going to say how comfortable I was because you guys would crush me later on [if it didn't work], but I do feel like stuff-wise what we added in the offseason and what we saw in Spring Training, it was good."

"Now we have the luxury of having Brasier and we have Barnes. As long as we communicate and they know coming into a series where they fit and how we're going to use them, I don't see a problem. So far, so good."

Service time party

When the Red Sox brought out two cakes in the clubhouse before Thursday's day game, the immediate thought was that it was someone's birthday. Or perhaps the team was celebrating Blake Swihart's 27th birthday a day late.

It turns out the cakes were in recognition of starting pitchers David Price and Rick Porcello for reaching 10 years of service time in the Major Leagues.

Price's cake said "Happy tenure".

Porcello's cake humorously said "10.006" because he reached his service time anniversary six days ago.

Cora recalls Arizona interview

With the Red Sox headed to Phoenix for a weekend series against the D-backs that starts Friday, Cora reflected on the interview he had for Arizona's vacant managerial job prior to the 2017 season. Torey Lovullo was the favorite all along, and wound up getting the job.

D-backs GM Mike Hazen told Cora that he needed to gain some on-field experience to become a manager.

"When I got home a few days later, Mike calls me," said Cora. "And he's like, 'We're going in a different direction. We feel like you need to gain experience.' Jokingly, sarcastically, but actually being honest I said, 'You thought I was going to gain experience from San Juan to Phoenix [for the interview]?'"

Cora did take the advice to heart, and wound up becoming the bench coach for the Astros. A couple of days after A.J. Hinch offered him that job, Lovullo offered him the same job with Arizona.

Why did he pick the Astros?

"I was like, 'It's the trendiest organization, sabermetrics, the way they do things, and the chance to win.' It was right there with the Astros," Cora said. "But Mike was the one that said just be on the field and things are going to happen quick. He was right."

**\* *WEEL.com***

**Alex Cora: 'We're not paying attention to details'**

Rob Bradford

OAKLAND -- It was one of the more pointed postgame media sessions in Alex Cora's tenure as Red Sox manager.

Losing was one thing. How the Red Sox did it was what led to Cora's displeasure.

The second-year manager doesn't like what he's seeing, with the Red Sox' 7-3 loss serving as the latest eyesore. Simply put, little things are leading to big problems.

"The whole game it was an issue. I pay attention to details," Cora said. "I love paying attention to details and that's something I took pride last year, and right now, we're not paying attention to details. So, that's on us. That's on me. That's on the staff. I know they have made mistakes, but at the same time, I think it gets to a point that we have to keep teaching the game and putting them in spots that they're going to take advantage of certain situations. Honestly, you know, today I was watching and there were a few things that, we were great last year, and we're not doing right now. It's early enough that we can clean it up, but that's on us. That's on me. I'm the manager of the team, so it's not that we're going to be doing fundamentals every day and all that, but obviously, we're going to talk a little more about the game. We've got to get it going. Regardless of the results – you win or lose – but stuff like that can't happen, and that's a reflection on us. I'm accountable, and I expect better things out of the group."

Two plays offered signature moments for what ails the Red Sox.

The first came in the A's three-run fourth inning when Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts let what should have been an inning-ending fly ball off the bat of Stephen Piscotty drop in between them, resulting in a two-run, ground-rule double.

"It's on me. It's a play that has to be made," Bradley Jr. said. "I'm the leader out there. The play has to be made. It's a catchable ball. I've got to take control."

The second came in the ninth inning with the Red Sox trailing by four runs. Betts took one last stab at testing the arm of Oakland center fielder Ramon Laureano, attempting to go from first to third with nobody out on Andrew Benintendi's bloop single.

It didn't work out.

"It's a bad decision," Cora said of Betts' baserunning. "And he knows it."

"We'll talk to them and we'll work on it," the Sox manager added. "You didn't see that last year, but last year was last year. We didn't play well in Seattle, we didn't play well here, now we go to Arizona. It's a three-game series. We have to play better. That's the bottom line. Like I said, I take pride in that stuff. Details. And details win ballgames. And for four games, they did a lot of good things out there. A lot of good things. They threw to the right bag. They played good defense. They ran the bases. They grind out at-bats. That was a reflection of who we were last year. I know we can get to that level, but we've to start getting at it."

### **Eduardo Rodriguez once again leaves Red Sox scratching their heads**

Rob Bradford

OAKLAND -- Whether they will admit it or not, this has to be maddening for the Red Sox.

It's one thing to lose six of their first eight games out of the chute, but when the latest defeat is a product of another Eduardo Rodriguez head-scratcher it only adds to the frustration. Welcome to Thursday. (For a complete recap of the Red Sox' 7-3 loss to the A's, [click here](#).)

In a stadium Rodriguez had excelled in his previous two outings, having turned in two eight-inning gems against the A's, the lefty did little to suggest he had evolved from his uncomfortable first start of the season in Seattle. This time around the Sox starter allowed six runs on eight hits over just 3 2/3 innings, throwing 84 pitches before giving way to Hector Velazquez.

Adding to the issue was the fact Rodriguez had been staked to a 3-0 lead heading into the bottom of the third thanks to a pair of bases-loaded walks and J.D. Martinez's solo homer in the third.

Rodriguez's problems began with Steven Piscotty's three-run homer in the third inning. And in fairness to the starter he could have escaped the fourth with just a one-run deficit if Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. didn't inexplicably let Piscotty's routine, two-out fly ball drop for a ground rule double, scoring two runs.

But this is a results business and Rodriguez continues to fail to garner consistent results.

In two starts the pitcher -- who had supplied more optimism than any other hurler throughout spring training -- has given up 12 runs on 16 hits over eight innings.

For his career, Rodriguez has started 89 games, going 31-26 with a 4.26 ERA.

The Red Sox need to figure a lot of things out these days, but deciphering exactly what they have in this pitcher might be near the top of the list.

The Red Sox got burned by A's center fielder Ramon Laureano's arm once again. With nobody out in the ninth inning and the Sox trailing by four, Betts attempted to reach third on a bloop hit into center field by Andrew Benintendi. Bad idea.

### **Alex Cora surmises why 2003 Red Sox closer-by-committee didn't work**

Rob Bradford

OAKLAND -- The idea was well before its time.

In 2003 the Red Sox tried heading into the season with the notion of not naming one closer but using multiple relievers in high leverage situations.

"In 10 years everyone will be doing this," then-Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein said in the book 'Chasing Steinbrenner' which followed the first-year GM through that '03 season.

But then came Opening Day and the flaws in the equation were immediately surfaced. With the Red Sox carrying a 4-1 lead heading into the ninth inning against the Rays, Alan Embree came on and immediately gave up a home run to Terry Shumpert. The lefty was ultimately replaced by Chad Fox, who ultimately surrendered a walk-off three-run homer to Carl Crawford.

After the first two weeks of that season, the Red Sox' bullpen had blown three of its five save opportunities while possessing a 6.90 ERA and .319 batting average against. The group consisting of Bobby Howry, Mike Timlin, Ramiro Mendoza, Fox, and Embree weren't getting the job done, leading the Sox to name Brandon Lyon as closer by early May.

Ultimately the Red Sox traded for Byung-Hyun Kim and the experiment was over.

So, why is there such an acceptance now -- as is evident by the current Red Sox way of doing things -- when that approach seemed so out-of-the-box 16 years ago? Alex Cora has his theory.

"I think stuff was different back in the day," Cora explained Thursday morning. "I don't remember who was involved but I guarantee you it wasn't 95 (mph) with cutters and breaking balls the way guys have

now. If you take a look at bullpens now, stuff is at a premium. It's hard to hit nowadays when you have guys, supposedly they don't pitch high leverage situations, but they still throw 96, 97, I think compared to before I played and when I played, that's a big difference. You wanted to get to the bullpen. You wanted to get to the righty he threw 87, 88 with a sinker and a slider. Those are the guys you wanted to face. Now, if you want to face a bullpen, it's 98, 99, spin out of the zone. I think today's bullpens are much better than back in the day."

The Red Sox seem perfectly content with their current strategy, which was put on display Wednesday night when Matt Barnes was brought in to get the final out of the seventh inning just a few days after serving as the Sox' closer.

"We have to see," said the Red Sox manager. "We might the middle of the lineup in the seventh, then the bottom of the lineup in the eighth, then the top of the lineup. That's the thing. Everybody talks about facing the highest leverage situation. I said it last year: what's a high-leverage situation for you might be different for me because it might be the highest leverage situation in the sixth, but then what happens if there's traffic in the eighth? Is that, like, the highest one? It's the game, you know. The game will dictate what we do, and every game is different. We'll adjust."

Cora does, however, believe the closer role isn't about to be eliminated.

"Obviously there's a lot of teams out there, they're using guys, they've got a closer," he said. "It seems like the Rays now have a closer and the guys that supposedly were going somewhere else ...I don't know. I guess in our situation, our guy last year he was a closer. But at one point in his career, he had no saves. He evolved into that. It all depends on what you've got. The weapons you have and how you feel about that. There are teams that I think they'll still have it. I don't know how many. I'm not saying every team will have it, but there's still going to be a few teams out there that are going to have one."

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

### **Red Sox, Patriots will both celebrate titles at historic Fenway Park opener**

Darren Hartwell

If you're envious of Boston's incredible professional sports success, don't come to Fenway Park next Tuesday.

That's the Red Sox's 2019 home opener against the Toronto Blue Jays, and as is tradition, they'll celebrate their 2018 World Series title in a pregame ring ceremony.

But they won't be alone: Members of the 2018 New England Patriots, who just won Super Bowl LIII in February, also will make an appearance to be recognized for their sixth championship.

Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy confirmed Thursday the Patriots have accepted the team's invitation.

"We're ecstatic that they're going to be there," Kennedy added.

Tuesday will mark the Red Sox's first official double booking of title celebrations, even if this scenario has happened before: A few members of the Super Bowl champion Patriots came to Fenway for Boston's 2005 home opener, but the main stage belonged to the 2004 World Series champion Red Sox.

It's unclear who on the Patriots will attend, but the guest list could produce some interesting storylines: Will Rob Gronkowski make a post-retirement appearance (and will quarterback Tom Brady tackle him in the infield again)? Will Patriots owner Robert Kraft show his face amid an ongoing legal battle over



solicitation of prostitution charges -- that includes a filing against Kraft by The Boston Globe, which is owned by Red Sox principal owner John Henry?

Best moments in Red Sox Opening Day history

There's intrigue on the Red Sox's front, too: The team has invited ex-closer and current free agent Craig Kimbrel to the ceremony, but he had yet to accept or decline as of Thursday.

Kennedy also suggested players from past Red Sox World Series champion teams -- they also won in 2004, 2007 and 2013 -- may join the Fenway festivities, setting up what will be a historic afternoon of celebrating excellence in Boston.

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

### **Embarrassing setback caps another series loss for Red Sox**

Sean McAdam

Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse for the Red Sox, Thursday afternoon happened.

They had lost before — but not like this.

They had blown a 3-0 lead before — but not like this.

They had made miscues in the field before — but not like this.

And don't think the manager hasn't noticed.

"The whole game was an issue," Alex Cora told reporters after the 7-3 embarrassment to the Oakland A's. "I pay attention to details. I love paying attention to details and that's something I took pride in last year and right now, we're not paying attention to details, so that's on us. That's on me, that's on the staff."

"I know we're going to make mistakes, but at the same time, we have to keep teaching the game and put them in certain spots where they're going to take advantage of certain situations. Honestly, today I was watching and there were a few things that were great last year and we're not doing right now."

If you had to pick a metaphor for the first week of the season, it came in the fourth inning. Stephen Piscotty hit a flyball to the warning track in right center. Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts, two Gold Glove outfielders, cruised toward the ball, pulled up and allowed it to drop between them as it hopped the fence for a two-run, ground-rule double.

That snapshot — ugly and hardly representative of the way this team played a year ago — was the 2019 Red Sox. And the picture wasn't pretty.

You name it, and it went wrong for the Sox in their series finale in Oakland.

Pitching? Not only did Eduardo Rodriguez cough up a 3-0 lead, but he did so in most frustrating fashion. Rodriguez needed just 14 pitches in each of the first two innings. But in the third, he fell behind Piscotty, then threw a complete meatball over the heart of the plate, with predictable results: a three-run homer to straightaway center.

That's 14 homers allowed by the starters in 35.2 innings pitched, a gopher rate that seems hard to believe.

Offense? The Sox let A's lefty Brett Anderson off the hook in the early going, leaving the bases loaded two times in the first four innings. The Sox managed three runs in total — two in the first, both on bases-loaded walks and another in the third on an opposite-field homer from J.D. Martinez.

But that was it for the Red Sox offense, which failed to score again over the final six innings. A total of 10 baserunners were stranded and the team was just 2-for-10 with runners in scoring position.

Baserunning? Right down to the final inning, the Red Sox were performing head-scratching feats. Mookie Betts, normally the team's best and smartest baserunner, foolishly attempted to go from first to third with the Sox trailing by four. Naturally, Ramon Laureano threw him out for a costly out at third.

Behind by four and with no out, there was no tangible benefit for Betts to be so aggressive. And while it would have represented a foolhardy play 10 times out of 10, it was especially inexplicable with Laureano in center. He had already gunned down the Sox twice before on the bases in the series. Betts made it three.

But the unquestioned low point was the gift double in the fourth, which effectively chased Rodriguez from the mound and ended the Sox' afternoon. It was all downhill after that, with little fight left.

Statcast assigned Bradley a 99 percent catch probability and Betts a 95 percent chance. That's how easy the play should have been. Instead, the ball dropped unattended. Worse, Betts and Bradley didn't seem to discuss what happened, with each player walking back to his position in complete silence, not so much as a glance between them.

Cora seemed to absolve his players from much blame, maintaining that the sloppy play was "on me. I'm the manager of the team. Regardless of the results, win or lose, stuff like that can't happen. So I'm accountable and I expect better things out of the group."

But these are not rookies. These are, for the most part, veteran players who have established themselves as All-Stars individually, and champions collectively.

While Cora's willingness to accept the responsibility may be admirable, it may not be the right tact. For the team to play this poorly, perhaps some calling-out is in order.

This is Cora's challenge, just eight games into his second season. After a year in which almost everything went right, from the second game on, his second season is not going nearly as smoothly. He now must figure out a way to get his team's attention and get them to turn things around — quickly.

"It's early enough that we can clean it up," said Cora, trying to sound a positive note.

Indeed, it is early. Eight games down, 154 still to play.

The other positive takeaway? It doesn't seem like it can much worse.

Can it?

### **BSJ Game Report: Athletics 7, Red Sox 3 – Red Sox drop another game, and series**

Sean McAdam

Rodriguez frustrates again: How many times have we seen a start like this from the Red Sox' talented lefty? His teammates gifted him with two quick runs in the top of the first before he even took the mound, then in the third added another run to boost his lead to 3-0. All good, right? Not quite. After taking an aggressive approach in the first two innings — as one should with an early lead — Rodriguez fell into a familiar pattern starting in the third. He lost that aggressiveness and began falling behind, needing 31 pitches to get through the inning. He also threw a center-cut fastball right down the middle of the plate to Stephen Piscotty, who hit it out for a three-run homer, erasing the lead he had been given.

It got worse in the fourth. Rodriguez got a quick out then got ahead of Ramon Laureano, the No. 8 hitter, 0-and-2 before losing him and issuing a walk. From there, the inning fell apart on him, with an infield hit, a

run-scoring double and a two-run double. After issuing an intentional walk, his day was done. He needed 84 pitches to get just 11 outs, forcing the Sox to go to the bullpen far earlier than they would have liked.

Red Sox squander chances: Boston managed two quick runs in the first inning and then tacked on another in the third against A's lefty Brett Anderson to grab a 3-0 lead. But like their getaway game in Seattle on Sunday –when they also raced out to a 3-0 lead in the early going — it wasn't enough. The Sox had chances to do more damage. In the first, they had the bases loaded with two out, but Christian Vazquez hit into an inning-ending force play. It was more of the same in the fourth when, after two were out, an intentional walk to Mookie Betts and an infield hit by Andrew Benintendi loaded the bases again. But Anderson fanned Steve Pearce to leave the bases loaded again. Those were the worst of the missed opportunities, but not the only ones. They had a one-out baserunner in both the fifth and sixth, and a leadoff man on in the eighth — and came away with nothing all three times. They left ten men on base for the game and were just 2-for-10 with runners in scoring position.

Pearce returns: Steve Pearce, who missed the first seven games of the season with a calf strain, was activated before the game and was in the lineup at first base, giving the Red Sox a much-needed righty bat against lefty pitching. He fanned in his first at-bat with two on and no out, but led off the third by driving the ball on one-hop to the left field wall. Unfortunately for Pearce, he got a little too aggressive as he rounded first and tried to stretch the hit into a double, but was cut down at second on a strong throw from Robbie Grossman. Of course, a belly-flop for a slide, a few feet shy of the second base bag, didn't help things. The final two trips to the plate resulted in strikeouts both times, suggesting that perhaps Pearce might need a little additional time to get his timing at the plate against major league-caliber pitching. Nonetheless, given all the lefties the Sox have faced of late, having someone who can do damage against southpaws will be a welcome addition.

#### TURNING POINT

The Red Sox had the bases loaded, two out and the heart of the lineup coming up in the top of the fourth, but Anderson fanned Steve Pearce to quell the threat and the Sox stranded three.

#### TWO UP

J.D. Martinez: Martinez singled to right to fill the bases in the first inning, then produced one of his patented inside-out swing in the third to homer to right, his third of the season. He's hit safely in all eight games so far.

Brock Holt: Getting another chance to start, Holt collected a bases-loaded walk to force in a run in the first and then added a soft line single to center in the fourth.

#### ONE DOWN

Jackie Bradley Jr. Bradley delivered a single in four trips, but his inability to communicate with teammate Mookie Betts resulted in the very costly ground-rule double, scoring two for the A's.

Mookie Betts: He takes some blame for the ball that dropped, then made a bad call to run on Laureano in the ninth, only to get cut down at third base.

#### STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:

When Hector Velazquez allowed a run in the sixth, it marked the end of a 7.1 inning scoreless streak for the Red Sox bullpen.

Holt's single in the fourth marked his first hit of the season.

The game marked the first time that Rodriguez failed to pitch eight innings at the Coliseum.

Boston pitchers have allowed 18 homers this season; going into yesterday, no other A.L. team had allowed double figures.

The Sox are now 3-13-1 in their last 17 series in Oakland.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

“Regardless of the results, win or lose, stuff like that can’t happen.” Alex Cora, on the myriad of mistakes the Red Sox made.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox move to Phoenix for the start of a three-game, weekend series. It will be RHP Rick Porcello (0-1, 13.50) vs. RHP Zach Godley (0-1, 11.81) at 7:10 p.m. (ET)

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

### **From ‘thrower’ to ‘pitcher,’ Matt Barnes’ journey through Red Sox farm system**

Chad Jennings

OAKLAND – The question came out of nowhere, without warning or context, asking Blake Swihart to recall five baseball games, played in five different stadiums, seven years ago in the low minors. By any chance, would he happen to remember anything about Matt Barnes professional debut with Class-A Greenville in 2012?

Swihart didn’t break eye contact, and he didn’t hesitate.

“You mean when he didn’t give up a run for a month?” Swihart said.

Yep, that’s the one.

As this year’s minor league season began on Thursday, young Red Sox prospects from Pawtucket to Salem, Portland to Greenville, were attempting to do what Barnes made look easy: make such a first impression that it’s still impossible to forget all these years later.

“I don’t know what to say, dude,” Swihart said. “He was nasty. He was good. He was better than everybody else at that age.”

He was too dominant for his own good, actually. In his first professional assignment, 10 months after the Red Sox had drafted him out of UConn in the first round, Barnes went four straight starts without allowing a run. In his fifth start, an earned run finally crossed the plate, but that was an inherited runner who scored off the first guy out of the bullpen. From April 8 to April 29, Barnes was never on the mound when a run scored. He struck out 42 and walked four. He had a 0.60 WHIP and a 0.34 ERA.

And then, he was gone, promoted to advanced Class-A Salem in hopes of finding some competition that might actually make him better.

“I was surprised he lasted that long,” said then-Greenville manager Carlos Febles, now Red Sox third base coach. “I mean, he didn’t last long, but to me, after two or three starts, he was ready to move up.... He needed better competition. If he had stayed there, he would have had probably the lowest ERA in the league.”

And there’s the rub for player development. For every player assigned to a minor league affiliate, success is good and dominance is great, but that’s not the goal. Each level is meant to challenge and teach. It’s meant to give players something to prove.

For Barnes, it was the breaking ball and the endurance of a full season. In his first eight starts after he moved up to Salem, he had a 1.37 ERA with 53 strikeouts and a .201 opponents’ batting average. In his last

12 starts in the second half of the season: a 5.74 ERA with 38 strikeouts and a .295 opponents' batting average.

“For me, (the learning curve) hit after the All-Star break in my first season,” Barnes said. “Everybody tells you it comes, but I went from throwing 97 (mph) to throwing 92 just because it was so much longer and I’d thrown so much more. I started to get hit around because my secondary wasn’t very good. I had relied on the fastball so heavily, so my learning curve came right after the All-Star break.”

Hard to believe there could be such a difference of performance in such a short amount of time, but wunderkinds like Mike Trout and Ronald Acuna – or even Andrew Benintendi and Rafael Devers – are the rarest of rare. For the most part, even the most talented baseball prospects need that long road through the minors in order to fully develop. They need to be tested and, in some ways, need to be beaten.

Barnes came into pro ball more polished than most. Undrafted out of high school, he’d thrived at the University of Connecticut and in the Cape Cod League. The Red Sox took him 19th overall in 2011 and signed him just before the deadline. He didn’t get into any professional games that season but began meeting his new teammates in instructional league. Among those new teammates was the high school catcher the Red Sox had drafted seven spots later.

“He didn’t like me at first,” Swihart said. “He was drafted before I was, but I got more money than him. That’s what it was. He didn’t like that. You can ask him about that.”

Said Barnes, “That’s not true,” laughing but shaking his head. “He tells everybody that.”

Assigned to Greenville together, Barnes and Swihart became friends, then they became roommates. Barnes swears Swihart caught both his first professional pitch in the minors and his first big league pitch at Fenway Park, though the box scores suggest otherwise (they say it was Jordan Weems who caught his debut in Greenville and Christian Vazquez who caught his first game in the majors). No matter. Swihart didn’t have to be behind the plate in Game 1 to recognize Barnes was beyond the South Atlantic League.

“You knew he was on a different level,” Swihart said. “So, you knew he was going to move up quick.”

Barnes had nine strikeouts in his debut at home, then seven strikeouts with just one hit on the road in West Virginia. He pitched another nine-strikeout game in Lexington (Swihart had a double in that one) then another in Delmarva. Barnes was technically working with a four-pitch mix – the same fastball, slider, curveball and changeup he was using in college – but he was leaning heavily on the heater.

“I had a good fastball then and was able to command it well and had some success using predominantly that pitch,” Barnes said.

That was the problem. Febles said he remembered Barnes mixing in his other pitches, trying to make them better like the Red Sox wanted, but he could always fall back on that fastball. It was both a weapon and a safety net.

“I remember talking to (director of player development) Ben Crockett about it,” Febles said. “Like, listen, he needs to be challenged and face better hitters. He’s getting away with working behind in the count. When he gets to the next level, he’s going to have to rely more on breaking balls and stuff.”

Sure enough, after one more start with Greenville – Barnes pitched into the sixth inning, left the game with two outs and a runner at first, and the runner wound up scoring for his only earned run at that level – Barnes was promoted. He’d lasted the month of April and then was onto the next level.

“It was awesome,” Barnes said. “It was a lot of fun. We had a good team, and I was honestly just excited to get playing. I didn’t play the summer before that, but I came and I’d had a bunch of time off and felt good, and I was able to put up some pretty good numbers.”

Febles said there's a funny thing that happens to every minor league manager or coach: within the daily grind of a season, it's sometimes hard to recognize the strides of an individual player, but after a year or two away from them, those players seem lightyears ahead. Moving through the system, being challenged by better hitters, had exactly the desired effect. It forced Barnes to improve his secondary pitches. It taught him to prepare for the grind of a full season. It prepared him for the big leagues.

The Matt Barnes now pitching in key situations out of the Red Sox bullpen is a refined version of the guy who dazzled for one untouchable month seven years ago in Greenville. Febles recognizes him, and sees clearly how far he's come.

"He knows how to pitch," Febles said. "He's a pitcher. To me, that year, he was a thrower."

But he was such a thrower that Febles might never forget it.

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

### **Three observations from the A's 7-3 win over Red Sox**

Jerry McDonald

OAKLAND — The Athletics departed on a three-city, 11-game road trip Thursday basking in the glow of a home run and five RBIs from Stephen Piscotty, a gritty start from left-hander Brett Anderson and yet another throwing miracle from Ramon Laureano in a 7-3 win over the Boston Red Sox.

The win concluded a 6-2 homestand before a crowd of 15,095 at the Coliseum, taking three of four from both the Los Angeles Angels and the defending World Series champions.

Three observations on how the Athletics bounced back after coughing up a 3-0 lead Wednesday night in a 6-3 loss to the Red Sox:

Piscotty power

The Athletics trailed 3-0 in the third inning when Piscotty hit a 2-0 pitch from starter and loser Eduardo Rodriguez (0-2) over the fence in straightaway center.

Josh Phegley had opened with a double, advanced to third on a fly out and Marcus Semien was on first with a walk.

"In that situation you just want to get something in the air, drive in that run no matter what," Piscotty said. "Home run is the best-case scenario there. I was just trying to get the ball elevated."

Said Athletics manager Bob Melvin: "That home run was huge — all of a sudden we're back in the game."

In the next inning, Piscotty came to the plate with a 4-3 lead after Robbie Grossman's RBI double and two runners aboard. He lofted a deep but playable fly to right center between two reliable defenders — center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. and right fielder Mookie Betts.

Neither caught it. It bounced on the warning track and into the stands for a ground rule double, two more runs and a 6-3 lead.

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"I'm a little surprised it got down but I'm very grateful," Piscotty said.

Throw in a single in the first and a ground ball single in the sixth and Piscotty had his first four-hit game since 2016 to go along with an eighth-inning walk.

“I’m starting to see the ball a little bit better, the rhythm was good,” Piscotty said. “Got a couple of lucky breaks, but that’s baseball.”

Anderson guts it out

Coming in with a 34 1/3 inning scoreless streak at the Coliseum, Anderson forced in two runs with bases loaded walks to Xander Bogaerts and Brock Holt. He also gave up a solo home run to J.D. Martinez in the third inning.

By the time he left, Anderson (2-0) had seen more traffic on the bases than Highway 880 at commute time. He gave up eight hits and walked four, one intentionally. There were no 1-2-3 innings. When Melvin lifted him in favor of Lou Trivino with one out in the sixth, he’d thrown 101 pitches.

“They’re the world champs for a reason,” Anderson said. “They grind out some at-bats, put balls in play. My command wasn’t great all day, but I made some pitches when I had to with a bunch of traffic.”

By righting himself and pitching into the sixth, Anderson helped ease the strain on a bullpen that was resting Ryan Buchter, Fernando Rodney and J.B. Wendelken.

“The way the game started out, the first inning looked like it could get away from us,” Melvin said. “Brett got some outs when we needed to and ended up giving us some length.”

Trivino finished the sixth inning, Joakim Soria worked the seventh and Liam Hendricks finished it off in the eighth and ninth.

Laureano does it again

The Athletics center fielder completed the most impactful 4-for-24 series in memory with three stunning outfield assists. He got Bogaerts at the plate in Monday night’s 7-0 when, then at third base on Tuesday night to help preserve a 1-0 victory.

His final victim was Betts, who opened the ninth inning with a walk and then got a good jump on a bloop single to center by Andrew Benintendi. Laureano rushed in and threw a strike from shallow center to Matt Chapman at third for the first out of the inning.

“I pretty much figured I’d have second and third with none out,” Hendricks said. “And then he comes out and makes a play on the run that an outfielder shouldn’t be able to make. It’s something special, not only the speed and quickness in how he releases it, but the accuracy that comes along with it.”

Laureano’s reward was being given a night off from the media, which is just as well since he’s running out of ways to describe how he could possibly have 12 outfield assists in his last 58 games — the most in major league baseball.

“Rarely do you see three plays like that in a series, because sometimes they stop running on you,” Melvin said. “But they continue to be aggressive, and every time he made a play it was different than the one before. All big plays during the course of the game. It’s similar to coming up with superlatives for (Khris Davis). It’s tough to keep coming up with adjectives for Ramon’s throwing but it’s one of a kind.”

NOTES

— Chapman, who had a sore left wrist after being hit by a pitch Wednesday night, didn’t start but entered the game as a defensive replacement in the eighth inning. With one out, Chapman made a sprawling stop on a grounder by pinch-hitter Rafael Devers and forced a runner at second.

“Laureano can still throw, and Chapman can still pick ’em up,” Melvin said.

Melvin said he was trying to keep Chapman from having to swing a bat, but believes he’ll be ready to go Friday against Houston.

— Laureano isn’t the only outfielder who can throw. Grossman fielded a would-be double off the bat of Steve Pearce leading off the third inning and then threw him out at second base.

— With pretty much the entire series played under the threat of rain, the Thursday attendance of 15,095 was the largest of the four games against Boston.

— The Athletics are now seven games in to a stretch of 18 straight days with a game until their next scheduled day off on April 15.

— First baseman Matt Olson has fielded grounders for three straight days but doesn’t know when he’ll be able to grip a bat following surgery to remove the hamate bone in his right hand. He said it could be anywhere from four to eight weeks.

After playing 162 games last season, Olson will stay behind during the road trip.

“I’m bored, honestly,” Olson said. “I am used to playing every day, maybe an occasional day off or two, but this is the longest stretch I’m going to have.

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

### **Laureano nails another Red Sox runner, Athletics win 7-3**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- When the reigning AL MVP openly regrets challenging you, that's pretty high praise.

Center fielder Ramon Laureano threw out another Red Sox runner in a key spot, and the Oakland Athletics kept Boston stumbling with a 7-3 win on Thursday.

Laureano tossed out three runners as the A's took three of four in the series.

"Rarely do you see three impactful plays like that in a series, because sometimes they stop running on you, but they continued to be aggressive on him, and every time he made a different play from the one before -- but all big plays in the course of a game," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

"It's tough to keep finding adjectives for Ramon's throwing, but it's one of a kind," he said.

Mookie Betts led off the Red Sox ninth inning with a walk and tried to take third when Andrew Benintendi followed with a bloop single. But Laureano charged the ball hard and threw on the run to catch Betts, with the out call being upheld on replay.

"I should have known," Betts said. "He's pretty much thrown everybody out. That's what my instincts told me to do and I should have let myself know before anything even happened that my run meant nothing."

On Tuesday night, Laureano threw out Xander Bogaerts at third as he tried to stretch a double in the ninth inning of a game Oakland won 1-0. On Monday night, Laureano threw out Bogaerts at the plate early in a 7-0 win for the A's.

The 24-year-old Laureano made his major league debut last year. He now has 12 assists in only 57 games in the outfield with the A's.

"It's a bad decision and he knows it," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said of Betts' base-running blunder.



"The three plays were bang-bang plays, but that one right there can't happen and he knows it. He came up to me, and for how great a player he is, he makes mistakes and he owned it. He came up to me and said `that's my fault.'"

Why would anyone challenge Laureano?

"They might, I don't why they would, but they might," Stephen Piscotty said. "I was shocked to see it ... The guy's got a cannon and he's laser accurate."

Piscotty led the A's offense as he went 4 for 4 with a home run, double and five RBI to help Oakland win for the fifth time in six games.

The Red Sox fell to 2-6, the worst start for a defending World Series champion since the stripped-down Marlins struggled in 1998. J.D. Martinez homered for Boston.

Brett Anderson (2-0) gave up three runs and eight hits and four walks in 5 1/3 innings.

Anderson walked home two runs in the first inning. Martinez connected for his third home run in the third, making it 3-0.

The A's tied it in the third on Piscotty's three-run homer off Eduardo Rodriguez (0-2). Rodriguez gave up six runs and eight hits and three walks in 3 2/3 innings.

Piscotty got a gift two-run double with two outs in a three-run third. Oakland had runners at second and third when Piscotty hit a fly to the warning track that split Jackie Bradley Jr. in center and Betts in right -- neither outfielder called for the ball and it landed between them, bouncing over the fence for a double.

"The whole game was unusual," Cora said when asked about the outfield miscommunication.

"You didn't see that last year, but last year was last year ... We have to play better, that's the bottom line."

A's relievers Lou Trivino, Joakim Soria and Liam Hendriks combined for 3 2/3 innings of shutout ball.

## SHORT HOPS

Martinez has hit safely in all eight games for Boston. ... Rodriguez recorded his 500th career strikeout in the first when he got Khris Davis swinging to end the inning. ... The Red Sox are 16-38 in their past 54 games at Oakland and 3-13-1 in their past 17 full series at the Coliseum.

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: 1B Steve Pearce (left calf strain) was activated from the injured list and was in the lineup. The 2018 World Series MVP was 1 for 4 and struck out three times.

Athletics: A day after being hit by a pitch on his surgically repaired left wrist, 3B Matt Chapman was out of the lineup on Thursday but came into the game in the eighth inning. Manager Bob Melvin said the move was precautionary. Chapman underwent left wrist surgery in 2015. ... Utilityman Chad Pinder took Chapman's spot at third. ... 1B Matt Olson (right hand surgery) took ground balls for third time on Thursday.

## UP NEXT

Red Sox: RHP Rick Porcello (0-1, 13.50 ERA) will start Friday's series opener in Arizona. Porcello gave up nine runs (four earned) in 2 2/3 innings in his season debut on March 31 against Seattle.

Athletics: RHP Frankie Montas (1-0, 1.50) will start Friday's series opener in Houston. Montas gave up one run in six innings of one-hit ball in his first start against the Angels on March 31.