

## ***The Boston Red Sox Saturday, April 6, 2019***

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

#### **Red Sox' struggles continue in blowout loss to Diamondbacks**

Alex Speier

PHOENIX – It no longer seems so early.

On Friday night, the struggles of the defending world champions became more than an early season curiosity, instead descending into a portrait of frustration. After a mess of a fourth inning in which the Red Sox gave up four runs — one due to a poorly located pitch, three more in no small part the product of bad luck and a string of misplays — starter Rick Porcello couldn't contain the welling disgust of an outing and early season that has veered in a wildly unexpected direction.

After Porcello came off the field, he picked up a cooler and chucked it against the dugout wall. Though the starter was the one to throw the water cooler, he probably wasn't the only one tempted to do so during or after the Red Sox' 15-8 loss to the Diamondbacks.

“You think about your start for four days. Obviously, we haven't been playing the best baseball. You want to go out there and stop it,” Porcello said. “I didn't do that in the fourth inning. I let that inning get out of control. It never should have gotten out of control. It's just frustration stemming from that.”

Porcello pitched poorly, but what occurred behind him turned the game into an embarrassing blowout whose completeness became apparent when infielder Eduardo Nunez took the mound to pitch the eighth. One day after the Red Sox left Oakland with manager Alex Cora outlining the team's need for improved attention to detail, the Red Sox instead featured another night of failed execution.

“It's us,” said Mookie Betts. “We have to play better, for sure.”

As has often been the case through the team's 2-7 stager, a poor start left the Red Sox in an uphill scramble almost from the game's outset. Porcello missed his location on numerous pitches, leaving him vulnerable to hard contact (two homers, 10 hits, 7 runs) and in stretches unable to find the strike zone.

A pitcher who at times goes weeks without issuing a walk instead permitted three, the second straight outing this year in which he's given out at least three free passes — a control lapse unlike any he'd experienced since 2012.

A 1-1 tie in the bottom of the fourth quickly unraveled for Porcello and the Sox. With one out, the righthander fell behind Ketel Marte, 2 and 0, then left a hanging slider over the middle of the plate that the Diamondbacks second baseman launched into the bleachers, 434 feet away, for a solo homer and a 2-1 lead. The long ball marked the ninth straight game in which a Sox starter has been taken deep.

Nick Ahmed then bounced a double down the left-field line, past the glove of Rafael Devers. After a wild pitch and a walk to the eight-hole hitter put runners on the corners, Diamondbacks pitcher Zack Godley — who earlier singled on an 0-and-2 fastball and came around to score Arizona's first run — skied a flyball into a Bermuda Triangle of Sox fielders in shallow right. The ball dropped between right fielder J.D. Martinez (playing surprisingly deep against a pitcher), center fielder Betts, and second baseman Brock Holt, allowing a run to score.

Jarrod Dyson then lined a ball that Holt appeared to read well, but it bounced off his glove for another run-scoring single. A run-scoring groundout concluded the scoring in the inning, but it didn't stifle Porcello's mounting dismay, as a water cooler and the dugout wall soon discovered.

Porcello allowed two more runs in the fifth, resulting in a hook after just  $4\frac{2}{3}$  innings — the first time in his Red Sox career that the bastion of reliability had failed to complete five innings in back-to-back games. His outing continued a woeful start to the season for the Red Sox rotation, which now has a 9.60 ERA, easily the worst in the majors.

"I'm not doing my job right now," said Porcello (0-2). "This one's on me. I take full responsibility for these first two starts, not throwing the ball the way I need to. I better turn it around quick."

Brian Johnson struck out Godley to end the fifth, but got tattooed in the sixth, allowing seven runs — four of them when the switch-hitting Marte, batting righthanded against the lefthanded Johnson, clubbed a grand slam over the fence in left.

With Friday's gaudy 15-run yield, the Red Sox have a staff ERA of 7.08 — the worst in team history through nine games since ERA became an official American League statistic in 1913. With five Diamondbacks homers on Friday — two by Marte, one by Adam Jones, and one by Ildemaro Vargas, one by Alex Avila off of debuting "pitcher" Nunez — the Sox have given up 23 homers thus far, the most the team has ever permitted through nine games. A year ago, the team gave up just five long balls through the first nine contests.

"We kept the ball in the ballpark last year. This year, we're not doing that," said Cora. "As soon as we start pitching, we're going to be fine."

Though the Red Sox showed glimmers of life while scoring seven runs in the final two innings — two on a Betts homer in the eighth, three on a Mitch Moreland blast in the ninth — there's little hiding from the team's awful play to open the 2019 campaign.

"We're struggling. We have to do a better job at everything," said Nunez. "We know that it's a bad start, a rough week, but it's time to pick it up. There's a lot of good talent in here. There's no excuse, nothing, for us to play like this."

The Red Sox' struggles are magnified by their occurrence at the start of the season. Nonetheless, the early hole also creates a sense of urgency.

Of the more than 200 teams to reach the postseason since the introduction of the wild-card round in 1995, just four have overcome a performance as poor as the Red Sox' through the first nine games. If the 2019 Red Sox hope to become the fifth, they can ill afford for their struggles to last much longer.

### **Nine games in, and Red Sox still not ready to go**

Peter Abraham

PHOENIX — The Red Sox were 22-8-1 in spring training last season then won 17 of the first 19 games they played once the regular season started.

Alex Cora and most every player said the same thing at the time: that the tone set in Florida carried through to the season. The Sox played with a sense of purpose when the games didn't count and were even better once they did.

And now the reverse is true.

The Sox were 12-17-1 during spring training, easing through the schedule with the collective goal of getting enough rest after winning the World Series. There were only a few days when the Sox had a

representative team on the field. It was almost like they were trying to fast forward to the start of the season.

Now they are 2-7 and you have to wonder which players will get booed at the home opener on Tuesday.

The point here is not to get carried away with spring training results; those scores are meaningless. It's that spring training does have a purpose and it's to get ready for the season. The Sox were ready for last season and they are not this season.

It made sense, and still does, to have controlled the workload of certain players coming off the 14 tension-filled games of the postseason. But the Sox didn't strike the right balance.

Their starting pitchers are 0-7 with a 9.60 earned run average and 2.06 WHIP. They also have allowed 16 home runs. It got so bad on Friday night that Eduardo Nunez pitched the eighth inning in a 15-8 loss against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

He had a good changeup at least.

Through nine games, the Sox have had one good performance by a starter. That came from Chris Sale against Oakland when he allowed one run over six innings.

The offense has been inconsistent. The Sox have been shut out twice and had three games when they scored at least seven runs.

It's almost amusing that the biggest concern the Sox they had — locking down leads late in the game — has been no problem at all. Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, and Brandon Workman have been excellent.

The Sox knew who they were on Opening Day last season. This team is still trying to figure it out.

The rotation is a good place to start. Sale, David Price, Rick Porcello, Nate Eovaldi, and Eduardo Rodriguez are set to make \$87.3 million this season, more than the entire roster of the Athletics, Blue Jays, Marlins, Orioles, Padres, Pirates, Rays, Royals, and White Sox.

The Sox are locked into this group. The only alternative would be replacing Rodriguez with Hector Velazquez and how much of an upgrade would that be?

The starters have to pitch better. That is how this slump ends.

"Absolutely. We have to go out there and set the tone," said Porcello, who lasted only 4 $\frac{2}{3}$  innings on Friday and allowed seven runs on 10 hits. "We're not doing it right now."

Porcello was staring intently at a laptop when reporters were allowed into the clubhouse on Friday, watching video of his start trying to figure out what went wrong.

"I have to find a way to get better," he said.

Cora, now facing his first real challenge as a manager, also pointed to the rotation as the root of the problem.

"We'll be OK. We'll keep working," he said. "We understand that we're not playing good baseball. It's a tough spot right now but we'll be OK."

"We have a bunch of guys; they can throw the ball. We know that. We know we're going to pitch. We have to figure it out some how, some way. As soon as we start pitching, we're going to be fine."

What Cora won't do is overreact.

“I’m not going to change,” he said. “I’m going to be the same guy. For how great it was last year, I understand what a big league season is. You’re going to have ups and downs. You’ve got to stay calm. The same way we did things last year, we’re going to do it again.

“We’ll get them in the right spot. At one point we’re going to get hot and we’re going to start playing good baseball.”

I ran the idea by Mookie Betts, is this level of play a residue of spring training?

“Maybe, maybe. You could definitely say that,” he said. “But we have a great squad here. It’s just a matter of time before we get our heads together.”

Time, they have. The Sox have 153 games remaining.

But beyond that, there’s not much else right now.

### **Torey Lovullo still relishes his Red Sox connections**

Peter Abraham

PHOENIX — It was on Aug. 14, 2015, when Red Sox manager John Farrell, his voice trembling with emotion, announced he had cancer and would step down for the remainder of the season.

Only four days later, the Sox hired Dave Dombrowski as president of baseball operations. General manager Ben Cherington immediately resigned.

The Red Sox, hopelessly in last place, were an organization in disarray. Nobody knew what Dombrowski would do, only that he had come from outside the organization and had wide-ranging power to make changes.

Meanwhile Farrell was getting treatments, a big bear of a man growing weaker every day from chemotherapy.

What happened over the remainder of that season helps to explain why so many of the Red Sox players were wrapping Torey Lovullo in hugs at Chase Field before Friday’s game against the Arizona Diamondbacks.

It’s not hyperbole to say Lovullo, then Farrell’s bench coach, held the organization together over the final seven weeks of that season. The Sox were 28-20 under Lovullo, his communication skills and empathy helping guide the players through what was a difficult time.

Mookie Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Brock Holt, and Jackie Bradley Jr. were among the young players who flourished during that time.

“Torey did a great job that year, really the whole time he was around us,” Bogaerts said. “He was somebody you could sit down with and have a good conversation about baseball or anything else.”

Lovullo still keeps in touch with Bogaerts, Bradley, and other players from that team. He also watches Red Sox games on television when he can.

“It’s always fun to go back and watch first-hand some of the young players I was around for so long,” Lovullo said. “One of them arguably was the best player in the league last year; I’m excited to see Mookie. But the list doesn’t end there. There are some really exciting young players I’m excited to watch from the other end of the field.”

Many of the players would have welcomed Lovullo becoming the manager with Farrell moving to the front office. But Farrell beat cancer and returned to manage in 2016. It was the right thing for the Sox to do at the time.

Lovullo went back to his role as bench coach then left after the season to manage the Diamondbacks, joining former Red Sox executive Mike Hazen in Arizona. At the time, it seemed like the Sox had missed a chance to retain a potentially very good manager.

“For me it couldn’t have worked out any better,” said Lovullo, who led Arizona to the playoffs in 2017 and in January agreed to a two-year extension.

Farrell was fired after the 2017 season and replaced by Alex Cora. Much in the same way Lovullo did in ’15, Cora brought energy to an underachieving group almost immediately.

Cora is from Puerto Rico and Lovullo from Southern California. They have different backgrounds but the same sensibilities about baseball and what their roles should be as leaders.

“Torey was my manager in Triple A and I knew he’d be a big league manager,” said Jarrod Saltalamacchia, the former Red Sox catcher who’s now working with NESN. “He knows how to relate to players and talk to players and get the best out of his players.

“He made sure everybody was in a good position to succeed. It reminds of the way Alex manages the Red Sox.”

Lovullo and Cora first crossed paths in during spring training in 2005 when they were with the Cleveland Indians. Cora was a backup infielder and Lovullo the Double A manager.

“Having baseball conversations with him at that time told me that was very well-versed on what was going on during the game,” Lovullo said. “He thought like a coach; he thought like a manager.

“He showed me unbelievable respect as a Double A manager. There were a couple of situations that I still remember where he basically told a couple of guy who were chatting over me to shut up and listen because he’s got something good to say. I was a young, dumb manager at the time and I thought he was a stand-up guy. I never forgot that.”

Lovullo offered Cora a position on his coaching staff in ’17 but Cora decided to become the bench coach of the Astros instead. There’s still mutual respect.

“Alex has done a great job in Boston,” Lovullo said. “I thought that he would.”

As the Sox and Diamondbacks meet this weekend, there will be plenty of pregame hugs.

“Torey’s a good guy,” Bogaerts said. “We’re happy for him and we know he’s happy for us.”

### **Red Sox’ J.D. Martinez a hit with his teaching skills, too**

Alex Speier

PHOENIX — On Friday afternoon, J.D. Martinez stood in the Red Sox clubhouse with Rafael Devers, positioning the 22-year-old’s arms and upper body as if adjusting a mannequin. The conversation, as it often does with Martinez, revolved around a teammate’s mechanics, and how to lock in a swing that would permit Devers to get to a more productive form.

That Martinez was entertaining such a conversation inside of Chase Field seemed appropriate. After all, it was during a three-month tenure with the Diamondbacks that Martinez learned how to become a culture-changing voice.

Though Martinez broke out as a hitter with the Tigers in 2014 following a radical swing overhaul, with Detroit, the outfielder remained deferential. The Tigers were the team of Miguel Cabrera and Victor Martinez. J.D. Martinez did not want to overstep his role.

But after the Diamondbacks traded for him in mid-July of 2017, first baseman Paul Goldschmidt let Martinez know that his feedback — whether on technical aspects of his teammates' swings or on gameplanning for opposing pitchers — could be game-changing. Martinez discovered a role that he loved.

“When I came [to Arizona], I was relatively quiet. I came from a veteran clubhouse. I was a lot more to myself, quiet, really didn't speak out,” said Martinez. “Goldy did a really good job of kind of opening me up, kind of showing me the next step of growing and becoming a leader, taking responsibility in the clubhouse, sharing your thoughts and ideas because they might help someone. He really pushed me to open up. I think it really helped me.”

It certainly helped the Diamondbacks. Martinez was a monster in the middle of the Arizona lineup down the stretch, hitting .302/.366/.741 with a mind-blowing 29 homers in 62 games after the trade. Yet his impact was felt beyond that.

“He transformed our clubhouse and our culture that season,” said Arizona assistant GM Jared Porter.

Martinez loved his time with the Diamondbacks, helping Arizona win a wild-card game before getting knocked out of the playoffs by the Dodgers. He would have loved to return, but the Diamondbacks didn't have the resources to make a run at keeping him.

“I loved it. I really did want to come back. It was something I told my agent that I was definitely up for,” said Martinez. “Obviously, it's a business. Things don't work out. I found a home in Boston and I couldn't be happier.”

The Red Sox are likewise thrilled that they were able to add Martinez to their mix on a five-year, \$110 million deal after his brief run with Arizona, with the team benefiting considerably from both his game-changing offensive abilities and his newfound presence as a leader.

“He's the one in the cage, in the hitting room, in the meetings, he's always talking about his gameplan, talking about the opposition,” said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. “He loves it. That's why he's become the leader of this team.”

#### Reunion in the desert

A massive reunion of former and current Red Sox took place on the field during batting practice. Among the Diamondbacks coaches, players, and personnel to check in with their former club were: manager Torey Lovullo (the Red Sox bench coach under John Farrell from 2013-16), GM Mike Hazen (formerly the Red Sox GM), Porter (formerly the Red Sox director of pro scouting), assistant GM Amiel Sawdaye (a VP of international and amateur scouting with the Sox), assistant hitting coach Eric Hinske (a Sox first baseman and outfielder), mental skills coach Daniel Bard (a former Sox pitcher), and special assistant to the GM Burke Badenhop (who pitched for the Sox in 2014).

#### Pedroia making strides

In the second game of his rehab assignment for Single A Greenville, second baseman Dustin Pedroia went 1 for 2 before being replaced at second base in the top of the sixth inning. It marked the first time that Pedroia had played in back-to-back games since his three-game big league stint last May.

Pedroia is now 3 for 5 with a walk in two games with Greenville. He's scheduled to take Saturday off, and then play another full game on Sunday, after which the team will reassess his status. If everything goes well in his ongoing buildup toward the season, it's possible that Pedroia could be activated from the injured list for the Red Sox's home opener on Tuesday.

Johnson likely for Sunday

Before Friday's game, Cora announced that lefthander Brian Johnson was likely to get the start on Sunday, but that plan appeared to be scrapped when Johnson entered the game in relief of Porcello in the fifth inning. Johnson got lit up for seven runs in 1½ innings. Cora identified Hector Velazquez as the other rotation option for Sunday . . . With the Red Sox playing in a National League park, Jackie Bradley Jr. had the day off Friday while Martinez patrolled rightfield. Martinez will have Saturday off, and Mookie Betts will rest on Sunday.

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

### **Rick Porcello lit up, Red Sox frustration boils over in 15-8 loss**

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — The Red Sox' frustration has come to a boil, bubbled a little too long and, Friday night, spilled all over the place.

After a four-run inning that Rick Porcello didn't particularly deserve — poor defense and some bad luck were partially to blame — the former Cy Young winner went into the dugout, calmly walked over to the big orange Gatorade cooler and then used two arms to heave it straight into the wall as it exploded like a shaken bottle of soda.

On the field, the Red Sox were imploding.

Porcello followed up one of the worst starts of his career with another stinker, allowing seven runs while the defense played flat-footed behind him, then Brian Johnson allowed seven more as the Sox were embarrassed by the Diamondbacks in a 15-8 loss.

It was perhaps the worst game yet in this 2-7 start.

"I don't believe in the hangover," manager Alex Cora said. "The only hangover is when you go out drinking and the next day you have a headache. We've all been there."

Porcello blamed himself for the rough game and said he threw the Gatorade as a sign of "frustration stemming from" the ridiculous fourth inning, in which he allowed four runs, all earned. But Red Sox fielders had a chance to make a play on three different hits in that inning and didn't convert any of them.

Mookie Betts knew it.

"A couple plays there — we have to find a way to make the play," he said. "We didn't do that throughout the game."

The final pitcher for the Red Sox was infielder Eduardo Nunez, who estimated that he hadn't pitched in about 20 years. And he did OK, allowing a solo homer in an inning of work.

Even in their moments of glory, the Red Sox look far from being themselves.

The continued lack of sharpness by most members of the pitching staff doesn't look like it's going to go away at the snap of Cora's fingers.

The fundamentals the manager was preaching about Thursday were not on display, and defense was once again sloppy.

"I think it's more that we didn't pitch tonight," Cora said.

The bats have shown moments of life, and that ought to give them some hope as the Sox look to their offense to carry them while the starting pitching works out a multitude of problems.

“Those last two or three innings were the hardest we’ve hit the ball all season,” Cora said. “That’s a positive.”

Porcello’s outing didn’t look that bad early on. He was getting a lot of weak contact, but it seemed like the fourth inning caused him to unravel.

Ketel Marte hit a mammoth homer with one out, Nick Ahmed doubled, Alex Avila walked, and then with Diamondbacks pitcher Zack Godley at the plate, Porcello allowed a little flair into right-center field that dropped in between three Red Sox fielders in center, right and second base. J.D. Martinez was the closest to it, but nobody dove at the ball, which dropped at Martinez’ feet for a single.

The very next play, Jarrod Dyson hit a weak line drive to second base that bounced off Brock Holt’s glove and rolled into the outfield for an RBI single.

And right after that there was another mistake, when Mitch Moreland couldn’t cleanly handle a routine grounder and had to settle for one out at first instead of trying for a double play.

The D’backs took a 5-1 lead but it must have felt even worse for Porcello, who lost his temper on the Gatorade cooler between innings, then nearly beat out an infield single at the plate in the top of the fifth.

“He was flying to first,” Cora said. “He was competing.”

Porcello departed in the fifth inning with seven runs to his name. He begins the season with a 13.50 ERA.

“Very frustrating,” he said. “I’m not doing my job right now. I don’t take that lightly. I’ll do whatever I can to get back on track this week and for my next one. This one’s on me. I take full responsibility for these first two starts, not throwing the ball the way I need to. I better turn it around quick.”

Red Sox starters have a 9.60 ERA through nine games, having allowed 16 homers in that span.

Johnson, who has looked strong in relief until Friday night, was hammered by the Diamondbacks for seven runs, including two homers, while recording just four outs.

It hardly mattered that the Sox scored seven runs the final two innings. The game simply wasn’t fun to watch or to play.

“I think we just need to go out and have fun again, just be the team we know we are, have some fun and relax a little bit,” said catcher Blake Swihart, hitting .500 to start the year. “We’re trying a little too hard. We just need to go out there and play baseball.”

Cora isn’t going to invent some new style of managing just because his team is off to a horrendous start.

“I’m not going to change,” he said. “I’m the same guy. For how great it was last year, I understand what the big league season is. You have your ups and downs. Have to stay calm. The same way we did things last year, we’re going to do it again.

“At one point we’re going to get hot and start playing good baseball and when we look back, we’re going to be like, ‘That wasn’t fun. That wasn’t fun baseball.’ But we’re going to be OK.”

Don’t blame the manager for the awful start, Betts said.

“It’s definitely not him,” Betts said. “It’s us. Our heads aren’t in it in some situations. A couple tough bounces, it’s just a part of the game. We have to play better for sure.”

## **Infielder Eduardo Nunez pitches final inning of Red Sox blowout loss**

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — With the Red Sox looking at a 14-1 deficit entering the eighth inning Friday, Alex Cora walked over to infielder Eduardo Nunez and asked him if he's ever pitched.

"I said yes, when I was in Little League," Nunez said. "It was 20 years ago."

This was a moment 20 years in the making.

Nunez took the mound for the bottom of the eighth inning of the Sox' eventual 15-8 loss to the Diamondbacks and actually pitched quite well.

Ketel Marte had smoked two home runs already in the game, but Nunez threw him an 80 mph breaking ball that Marte grounded to second base for an easy out to begin the inning.

Matt Koch hit a weak fly out to center for the second out.

Then Nunez faced old friend Alex Avila, who he knew from his time in the American League Central, and wanted to have some fun.

"It's no fun to be in that situation, but it's fun to pitch in the big leagues," Nunez said.

He threw back-to-back knuckler-looking pitches that looped in for strikes. Avila swung wildly at the second one and missed, then looked at Nunez and started laughing.

"I saw him laughing, so I started laughing," he said.

Three pitches later, Nunez threw what he called a "straight fastball" at 85 mph on the outer part of the plate and Avila hit it out of the park on a line to left field.

But Nunez finished the inning allowing only Avila's home run.

Though Nunez had fun with it, the outing signaled a dark moment for the 2-7 Red Sox, who haven't found any rhythm to start the season.

"We're struggling," Nunez said. "We have to do a better job at everything. Everything. I think we're better than that. We know that it's a bad start, a rough week, but it's time to pick it up. There's a lot of good talent in here. There's no excuse, nothing, for us to play like this.

"We all have to trust each other, trust each other through the process. We have to go back, go to work, have to be humble again, have to be hungry. We're in this hole. We have to come back tomorrow and play."

## **Blake Swihart's hot bat stays in Red Sox lineup**

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — Blake Swihart quickly is becoming a bigger part of the Red Sox' plans.

After starting just once in the team's first six games, Swihart was back in the starting lineup Friday against the Diamondbacks to make his second start in three games.

He's 4-for-5 with a home run over his last two games and has given a spark to a Red Sox offense that's badly needed one.

Swihart's offensive approach has been "pretty solid," manager Alex Cora said. "Last year in spring training it seemed like he was just hitting fastballs early in the count. I might be wrong but that's what it looked like. This year, some good at-bats with two strikes, staying back, not chasing as much. Had a great game two days ago. Yesterday pinch-hit. Got the single. We'll throw him out there again. He's catching Rick Porcello. No issues there. The way he swings the bat, good to have him in the lineup."

Especially in a National League park, where the Red Sox lose the designated hitter, it makes sense to try to get the extra offense wherever you can.

Jackie Bradley Jr. was out of the lineup while Mookie Betts played center field, allowing J.D. Martinez to play right field. Martinez is expected to get a day off this series.

Cora also put Andrew Benintendi back in the leadoff spot for this game, with Betts hitting second and Mitch Moreland hitting third in front of Martinez.

Swihart was hitting seventh.

"I've been working every day trying to stay ready," Swihart said. "It's been feeling really good."

The Sox want to see Swihart continue to grow defensively. Cora's paired him up with Eduardo Rodriguez, Nathan Eovaldi and Porcello so far.

"He'll get more comfortable," Cora said. "Same thing with Christian Vazquez. Even with Sandy Leon last year. It's a learning experience every day – new hitters, new trends, new pitchers, guys trying to hit flyballs, teams getting on top of fastballs. Every day he's learning. Little by little, he's going to feel more comfortable."

Swihart, who turned 27 on Wednesday, said the game has changed drastically since he first arrived in the big leagues in 2015.

"There's so much more information," he said. "With everyone picking signs, it's a learning experience every day for everybody. There's a lot more information you just have to keep learning and keep growing."

#### SIXTH STARTER SUNDAY

Brian Johnson has looked dominant in three relief appearances this season, touching 92 mph while working his big looping breaking ball into the mix. He's allowed one run in 4 1/3 innings while fanning five. Next up will be a spot start Sunday.

Cora said he's likely to start Johnson for Sunday's game, though Hector Velazquez also could be used, depending how hard the bullpen is worked the first two games of the season so far.

With off days Monday and Wednesday next week, it allows the struggling rotation some extra rest early in the year.

#### PEDROIA'S RETURN COMING SOON

Fenway Park will host its first game of the season Tuesday, and it remains to be seen if Dustin Pedroia will be activated from the injured list to be in the starting lineup.

Pedroia's first rehab game Thursday with Single-A Greenville was a success and Pedroia said he felt good afterward. He went 2-for-3 with a walk and a double in front of a record crowd of more than 7,500.

"He made a lot of plays," Cora said.

Pedroia was in the Greenville lineup again Friday for his first time playing in back-to-back games this year. The Sox will decide Sunday what the next step will be for Pedroia.

#### SPECIAL RETURN FOR J.D.

Martinez was happy to be back in Arizona, where he hit .302 with 29 homers in 62 games in 2017 before signing with the Red Sox.

Chase Field was kind to Martinez. In 38 games there, he's hit .345 with a 1.237 OPS, 18 homers, and 40 RBI. He ranks first all-time in slugging (.813), OPS (1.237), and at-bats per homer (7.72) among the 248 players with at least 100 at-bats at Chase Field.

Martinez said he would have liked to stay in Arizona, but was happy it all worked out with him in Boston.

"He's been great in the clubhouse," Cora said. "Last year, you'd see him talking baseball, talking hitting with those guys. I'm a huge believer that the more you're talking in the clubhouse and the dugout, the better you're going to be. He's the one in the cage, in the hitting room, in the meetings, he's always talking about his gameplan, talking about the opposition.

"Today, he talked a little bit about the gaps here, although obviously it's going to play a little different with the new surface. He's a baseball guy. I learned that in Orlando, when we met with him and (agent) Scott Boras when he was a free agent. The way he talked that day, I was like, you know what, if this happens, it's a good fit for Boston because we live in a city that is 24 hours, 7 days a week, they don't stop. They're relentless. He's the same way. He loves it. That's why he's become the leader of this team."

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Red Sox haven't started a season as poorly as 2-6 through eight games since 2011 and 2009, though they went on to win 90 games in 2011 and 95 games in 2009. The last team to start 2-6 or worse and win the World Series was the 2011 Cardinals.

In interleague play, the Sox are 37-9 in their last 46 games and unbeaten in their last 13 series vs. National League teams.

#### **Red Sox and MGM Resorts reveal "Lion" logo advertisement on Green Monster**

Michael Silverman

The Lion roars at Fenway.

The iconic roaring lion logo of MGM Resorts fame is now emblazoned in the middle of Fenway's fabled and iconic Green Monster, the advertisement a hard-to-miss symbol of a new partnership between the Red Sox and the global entertainment and gaming company which has a new casino in Springfield.

Just after unveiling the Wall ad with his fellow Trinity alumnus, MGM Resorts head Jim Murren, Sam Kennedy explained how the partnership came to be.

"We've had an official resort-casino partnership for some time," said Kennedy, Red Sox president and CEO. "We obviously worked with Foxwoods in the past and Mohegan Sun. MGM has made a huge commitment to this region and it made a lot of sense, the guys are really involved in the community. We've been working on this relationship for several years. It works for us, and the players are excited about the future Winter Weekend out in Springfield, we've had a great connection with the mayor out there and the community of western Massachusetts, so it's important that we stay in Massachusetts."

Murren, a native of Bridgeport, Connecticut, says he and his mother are both Red Sox fans.

“It’s very prominent,” said Murren, gazing over his shoulder to peer up at the sign from the warning track in front of the scoreboard. “Of course, this is hallowed ground. The fact that Fenway Sports was interested in working with MGM is humbling and we take that very seriously. And we aim to be the best corporate citizens we can be in the state. I think we are in Springfield, and we hope you visit, and certainly anywhere we go, we try to be the best people we can be.”

Murren’s comment came as the other Las Vegas-based casino operator in the state, Encore Boston Harbor, was testifying in front of the Massachusetts Gaming Commission as to why it should retain its casino license in the wake of the allegations of sexual misconduct by former head of Wynn Resorts, Steve Wynn.

With MGM Springfield president Michael Mathis in attendance as well, Murren spoke with obvious delight about establishing a working relationship with the Red Sox.

“It’s an honor – I cannot believe we’re on the Wall after a 58 year journey I’ve been on this planet,” said Murren. “Really super proud, Mike and I very, very proud.”

Kennedy reiterated that the Red Sox support legalized sports betting and the efforts of Gov. Baker to bring it to Massachusetts.

Murren said the prospect of sports betting was not behind the partnership

“On the sports betting side, that’s something we’re engaged in, that’s not why we did this transaction.” said Murren. “We did this transaction because we’re aligned culturally, and we’re in the entertainment business and MGM is an entertainment company, and we look for fan engagement, we look for fan experience and we’d love to do it here.”

After the on-field ad unveiling, Murren and Kennedy went upstairs to the EMC Club where the Red Sox unveiled new augmented reality options – there are now 36 spots to stop and scan with your phone in order to experience “augmented reality.” Also, new menu items, including King’s Hawaiian Pulled Pork Sandwich, Sam’s Slammin’ Onion and Bacon on a Stick, were introduced.

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

### **Stumbling Red Sox lacking focus**

Bill Koch

OAKLAND — There was an unmistakable edge that helped drive the Red Sox to a championship last season.

Certain players had something to prove, whether it was rising to the ranks of baseball’s elite or overcoming previous playoff failures. The manager brought fresh energy and the determination possessed by someone who was forced to make a living in the game’s margins as a utility player. The organization added a marquee free agent, busted through the top tier of the Competitive Balance Tax and backed the product on the field to the hilt.

Where do you go from there? Take up the task of repeating, obviously. But the games that determine your title fate aren’t played until six long months from April, and the regular season by comparison is far less sexy than October. Spring training takes on an air of being forced to eat Brussels sprouts by a diligent parent.

And so here we have the Red Sox, cast adrift for two weeks on the West Coast and a long way from home both physically and figuratively. Stints in Arizona, Seattle, Oakland and now Arizona again have the club’s players and staff longing for a first sight of Fenway Park. Thursday’s 7-3 defeat against the Athletics was

the latest example of Boston's ills — this team, despite having almost all of the same parts, currently bears no resemblance to the record-setting machine that tore through its opponents in 2018.

“It’s not very good,” said Mookie Betts, the unlikely participant in two of the afternoon’s more head-scratching plays. “It’s a long season and teams go through stretches. Obviously ours is right from the beginning and it sucks.”

“Not good,” said Jackie Bradley Jr., who conspired with Betts to help author one of the season’s lowlights to date. “It’s not good. It’s not good team baseball.”

Consider the calamity that unfolded in the bottom of the fourth inning. Starter Eduardo Rodriguez was one out from escaping with a 4-3 deficit when Stephen Piscotty lofted a fly ball to deep right-center field. Betts and Bradley looked at one another, said nothing and hesitated long enough for the ball to drop on the warning track and bounce over the fence for a two-run ground-rule double.

“Regardless of the results — you win or lose — stuff like that can’t happen,” manager Alex Cora said. “And that’s a reflection on us. I’m accountable and I expect better things out of the group.”

The two Gold Glovers did the same thing on Opening Day against the Mariners. Betts ultimately made the catch on a ball hit by David Freitas, but to see him softly collide with Bradley was surprising. To see it twice in the span of a week merits far more than a raised eyebrow.

“I pay attention to details,” Cora said. “I love paying attention to details. That’s something that I took pride in last year. Right now we’re not paying attention to details. That’s on us. That’s on me. That’s on the staff.”

To suggest the Red Sox don’t care or are giving anything less than maximum effort would be ignorance. But you can certainly question their collective focus when you see Betts thrown out at third base in the ninth inning trailing by four runs. That he opted to run on the cannon-armed Ramon Laureano was a moment of madness, as the Oakland center fielder completed a hat trick of assists on the series.

“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.”

The home opener on Tuesday will carry the air of celebration, the visits from various A-listers and the renewed promise of spring Boston desperately needs. But that occasion alone won’t cure what ails the Red Sox at the moment. It starts with nine innings on Friday night against the Diamondbacks, another nine on Saturday and another nine on Sunday.

“Details win ballgames,” Cora said. “And for four games they did a lot of good things out there — a lot of good things. They fought back, they played good defense, they ran the bases, they grinded 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 after it.”

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

### **Rick Porcello hurls Gatorade cooler, Eduardo Nunez pitches in Boston Red Sox loss to Diamondbacks; starting rotation ERA increases to 9.60**

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — The Red Sox starting pitching staff is earning \$87.925 million this season and its ERA increased to 9.60 (43 earned runs, 40.1 innings) on Friday.

Rick Porcello took out his frustration on the Gatorade cooler. He threw it against the dugout wall.

The Red Sox lost 15-8 to the Arizona Diamondbacks here at Chase Field to drop to 2-7.

This game became so lopsided that position player Eduardo Nunez made his first career appearance as a pitcher in the eighth. He allowed a home run to Alex Avila but he retired the other three batters he faced.

He got Avila to swing-and-miss on a 60.2 mph breaking ball. But then Avila took him deep on an 85.2 mph fastball.

Porcello allowed seven runs, all earned, 10 hits (two homers) and three walks while striking out five in 4.2 innings.

Red Sox starters have allowed 49 runs, 43 earned runs, 58 hits, 16 home runs, 25 walks and 35 strikeouts in 40.1 innings. They have a 2.06 WHIP (walks and hits per innings pitched).

They are averaging 12.9 hits and 5.6 walks per nine innings.

Reliever Brian Johnson took over for Porcello. He allowed seven earned runs in just 1.1 innings. He gave up six hits (two homers) and one walk while striking out two.

Mookie Betts blasted a two-run homer in the eighth. It went 103.9 mph and 417 feet to center field.

Mitch Moreland belted a three-run homer in the ninth. He went opposite field, 97.9 mph and 371 feet.

**David Price: It's a 'joke' Boston Red Sox star Mookie Betts is not in a commercial; 'He could be the face of baseball. MLB just needs to step up'**

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — “Mookie, you got any commercials right now?” David Price shouted over to his teammate, 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts.

“No,” Betts replied, sitting a few seats to Price’s right in the visitor’s clubhouse here at Chase Field.

“OK, that’s a joke,” Price told MassLive.com on Friday. “I saw the Brewers first baseman (Jesús Aguilar) has a commercial on MLB Network. Great player. Great player. I love watching him play. I’ve heard nothing but great things about him from Travis Shaw and all those guys. But he’s not Mookie Betts. We’re trying to grow this game in the African-American community. Put that guy (Betts) on commercials. That’s how this game grows. MLB is probably the worst at marketing their players. They need to do a better job of that. We’ve talked about that to the union and (MLB commissioner) Mr. (Rob) Manfred many times.”

Price, who will start Saturday here against the Diamondbacks, wants to see the game grow in the African-American community and overall. Not many MLB players like him have one million Twitter followers.

Boston Red Sox lefty David Price first mentioned changing his number to home clubhouse manager Tom McLaughlin approximately halfway through the 2018 season.

He has a simple message: MLB needs to market players better.

Price (@DAVIDprice24) has 1.8 million Twitter followers to be exact. He said his following probably grew because he has played for four different teams (Rays, Tigers, Blue Jays, Red Sox).

The African-American population on MLB Opening Day rosters increased last year, but still was at only 7.8%, per USA TODAY’s study.

“Market the African-American stars in baseball better,” Price said. “And the other players. Everybody. Market us better. Mookie Betts doesn’t have a single commercial. He’s one of the most marketable people in all of baseball. He plays for the Red Sox and he’s African American. Zero commercials. A very likable person. He could be the face of baseball. And zero commercials. He just won MVP. MLB just needs to step up.”

**Eduardo Nunez, Boston Red Sox utility man, pitches for first time in about 20 years, touches 85 mph; ‘Why not? It’s fun to pitch’**

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Eduardo Nunez hadn’t pitched in about 20 years. But he jumped at the opportunity when Red Sox manager Alex Cora asked him to pitch the eighth inning in the Red Sox’s 15-8 lopsided loss to the Diamondbacks here at Chase Field.

“Yes. Why not? That’s fun,” Nunez said. “It’s not fun to be in that situation (losing) but it’s fun to pitch in the big leagues one day. So I said, ‘Yeah, I can do it.’”

Nunez, who pitched and played shortstop growing up, allowed a home run to Alex Avila but he retired the other three batters he faced.

Avila swung and missed on a 60.2 mph breaking ball, but he then homered on an 85.2 mph fastball.

“That was fun because we know each other,” Nunez said.

Nunez and Avila got to know each other playing in the AL Central. Nunez played for the Twins and Avila played for Detroit.

“I saw him laughing. I was laughing, too,” Nunez said. “And then he took me deep, for sure. Straight fastball, 85.”

The Red Sox dropped to 2-7.

“We’re struggling,” Nunez said. “We have to do a better job (at) everything, everything. ... We know this is a bad start. Rough week. But it’s time to pick it up. There’s a lot of good talent here. There’s no excuse.”

**David Price, Boston Red Sox pitcher: ‘I wanted to change numbers out of respect for Dwight (Evans). I believe he’ll be a Hall of Famer. He’s been so good to me’**

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — David Price changed jersey numbers from 24 to 10 this season and he wouldn’t reveal the reason when he met with the media for the first time during spring training. He simply said, “I’m gonna let you guys figure it out. It’s not that tough.”

He’s ready to talk about it now. He’d like to see Dwight Evans’ No. 24 retired at Fenway Park.

He ultimately chose 10 because he calls his son Xavier by the nickname ‘X’, which equals 10 in Roman Numerals. He also likes No. 10 because 24 minus 14 (his number with the Rays, Tigers and Jays) equals 10.

“But I wanted to change numbers out of respect for Dwight,” Price told MassLive.com here at Chase Field on Friday. “As good of a player as he was, I believe he’ll be a Hall of Famer. That’s his legacy. He’s been so good to me ever since I’ve been here. I’d just like for him and his family to be able to see that number up in Fenway somewhere, at some point.”

The Veterans' Committee still has the opportunity to elect Evans, who now serves as a Red Sox player development consultant, to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Price first mentioned changing his number to home clubhouse manager Tom McLaughlin approximately halfway through the 2018 season.

"Then this offseason I was talking to Tommy and he sent me all the available numbers and what not. And 24 minus 14 is 10. There's a lot of ways you can go about it. So I just felt like it was the right thing to do."

No. 14, which Price wore throughout his entire career, is retired by the Red Sox in honor of Jim Rice.

New year, new number and a new Price, although the lefty said he's no different than before. But one major difference exists: He's a World Series champ after almost a decade of people doubting whether he would ever win a postseason start.

Price posted a 3-0 record with a 2.59 ERA, 1.03 WHIP, 23 strikeouts and 10 walks in five outings (four starts) during the ALCS and World Series after a loss in Game 2 of the ALDS. He recorded wins in the ALCS clincher and World Series clincher.

Price is here longterm. He opted into the remaining four years of his contract after winning the World Series. Some might say he'll escape criticism in Boston now because he delivered a World Series to Boston.

"No, I don't agree with that. Lord, no," he said.

This summer will be very meaningful for him. He and wife Tiffany will welcome their second child in August.

"We're not going to find out what we're having (boy or girl) until birth," Price said. "A cool surprise. One of the few real surprises in life. It will be really cool when our baby comes out to see what the sex is."

He and Tiffany have both a boy and girl named ready.

"My wife was like, 'I like this' and I was like, 'All right, cool,'" Price said.

His favorite part of this past offseason? Being more involved raising Xavier. Time at home is limited during the baseball season.

"I have work to do at the field," Price said. "I try to stay at home until he takes his nap. But usually I leave to go to the field earlier than that and only get to see him for a couple hours out of the day. But in the offseason, I'm waking up and at home. So just being more involved with everyday activity is exciting. So I guess that continues to grow."

Price's narrative could have been much different right now. He lasted only 1.2 innings in his ALDS start vs. the Yankees. He wouldn't have had a chance to pitch again, or become a postseason hero, had his teammates lost both games at Yankee Stadium. The old narrative would have continued to this day.

Price said he was able to sleep the night after his disappointing ALDS start.

"You've gotta do your best to leave baseball at the field," Price said. "Once you let baseball start affecting your everyday life, that's when you have a problem. There's too many ups and downs in this game, especially for hitters. If they hit .300, they fail 70% of the time. You've got to be able to leave it at the field. I feel like that's something you learn the more time you're in the league, the more times you fail. Just going through tough patches throughout the season, you've gotta believe it's going to turn around at some point. That was my thought process the entire time."

Boston Red Sox's David Price, who will start Saturday here against the Diamondbacks, wants to see the game grow in the African-American community and overall.

He used the same thought process he uses during the regular season.

"If you're struggling and all you're doing is thinking about your struggles, then you're not going to be very happy," he added. "Even when I'm struggling, I'm watching videos of times that I'm dominating just to get that visual, to remember that feeling. You're going to struggle in this game. Everybody is. That's part of it. But the good ones, they don't let that struggle go on for a month of starts or whatever it is. They can turn it around after a couple of rough ones. Remember the good ones and forget about the bad ones."

Price often talks to himself while walking off the mound to the dugout after being pulled from a start. He joked last year, you don't want to know what he's saying. But tries to erase any feelings of anger quickly.

"Once I get out of the game, I take my stuff off, go hop in the shower and once I come out of the shower it's over," Price said. "It was something that Ken Ravizza used to talk to me about."

Ravizza, who died in July 2018, worked as a sports psychologist. He co-authored the book, "Heads-Up Baseball: Playing the Game One Pitch at a Time."

"He worked with Joe Maddon a lot," Price said. "He was with us in Tampa. Whenever I get back to the dugout, if you're mad or whatever it is, I always put my hoodie or my jacket on. And whenever I do that, I forget about that last hitter and focus on whoever that next hitter is to start that next inning. You've got to have a short memory whether it's pitch to pitch, hitter to hitter, game to game. People do it differently. There's not just (one) correct way to do it. Everybody is different. So that's just the way I've gone about it. And it just works for me."

Price's teammates love him. The fans certainly embraced him last year. He showed love back to them. It should be interesting to see how much he enjoys himself this year in Boston as a World Series champ.

"I'm worried about baseball," Price said. "That's it. It's up and down. You're going to have your good days. You're going to have your bad days. Hopefully I have way more good days than I have bad days. I'm going to continue to plug away and move forward and work on my craft and try to be great. However that's perceived is out of my control."

He enjoyed his offseason. He visited Miracle Field in his hometown of Murfreesboro, Tenn. The field, funded by Price's Project One Four Foundation, is built "for children and adults with special needs and accommodates wheelchairs and other assertive devices," per [project14.org](http://project14.org).

He also visited his alma mater Vanderbilt a couple times.

"I took X up there and let him run around the field and hang around with coach (Tim) Corbin," Price said. "Just got out there to hang out and see all the guys, see all the new facilities and stuff. It's top-notch. I don't know if anybody in the big leagues has the facilities that Vanderbilt has."

He has been tweeting more than in recent years, although he calls social media "a cesspool of negativity." He even live streamed "Fortnite" games on Twitch this past offseason. He said the live stream and tweeting is for the fans, not him.

He said it would have been the coolest thing in the world if he had social media as a kid and received a reply tweet from his favorite player, David Justice.

"I've seen little kids grow up through Twitter," said Price, who has 1.8 million Twitter followers. "Little kids. Like kids who started following me back in 2010 and now they're nine years older. And some of them are in college at Vanderbilt. Some of them are seniors in high school that are about to go to college or they

got drafted. These kids have followed me for so long. And to see them going from this tall to 6-foot-2, I think that's pretty special."

**Red Sox World Series hangover? Alex Cora says, 'I don't believe in hangovers. The only hangover is when you go out drinking and the next day you've got a headache'**

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — The Red Sox are 2-7 but don't tell manager Alex Cora his team has a World Series hangover.

"I don't believe in hangovers," Cora said. "The only hangover is when you go out drinking and the next day you've got a headache. We've all been there."

The Red Sox lost 15-8 to the Diamondbacks on Friday here at Chase Field.

Starting pitching continues to be the main issue. Rick Porcello allowed seven earned runs on 10 hits and two homers in 4.1 innings.

Red Sox starters have allowed 49 runs, 43 earned runs, 58 hits, 16 home runs and 25 walks while striking out 35 in 40.1 innings. They have a 2.06 WHIP (walks and hits per innings pitched). They have a 9.60 ERA and 2.06 WHIP. They are averaging 12.9 hits and 5.6 walks per nine innings.

The starting pitching staff is earning \$87.925 million this season and dominated at the beginning of last year.

Their 2.17 ERA (25 earned runs, 103.2 innings) through 19 games last year marked the franchise's lowest starter ERA through the first 19 games during the Live Ball Era (since 1920), per Red Sox notes from last year.

So what's the difference?

"Without looking at the stats, we kept the ball in the ballpark last year," Cora said.

It seems this the big difference is this year's staff wasn't ready entering the regular season.

Eduardo Nunez hadn't pitched in about 20 years. But he jumped at the opportunity when manager Alex Cora asked him to pitch the eighth inning in the Red Sox's 15-8 lopsided loss to the Diamondbacks here at Chase Field.

Cora agreed this is the biggest challenge the Red Sox have faced in his time as manager.

"Yeah, it is but we'll be OK," Cora said. "We'll keep working. We understand that we're not playing good baseball. It's a tough spot right now. But we'll be OK. We've got a bunch of guys in there that they can throw the ball. We know that. We know we're going to pitch. We just have to figure out somehow, someday. As soon as we start pitching, we'll be fine."

Cora said he's not going to change as a manager.

"I'm the same guy," he said. "For how great it was last year, I understand what a big league season means. You're going to have your ups and downs. You've just got to stay calm. Same thing we did things last year, we're going to do it again. We stay in touch with them. We keep talking to them and try to coach them. We'll get them in the right spot. At one point we're going to get hot and start playing good baseball. And when we look back we're going to be like, 'You know what? That wasn't fun. That wasn't fun baseball.'"

Mookie Betts said, "It's definitely not him (Cora). It's us. Our performance. Our heads aren't in it. We've had some situations of a couple of tough bounces. It's just a part of the game. We have to play better for sure."

### **Boston Red Sox unveil MGM logo on Green Monster: 'Great to market to the western part of the state'**

Nick O'Malley

The MGM lion is the latest image to be emblazoned onto Fenway Park's Green Monster.

On Friday, the Boston Red Sox unveiled the advertisement to officially launch their multi-year partnership with MGM Resorts. The logo is featured in a prominent location right above the center of the manually operated scoreboard.

"It's an honor -- I cannot believe we're on the wall," MGM Resorts Chairman Jim Murren said.

Murren joined joined MGM Springfield President Michael Mathis joined Red Sox President Sam Kennedy at field level inside Fenway to show off the latest addition to the iconic left field wall.

"We do not take lightly putting corporate advertising on the most iconic location in professional sports," Kennedy said. "We're exciting to work with a company that's committed to the region. Mike's been running their operations in Springfield now. It's great to market to the western part of the state."

Kennedy spoke positively about the team's relationship with MGM, particularly in the way the company has integrated itself into the community since launching the casino in Springfield. In particular, Kennedy spoke highly of the casino's impact on the Red Sox's relationship with Western Mass.

"We've been working on this relationship now for several years," Kennedy said. "It works for us and our players are excited about the future of Winter Weekend out in Springfield. We've got a great connection with the mayor out there and the community out in Western Mass, so it's an important day for the state of Massachusetts."

Kennedy also gave an update on the Red Sox's continued efforts to renovate Fenway Park, including updates to WiFi connectivity, upgrades to the visitor's clubhouse and augmented reality features fans can access on their smartphones. Overall, the team has invested over \$400 million into the preservation and protection of the ballpark, Kennedy said.

"This is of course hallowed ground here," Murren said. "So the fact that Fenway Sports was interested and willing to work with MGM was humbling and we take that very seriously and with pride."

The newly decorated Green Monster will be on display for fans when the Red Sox open up their 2019 home schedule on Tuesday, April 9 at 2 p.m. against the Toronto Blue Jays.

### **Boston Red Sox would 'like to see sports betting happen,' team president Sam Kennedy says**

Nick O'Malley

The Boston Red Sox aren't just open for a future where sports gambling is legal in Massachusetts, they're hoping it becomes a reality.

During Friday's unveiling of the MGM Resorts logo on Fenway Park's Green Monster, Red Sox team president Sam Kennedy spoke positively about the benefits of sports gambling in regards to the fan experience in baseball.

“We’d definitely like to see sports betting happen,” Kennedy said. “It’s important for fan engagement. There’s a ton of illicit activity that we all know has been going on for a long, long time. So, we’ll let the state figure that out. It’s in their hands.”

Kennedy added that the team supports the bill put forth by Governor Charlie Baker and will focus on working both within state laws and bylaws put out by Major League Baseball.

The proposal sets the application fee for an initial license at \$100,000, which would fund the commission's administration of the application process. Once approved, an applicant would pay a licensing fee of no less than \$500,000 that will need to be renewed every five years.

The governor’s bill could open the door for companies like MGM to flourish with the business of legalized sports gambling. At the unveiling, MGM Resorts Chairman Jim Murren admitted that his company is certainly engaged in the potential industry. However, he stressed that it was not the motivation behind MGM’s partnership with the Red Sox.

“That’s not why we did this transaction,” Murren said. “We did this transaction because we’re in line culturally and we’re in the entertainment business. MGM is an entertainment company. We look for fan engagement, we look for fan experiences and we’d love to do it here.”

In speaking about MGM, Kennedy said that the sponsorship of the Green Monster is the latest step in a relationship that goes back several years, citing the company’s commitment to the region as a significant factor in forging the partnership.

In March, Baker told reporters that he would like to see a vote on sports gambling before the state legislature breaks for the summer.

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

### **Reigning champs have questions yet to answer**

Jesse Sanchez

PHOENIX -- Brian Johnson was tentatively scheduled to pitch Sunday in the series finale against the D-backs, but the Red Sox stopped short of officially naming him the starter.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora wanted to see how Rick Porcello would fare Friday in the series opener and if all went according to plan, Porcello would pitch deep into the game and help his club bounce back from a slow start to the season.

Porcello didn’t make it out of the fifth, the Red Sox lost 15-8 and Plan B is on the table because Johnson pitched. Nobody planned on infielder Eduardo Nunez pitching in the eighth, but that also happened.

With the loss, Boston’s record drops to 2-7 and the questions about the defending World Series champions increase. The last reigning World Series champions to start 2-7 or worse through nine games were the 1998 Marlins, who started 1-8 and eventually fell to 1-11.

“At one point, we will get hot and start playing good baseball,” Cora said. “We’ll look back and say, ‘You know what? That wasn’t fun baseball.’ Like I said, we will be OK.”

The biggest difference between the start this season and last season? The pitching.

Consider this: Through nine games last season, the Red Sox scored 42 runs and allowed 26. They allowed only five home runs. This season, the club has scored 41 runs and allowed 67, including 16 home runs by the starters, the most in the Major Leagues, in the same span.

The starters' ERA at this point last year was 1.70. It's 9.60 now, also the highest in the big leagues.

"We know we are going to pitch," Cora said. "We just have to figure it out somehow, some way. As soon as we start pitching, we will be fine."

The manager acknowledged the recent stretch is the biggest challenge the club has faced since he took over last season. He's also not going to panic.

"It is, but we will be OK," he said. "We will keep working, and we understand that we are not playing good baseball but it's a tough spot right now, but we will be OK."

The Red Sox took an early lead in the third on an RBI double by Andrew Benintendi, but the D-backs answered with a run in the bottom half of the frame. Ketel Marte's home run off Porcello highlighted a four-run fourth inning to put the D-backs ahead 5-1.

In the fifth, Adam Jones extended Arizona's lead to five runs with a home run, and Alex Avila's RBI double marked the end of Porcello's night. In the end, the right-hander was charged with seven runs on 10 hits, including two knocks to D-backs starter Zack Godley -- in 4 2/3 innings. Godley had three hits total in 65 plate appearances last season, and had never had a multi-hit game.

It's been a difficult start to the season for Porcello. He gave up nine runs -- only four of which were earned -- on six hits in 2 2/3 innings in his season debut against the Mariners on Sunday. He took his frustration out on a cooler in the dugout.

"I'm not doing my job right now," Porcello said. "I don't take that lightly, and I'll do whatever I can to get back on track this week for my next [start]. This one is on me, and I take full responsibility for my first two starts. I'm not throwing the ball the way I need to."

Johnson allowed seven runs on six hits -- including a grand slam to Marte -- in 1 1/3 innings. For his part, Nunez became the first Red Sox position player to pitch in a game since Mitch Moreland in 2017, and the answer to a trivia question. He allowed a solo homer to Avila in the eighth.

"Part of it is baseball, and you go through ups and downs," Porcello said. "Teams are ready to play us right now, and we have to be ready to answer back. That's the bottom line right now."

One more pitching question remains unanswered: Who is starting Sunday?

### **Martinez grateful for time with D-backs**

Jesse Sanchez

PHOENIX -- Moments before Red Sox outfielder J.D. Martinez spent 10 minutes discussing his return to Chase Field with local media in the visiting dugout, he stopped in his tracks to go over more video with his manager Alex Cora.

When he was done reminiscing about his two months with the D-backs in the summer of 2017, he sat down with young Rafael Devers to discuss the finer points of hitting. Martinez also spent part of the early afternoon telling his teammates about the park's dimensions, and how the balls could play off the outfield walls.

The slugger has fond memories of Arizona, and credits his time with the D-backs, and specifically Paul Goldschmidt, for making him the leader he is today.

"When I came here, I was relatively quiet," Martinez said. "I came from a veteran clubhouse [in Detroit], and I was quiet and [kept] to myself. I didn't really speak out. Coming here, I thought Goldy did a really

good job of opening me up, and showing me that next step of being a leader. Taking responsibility in the clubhouse, sharing your thoughts and ideas because they might help someone. He really would push me to open up and I think it really helped me.”

Martinez, who was acquired by Arizona from Detroit before the Trade Deadline, hit .302/.366/.741 with 29 regular-season home runs after the trade. He hit another in the National League Wild Card Game. In all, he sported a 1.107 OPS in 62 games with Arizona.

“I really did want to come back. It was something that I told my agent that I was definitely up for, but obviously it’s a business and things don’t always work out,” Martinez said. “I found a place in Boston, a home in Boston, and I’m pretty happy here.”

#### Pedroia decision looming

Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia appears on track to return for the home opener, but the club is waiting until Sunday to decide on his status.

On Thursday, Pedroia, who has been plagued with left knee issues during the last two seasons, had a pair of hits in a rehab assignment game with the club’s Class A Greenville team. He went 1-for-2 and played five innings at second base for Greenville on Friday and is expected to take the day off Saturday.

“It was a game. He felt good,” said Cora, who spoke with Pedroia on Friday. “He moved well, he said, and made a lot of plays, swung the bat well. He feels good.”

#### Quotable

“I’ve known Alex a long time. It started when I was a Triple-A manager in the Indians system, and he was an extra player in the big leagues and a role player in the big leagues, and just sitting down and having baseball conversations with him at that time told me that he was pretty well-versed on what was going on during the game. He thought like a coach, he thought like a manager and that was one of his great gifts.” -- D-backs manager Torey Lovullo on Cora.

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

### **Red Sox continue playing like the worst team in baseball**

John Tomase

After Thursday night's mistake-prone loss in Oakland dropped the Red Sox to 2-6, manager Alex Cora dropped the hammer.

"I pay attention to details," he told reporters. "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. . . . I'm accountable, and I expect better things out of the group."

Looks like it's time for a new speech. On Friday night in Arizona, the Red Sox made the same mistakes that have killed them all season, and also added some new ones.

They allowed at least 10 runs for the third time. They surrendered five more home runs, boosting their league-worst total to 23. They let another fly ball fall harmlessly between three outfielders. They failed to start a makeable double play during the four-run fourth that broke a 1-1 tie.

Oh, and they summoned infielder Eduardo Nunez to pitch the eighth, where he yielded a homer.

In short, they once again looked nothing like the team that dominated baseball last year en route to 119 wins and a World Series title. They remain in a fog that's now stretching into its second week, with no reason for optimism that things will change anytime soon.

Their 15-8 loss to the Diamondbacks followed a familiar script. The Red Sox scratched out a run early to take a 1-0 lead, but their starter couldn't make it stand. In this case, it was right-hander Rick Porcello, who allowed 10 hits and seven runs in 4.2 innings. He walked three, struck out five, and allowed two more homers. The next Red Sox starter to keep the ball in the park will be their first.

Defensively, right fielder J.D. Martinez, center fielder Mookie Betts, and second baseman Brock Holt all converged on a bloop off the bat of pitcher Zack Godley in the fourth. A night earlier, Betts and fellow Gold Glover Jackie Bradley Jr. had watched a fly ball drop between them for a game-changing double. This time, the trio gave chase, but the ball found grass in no-man's land. Martinez probably had the clearest path, but Betts was slightly tentative in a moment where he needed to take charge.

That frame also featured a wild pitch that Blake Swihart couldn't corral, as well as Gold Glove first baseman Mitch Moreland boxing a potential inning-ending double-play grounder.

When lefty Brian Johnson followed with horrifically ineffective relief -- he served up a grand slam to Ketel Marte while the Diamondbacks batted around in the sixth -- the rout was on. Nunez entering for the eighth just confirmed what is becoming a familiar refrain.

The Red Sox only lost 20 games last year by at least four runs. That works out to roughly one in eight. They've already lost four out of nine by that margin this year.

They're getting worse, not better, and no one has answers.

If you're the silver linings type, the Red Sox bats awakened over the last two innings. Betts homered and doubled, Moreland homered, and the Red Sox exploded for seven runs.

### **Inside Rick Porcello's quest to bounce back from one of his worst starts ever**

Rob Bradford

When Rick Porcello sat down to look at the video of his start in Seattle, it didn't take long for a eureka moment.

"It did jump out," the Red Sox starter said.

What was there on the screen was a flaw in his delivery that offered a quick explanation for what happened in his first start of the season. What had transpired, of course, was one of the worst outings of his career, in which he allowed nine runs and four walks over just 2 2/3 innings.

The video session allowed for a wake-up call when it came to the difference between the Grapefruit League and the regular season. As he pointed out, such uncomfortable revelations aren't just for MLB novices. This is the reality of every pitcher, even a 10-year veteran like Porcello.

"Spring training you don't have as much video. The camera angles are different. The cameras in Port Charlotte and Sarasota are from left field. Everything looks different. It's not directly behind the plate like a big league camera angle. It's always hard to dial in," he explained. "Now I went back to 2016, last year and it all stuck out to me. It was pretty obvious. I think your body falls into similar patterns if you're a little bit off."

So, what was the issue?

"I never got locked in with it out there. It was my stride," he explained. "They all kind of work off one another. The last part of my delivery I was thinking about my stride but that's the last thing you should do. You can't be thinking about that when you throw the ball. It's more my shoulder, my line to home plate and everything kind of falls into place after that."

"When you don't have life on the pitches you're not aggressive as you should be. You have the intent to do what you want to do, but you can't because you're not delivering the ball the right way."

One of the examples of how Porcello's uneven mechanics impacted the pitches he was throwing on the home run hit by Seattle's Omar Narvaez. The idea was to throw a cutter that would dart down into the lefty hitter. Instead, it served more like a flat slider, sailing right into the hitter's bat path.

Then there is the approach by the new generation of hitters.

The all-or-nothing element of hitting is something Porcello and his fellow pitchers started to come to grips with last season but, according to the Red Sox' Friday night starter, has become even more prevalent throughout the season's first round of games.

"You need to know what the ball is doing and where it is going every time you throw it," he said. "It makes it more stressful because it's not like it used to be where guys were taking pitches and you could see what you have. Things were more line-drive oriented, looking for base hits. You might have two or three guys in the lineup who are power guys. Now it's three different sign sequences and everything else. If you're a little bit off it gets exposed quickly."

### **J.D. Martinez: Diamondbacks could have 'easily' re-signed slugger**

Rob Bradford

OAKLAND -- As the Red Sox head into Phoenix for their three-game series against the Diamondbacks it's interesting to note what might have been.

Certainly, that's what Arizona fans are thinking upon being re-introduced to J.D. Martinez.

Talking to the Arizona-Republic, Martinez suggested that the idea that he could have returned to the Diamondbacks after the 2017 season wasn't all that far-fetched.

"I don't want really get into that (details of the negotiations)," Martinez told the newspaper. "But it could have got done. I think so. Easily."

Martinez played in 62 games with the Diamondbacks after being dealt from Detroit just before the 2017 non-waiver trade deadline, hitting 29 homers while managing a .302 batting average.

Considering Arizona's relatively low payroll, along with the money allocated to Zack Greinke, Yasmany Tomas and Paul Goldschmidt and the need to pay emerging young players, a reunion after 2017 seemed like a longshot. But as the offseason unfolded there appeared to be some traction regarding a deal between Martinez and the Diamondbacks.

The report states that Martinez's agent Scott Boras met with Arizona owner twice during the offseason due to how much the slugger liked playing in Arizona. But the numbers compared what the Red Sox ultimately offered never came close, with the Diamondbacks reportedly extending a deal around two years, \$50 million.

"I was willing to be flexible with them because I really did want to go back," Martinez said. "I thought it would be a good opportunity for both sides, just to go in there another year where I could demonstrate a full season (of elite production) while also give them what they need with their flexibility of a short-term deal where they're not locked down forever."

"He wasn't considering two years," Boras told the newspaper. "They would have had to do more than that in years, I think. He had a five-year deal from Boston."

"I got an opt-out from Boston after two years (and another after three years) with length of contract. Arizona just wanted to offer a blanket two years. If it would have been an opt-out after one year, it would have been a different look, but we never got to that point."

### **Can the Red Sox learn lessons from the 2014 hangover?**

Rob Bradford

OAKLAND -- It's the magical concoction every World Series-winning team has tried to capture. But as these Red Sox are finding out duplicating the magic that allowed for October euphoria six months later isn't an easy feat.

"I think it's a fine line in rest and actually being prepared and what that formula is I don't know," said former Red Sox catcher David Ross, a member of the 2013 World Series-winning team.

The path the Red Sox took this time -- bringing back relatively the same group while making sure that extra month of baseball the season before is factored into the workload -- hasn't initially worked. Blame the schedule. Blame the expectations. Blame the level of opposition. Whatever it is, they are 2-6.

But this isn't a new phenomenon. Take the 2014 Red Sox, for example.

After the first eight games of that season, the defending world champs were 3-5 and found themselves 5-9 a week after that. The turnover from the World Series included the loss of Ryan Dempster, Jacoby Ellsbury and Jarrod Saltalamacchia. Now the team was depending on the emergence of Jackie Bradley Jr., and Xander Bogaerts with help from newcomers Grady Sizemore and A.J. Pierzynski. And then there was the expectation that players like Jonny Gomes, Daniel Nava and Clay Buchholz might break out of their limited expectations to emerge into something else.

Comparing to this round of adversity, it's certainly not apples to apples. But there are undeniably some similarities that might hit home.

"In spring training we discussed not taking anything for granted, teaching and talking about it," said then-bench coach Torey Lovullo. "We wanted to continue to do the same things we did in the past spring training with the same intent. I think we were a little bit concerned playing an extra month of baseball so we were taking it easier early on some of the key pieces making sure they were healthy for the start of the season.

"We might have been a tiny bit lethargic, but there were also some personnel changes. We were missing some key guys we were getting used to playing without. One was Jacoby Ellsbury, who was a catalyst for us in '13. We were still getting used to all the new normals and because of the protection of the key players who played the extra month of baseball, then missing a couple of key pieces it took us a while to get things kick-started.

"One thing that stood out to me was that the guys who we counted on, their stuff didn't come out as hot when we first saw them in spring training. But it was all to be expected."

In that case, a good chunk of the starting staff was actually solid its first three times through the rotation, with Jon Lester, John Lackey and Jake Peavy all doing their part. Buchholz and Felix Doubront, however, resembled some of the uneasiness the current Red Sox have seen on this current road trip.

"I don't think April was a great month," Lovullo recalled. "We had a great April in '13 that set the tone for the rest of the season. I don't remember that being the case '14. The pitchers probably weren't as sharp to start that year as the year before.

"I feel like we should have perhaps allowed some of the players to assume the same roles they had in '13 instead of projecting they would have better years on top of what they had in '13. An example for me was

Daniel Nava. He and Jonny Gomes had a tremendous year and because of that year, we thought they would be able to step into an everyday type of role. They had some opportunities and it didn't work out the same way. We probably projected them a little differently after the tremendous year they had. We thought they were ready to take off and have a huge year. But I think we needed to remember it was a two-man group. They had a great year in left field together, not individually. We might have projected certain things on certain guys that weren't accurate.

"It's important to remember that once something has been defined and been defined as good you don't need to change it. You should continue to embrace what it is and continue to allow them to perform inside of that expectation."

Another piece of the puzzle that pitch counts and lineup alignment can't make up for is the reality that comes with April baseball compared to what the team left behind in October.

"We had a lot of distractions and repeating is hard," Ross said. "Being on two World Series teams, that second year finding that energy on a Wednesday day game early in the year when the last thing you remember is 50,000 people screaming, for me it's hard to find that motivation and energy that takes your game to the next level that you had in October. It's hard to duplicate that at the beginning of the year. It's a combination for me of a lot of different things. And you're told by the organization to rest and take your time. I think it's difficult to get off to a good start."

The 2014 Red Sox never were able to right their ship, pulling themselves over .500 for one day (May 14) before spending the rest of the season with more losses than wins. Everything about it was a far cry from what transpired just a season before. That's the way it felt then, and through eight games it's the same dilemma these World Series winners are experiencing.

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

### **David Price criticizes MLB's marketing of Mookie Betts, other African-American baseball stars**

Justin Leger

Mookie Betts is a star, and David Price wants MLB to start treating him like it.

For some odd reason, the 2018 American League MVP isn't featured in any of MLB's commercials despite being an elite player in one of baseball's biggest markets. Price expressed his frustration with MLB's marketing of Betts -- or lack thereof -- to MassLive.com.

"OK, that's a joke," Price said. "I saw the Brewers first baseman [Jesús Aguilar] has a commercial on MLB Network. Great player. Great player. I love watching him play. I've heard nothing but great things about him from Travis Shaw and all those guys. But he's not Mookie Betts. We're trying to grow this game in the African-American community. Put that guy [Betts] on commercials. That's how this game grows. MLB is probably the worst at marketing their players. They need to do a better job of that. We've talked about that to the union and [MLB commissioner] Mr. [Rob] Manfred many times."

MLB's lackluster marketing of its players has been a subject of criticism for a while now, with Angels star Mike Trout being the prime example of the league's shortcomings. But Price emphasized that the issue goes well beyond just Trout. There's an entire group of worthy players blatantly being overlooked.

"Market the African-American stars in baseball better," Price said. "And the other players. Everybody. Market us better. Mookie Betts doesn't have a single commercial. He's one of the most marketable people in all of baseball. He plays for the Red Sox and he's African American. Zero commercials. A very likable person. He could be the face of baseball. And zero commercials. He just won MVP. MLB just needs to step up."

Price's point is a valid one. There is no reason a player of Betts' talent and character shouldn't be promoted just as much if not more than players like Phillies star Bryce Harper, and that also goes for numerous other African-American stars around the league.

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

### **BSJ Game Report: Diamondbacks 15, Red Sox 8 – Sox absorb worst drubbing of the season**

Sean McAdam

Porcello unable to reverse starter's slide: The string of poor performances by Red Sox starters continued with a brutal outing from Rick Porcello, who couldn't get through the fifth inning and was rocked for seven runs on 10 hits. This marked the seventh time in the first nine games a Red Sox starter failed to get into the sixth inning and it also continued the sorry pattern of being beaten up by the long ball. Porcello was pounded for two: the first by Ketel Marte with the bases empty in the fourth and the other, a leadoff shot from Adam Jones in the fifth. In nine games, Red Sox starting pitchers have surrendered a staggering 16 homers. But it was more than the homers that dogged Porcello. For the second straight time, he didn't have much command, issuing three walks, including two in the span of three hitters in the third. For the season, Red Sox starters have allowed 42 runs in 40.1 innings, evidence that they're not keeping the team in the game, or giving them much of a chance. Porcello's frustration boiled over after the fourth as he tossed a cooler of ice all over the dugout, but at some point, the Sox need results.

Another shoddy defensive game hurt: Granted, there wasn't anything as egregious as Thursday afternoon in Oakland when Mookie Betts and Jackie Bradley Jr. kept quiet while a ball dropped between them. But that doesn't mean the Sox cleaned up their game in the field. In the fourth inning alone, Brock Holt couldn't glove a low liner at second off the bat of pitcher Zack Godley, as the inning continued. Next, came a blooper (hit by the pitcher, mind you) that fell in between a charging J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts and a back-pedaling Holt, allowing a run to score. Finally, with a runner on third, Mitch Moreland juggled a routine grounder to first, giving time for Godley to score from third base. Three plays in an inning — with no errors charged — all contributed to a big inning for the Diamondbacks and symbolized the kind of sloppy play the Sox have had in the field for much of the first week and a half.

Don't be deceived by the final score: Thanks to some garbage time offense in the final two innings, it would be easy to look at the final score and think this game wasn't as bad as it seemed. But it was. For the first seven innings, the Red Sox managed just one run — that came in the third. Otherwise, in five of the first seven innings, they went down in order and without much of a fight. They went from the third inning until the eighth without recording a hit. And the only time from the fourth through the seventh when they didn't go down in order, they did so with the help of a faltering Godley, who walked three to fill the bases. Naturally, the Sox didn't take advantage when presented with the opportunity as Rafael Devers was retired on a weak comebacker and the team left the bases loaded for the third time in the last two games.

#### **TURNING POINT**

In a game this lopsided, it's tough to focus on any one moment. But for argument's sake, let's say it happened in the fourth. Porcello had given up a homer to Ketel Marte with one out with No. 8 hitter Alex Avila up and the pitcher's spot next. But Porcello walked Avila and inning wore on with two more runs scoring.

#### **TWO UP**

Mookie Betts: Betts hasn't been locked in at the plate, but he showed signs Friday night that that might be starting to happen. He had an infield single to short, a walk, a two-run homer to dead center and an opposite-field double.

Blake Swihart: Fresh off a three-hit game with a homer Wednesday night in Oakland, Swihart had a single in the third and a two-run, opposite-field double in the eighth, giving him five hits in his last two starts.

#### TWO DOWN

Brian Johnson: When Rick Porcello couldn't get through the fifth, the Sox turned to Johnson, who had been in line for a possible spot start Sunday. Johnson got the last out of the inning, but was shelled for seven runs on six hits in the sixth as the game turned into a rout.

J.D. Martinez: Martinez got exposed in the outfield. He was played way too deep with the pitcher at the plate, allowing a ball to drop in front of him in the third, then failing to cut off a ball in the gap later in the game.

#### QUOTE OF NOTE

"Very frustrating. I'm not doing my job right now and I don't take that lightly." — Porcello

#### STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The Red Sox dropped the opener of a series for the third straight time this season.

The Sox have now lost seven games, something they didn't do until April 28 last year.

Martinez extended his hitting streak to nine games with a ninth-inning single.

Eduardo Nunez became the first Red Sox position player to get into a game as a pitcher this season, allowing one run in the eighth.

#### UP NEXT

It's the middle game of the series Saturday, with LHP David Price (0-1, 6.00 ) vs. RHP Luke Weaver (0-0, 8.31)

### **Red Sox problems can't be isolated, making for a tougher turnaround**

Sean McAdam

Slumps happen. Teams experience losing streaks

Ordinarily, however, a club's poor play can be traced to a single element. Maybe the starting pitching is off. Or perhaps the bats have gone cold. For others, it's a series of bullpen implosions that are the root of the problem.

But for the 2019 Red Sox, not-so-proud owners of a 2-7 record, it isn't that simple.

It isn't just the hitting or the pitching or the defensive play.

It's "D" ... all of the above. And more.

Name the category, and the Sox are failing miserably. They've given up 23 homers in nine games. They have a minus-26 run differential, the worst for a defending World Series team since the 1984 Baltimore Orioles. They have one quality start from their rotation in nine games. Heck, they've had one game in which the starter has gotten into the sixth inning.

Offensively, they're stranding runners at an alarming rate, with 20 left on base in the last two games alone. Their .384 slugging percentage before Friday's clunker left them in the bottom half of American League teams. On Friday, they went down in order five times in the first seven innings, and after bunching together three hits in the third, didn't come up with another hit until the eighth when the game was ridiculously out of hand.

Defensively, the Sox aren't converting balls in play into outs. Among AL teams, only the Mariners have committed more errors. But errors, of course, don't tell the whole story. There was no error charged when two outfielders pulled up and allowed a ball to drop on the warning track Thursday afternoon in Oakland and none charged in the fourth inning Friday night either, despite three misplays in the span of three hitters — a blooper that fell in between three fielders; a low line drive that went off an infielder's glove for a single; and a juggled grounder which enabled a baserunner to score from third.

It's not one thing, in other words. It's everything. All at once.

"We understand that we're not playing good baseball," remarked Alex Cora. "It's a tough spot right now, but we'll be OK. I think it's overall. Like (Thursday), we were up 3-0 and (the A's) came back and we ended up losing the game. Tonight, we had the lead and (the Diamondbacks) came back right away."

But it could take a while. Maybe the offense will bail out a poor performance by a starter here or there, but can't be sustained for long. And if the ball isn't being caught, it doesn't matter how well the pitchers are throwing.

Of course, it would help if the starters could do a far better job in setting the tone. As Cora noted Friday night, the team has had a lead for a minuscule portion of the schedule so far. In each of their two wins, the Sox stormed back in the ninth inning to take the lead for good, but actually trailed for most of the night.

And while the ninth inning rallies demonstrated some resiliency on the part of the Sox, that, too, is a lousy formula. You can't count on many late-inning rallies to win games.

The biggest fear going into the season was the bullpen, but other than a couple of mid-game collapses — like the one experienced by Brian Johnson in the sixth inning Friday (seven runs allowed) — the relievers have actually been a strength. Before Friday's debacle, the Sox had a more-than-respectable 2.37 bullpen ERA.

More often than not, the bullpen has been largely irrelevant, with just two save opportunities through the first nine games.

One issue that has surfaced, though, is the challenge of 11 games in 11 days. Because the starters have almost uniformly failed to provide length — only two times has a pitcher made his way into and through the sixth inning — too much is being asked of the relievers in the early going, with no off-day on which to recover.

And so, the losses pile up and so does the mounting frustration. Rick Porcello exploded in the dugout after the fourth, upending a cooler of ice. An eighth-inning appearance by Eduardo Nunez on the mound seemed to provide some levity, a way to forget what had happened in the first seven innings.

"For how great it was last year, I understand what a big league season is," said Cora. "You're going to have your ups and downs. We've got to stay calm. The same way we did things last year, we're going to do them again. We'll stay in touch with (the players), keep talking to them and trying to coach them. We'll get them in the right spot.

"At one point, we're going to get hot and we're going to start playing good baseball and when we look back (on the first 10 days), we'll be like, 'That wasn't fun baseball.' But, like I said, we're going to be OK."

Probably. But maybe just not right away.

**\* *The Athletic***

## **Red Sox minor league boss Ben Crockett delivers state of the farm system report**

Chad Jennings

Michael Chavis hit a late, game-tying home run for Triple-A Pawtucket. C.J. Chatham had one of only two hits for Double-A Portland, while Jagger Rusconi had four of the 16 hits for Class-A Salem. Alex Scherff pitched five shutout innings for low Class-A Greenville, an outing that was easily overshadowed by a two-hit day for his second baseman – some kid named Dustin Pedroia.

That was Thursday night, Opening Day for the minor league baseball season. The following morning, vice president of player development Ben Crockett settled in for a wide-ranging Q&A with The Athletic, discussing some of the organization's more aggressive minor league assignments, which positions we can expect some of the bigger names to play this season, and some of the injuries that kept familiar faces from breaking camp coming out of spring training.

The conversation started with Chavis, arguably the top prospect in the entire system, who had a tremendous stint in big league camp and continues to add versatility to open potential pathways to Fenway Park this year.

Michael Chavis is a big and stocky guy. He looks like a home run hitter, but he does not necessarily look like a second baseman. How often do you expect him to play second this year, and how much do defensive shifts change the way you think about who can and cannot play that position?

I expect Michael to play second base fairly frequently during the year. It will be part of his, kind of, rotation playing multiple positions. Yeah, I think coming up as a middle infielder, playing shortstop in high school, having had that exposure, you know, players come in all shapes and sizes and he's somebody that has enough ability to play the position. Certainly, the way shifts impact the game, that plays a part for different positions in today's game, but I think Michael, for what he showed in spring training, he's got a chance to do it.

I went to the University of Missouri, so I obviously have a personal favorite in your farm system. Tanner Houck has gone through a series of adjustments since he entered pro ball, everything from arm slot to pitch repertoire. Where has he landed with all of that, and what can he carry over from a strong second half last season?

He had a really good camp, showing good stuff, showing consistency from where he ended the season last year and kind of finding the right mix of both four-seam and two-seam fastballs, showing the breaking ball – really there hasn't been a whole lot of change to that other than, I think as his slot has drifted some, that changed the shape of it. At this point, it's sort of a sweepy slider. It's got more horizontal action to it. But, overall, he's got a chance to be a really impactful major league pitcher. He's got a power two-pitch mix today, and the changeup is getting better. He threw some pretty good ones during spring training, so I'm interested to see how he's able to take the next steps with the changeup in Portland.

Brandon Howlett had a really nice debut, and now he's on the Greenville roster with Triston Casas. Will those two split time at third? Do you see Casas primarily at first? Can Howlett move around the infield at all?

Yeah, both of those guys will see some action at third. I think Howlett will probably see the majority of it. Casas will play a little bit more first than third but will remain exposed to third as well. That'll probably be the way it plays out at the corners. ... It's not dissimilar to having (Rafael) Devers and Chavis, among others, at the same level that we've had in the past. Yeah, I think having two young players like that who have the ability that they have, we understand that at some point there will be ups and downs, but at the end of the day, they're really talented guys.

Last we saw Bryan Mata, he was struggling to consistently throw strikes before being shut down with – I believe – a back injury last season. He was also a 19-year-old kid in Salem. How's his health, and what did you see this spring in terms of his ability to control what seems to be really good stuff and a lot of talent?

In addition to being 19, I think gaining almost two miles an hour on his fastball last year from 17 to 18 (years old), I think all of those things, in combination with playing at a high level for his age, kind of contributed to some of the inconsistencies we saw. But, coming into spring, he was pounding the strike zone and showed the ability to locate, throw multiple pitches, he's also working on a slider that we think should be a good weapon for him and overall kind of complementing a four-pitch mix.

Does it make you nervous when a kid like Durbin Feltman – third-round pick, something like 20 innings in pro ball – gets as much attention as he did this spring? Does that feel like too much? Does it feel like expectations get set too high on a kid just starting out?

We try not to get too wrapped up in those sorts of things. We understand it's part of the environment and part of what it means to be a minor leaguer these days. Some guys get more hype and others less, but certainly there's more scrutiny on young players today, and any time you've got a talented young player who is advanced in a lot of ways, it comes with that type of speculation or expectation externally. But, for us, we're trying to keep the goals short-term. Keep him focused on getting better each day. If he's able to do that and go out and perform, the other stuff will take care of itself.

Does the Xander Bogaerts extension change anything for C.J. Chatham? I don't believe he's played a position other than shortstop, but does it now make sense to move him around in anticipation of either a utility role or a need to play every day somewhere else?

No, I think, not at this point. He's just getting his feet wet in Double-A with one game under his belt. He hasn't had a ton of pro experience overall. Just because of what happens in the big leagues, particularly below Double-A and even at Double-A quite a bit, we're still focused on developing the best player we possibly can and putting guys in a position to succeed. Certainly, any time a guy does get established in Double-A and gets to Triple-A, those are things that we've done traditional with other guys. I certainly wouldn't eliminate that possibility by any means for C.J., but at this point, we're still focused on shortstop.

Mike Shawaryn was your Triple-A Opening Day starter, and he got to that level pretty quickly, consistently putting up pretty good numbers along the way. What does he need to carry that success into the big leagues? I have to imagine he'll be among the candidates for spot starts down the road.

Sure. I think continuing to understand and improve his ability to use his pitches in different parts of the strike zone and to utilize his changeup as a starter, I think having that complements the cutter, which is a really good pitch for him. Having that other pitch to give guys a different look is going to help, and I think it's something that he's focused on improving.

Three fairly aggressive assignments stand out to me: Zach Schellinger to Portland after just nine games in Low-A, Jarren Duran going straight to Salem just one year after being drafted, and Brayan Bello to Greenville almost straight from the Dominican Summer League. What went into those assignments and decisions?

A lot of conversations amongst our staff. With the players, each case is a little bit unique. Duran's is not an uncommon path for guys that have really excelled in their draft year and started in Salem (their first full season). Guys from Jackie Bradley to Deven Marrero to Travis Shaw, college hitters who have made that jump.

In Schellinger's position, it's somebody that had a really good spring. We kind of felt like that's where he would have been had he been healthy. What he showed this spring from a stuff standpoint, he's got some of the better stuff in the organization in terms of the pitch mix and the lack of comfort a hitter has in the box. We felt with those factors, Double-A would be a good place for him to start.

With Bello, it's similar. He obviously did very well, and he did come up to the states (to the Gulf Coast League) at the end of the year and was with us in the fall in Fort Myers. Given the age, it's a little different. He's actually 20 in comparison to Bryan Mata and other guys when they had come over with similar experience – maybe a little more stateside experience at the time, but not dissimilar – but they were a little younger than he was. A combination of those factors, and feeling like the player's makeup would be able to handle that challenge. Those are the things that we took into account.

I saw Danny Mars was released at the end of spring training, but a few other guys I didn't see on any rosters were Austin Rei, Teddy Stankiewicz and Roldani Baldwin. What's their status, and what's going on with Chad De La Guerra, who's on the Pawtucket DL?

Stankiewicz is recovering. He had a shoulder issue in the offseason. He pitched in spring training, but he hadn't really regained strength and form, so he's down in extended working on that. De La Guerra had a back spasm basically right there at the end of camp, so he wasn't able to break. He's down there. Danny Mars was released at the end of camp. And who else? Oh, both Rei and Baldwin, unfortunately, had fractures; lower extremity fractures. Rei's was running down the baseline, I think might have stepped on the base awkwardly and broke his foot. Small fracture in his foot. Then, Baldwin, he was sliding into a base, got his foot caught up underneath him and had a lower-leg, lower-shin fracture.

What's the status of Jay Groome? Do you have a timetable for getting him into games? Or maybe I should say, do you have a timetable you're willing to share for getting him into games?

Not at this point, no. He's continuing through the throwing progression, but at this point, we don't have a specific timetable to share.

What's the plan for Trey Ball? Where does he start and what do you see as his primary position?

We're working with him as an outfielder right now. It's unfortunate timing. He got banged up during spring training. He got to participate quite a bit early, but then around the time intra-squads were starting, he had a little abdominal or oblique issue, and then an ankle sprain once he came back from that. So he's just had some bad luck during the spring. Hopefully he'll be getting moving again here in extended (spring training) fairly quickly, and we'll be able to have a better sense of where he'll (end up). ... We saw him (play the outfield) in instructional league, and that's about it. We saw him again at the beginning of spring. He'd made some clear improvements, but unfortunately just not being able to see it much in live game action during spring. Whatever we saw in instructional league, you know, we asked him to switch over to being a position player after not playing there for a long time. So, the beginning, what we saw there was positive, but to see a little more polish this spring, which we were beginning to see there, just unfortunately didn't get a chance to see it in games or see it at a high level of competition. ... He will continue to throw bullpens and, once he's back healthy, continue to get work in at both, but outfield will be the focal point.

## **\* *AZCentral.com***

### **Ketel Marte hits 2 HRs, D-Backs bring offensive fireworks in home-opening win vs. Red Sox**

Nick Piccoro

On a quiet afternoon late in spring training, Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo was asked about his offense. For most of the previous three weeks, Lovullo had watched his hitters struggle to drive the ball, reach base or otherwise score runs. A concern entering camp had remained a concern entering the season.

"I think when the switch goes on and they crank it up and show what they can do," Lovullo said, "I think it might be a little bit of a different story."

Lovullo, as it turns out, was wrong. The story isn't "a little bit" different.

After clobbering the defending World Series champion Boston Red Sox 15-8 on Friday night in their home opener at Chase Field, the Diamondbacks boast an offense that, for the season's first week-plus, has bordered on unstoppable.

The Diamondbacks have scored 56 runs. They have blasted 19 homers. Each is a club record through eight games. They have scored at least five runs in every game but one. And they have scored runs in bunches, with 12 multi-run innings already, including seven in which they've scored three or more.

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The Diamondbacks, a team without Paul Goldschmidt and A.J. Pollock after offseason subtractions, a team without Steven Souza Jr. due to a late spring injury, a team now without Jake Lamb after a quadriceps strain this week, just keeps chugging along.

Adam Jones slammed his fourth home run. Ketel Marte went deep twice, homering from each side of the plate, including a grand slam from the right side in which he appeared to nearly swing out of his shoes. Nick Ahmed and Jarrod Dyson had three hits apiece.

"Right now, it's going good," Jones said. "It's easy when things go good. We're just trying to ride the wave and have quality at-bats every single game."

Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo breaks down 15-run output vs. Red Sox Richard Morin, [azcentral.com](http://azcentral.com) sports

Jones has been as responsible as any one player for the performance of the offense. Signed just 2 1/2 weeks before Opening Day, he had no issues getting ready for the season. He's 14 for 36 (.389) with eight extra-base hits, fitting nicely in the lineup whether it's been in the leadoff or cleanup spots.

The Diamondbacks went 5 for 12 with runners in scoring position, an area Lovullo called a focus during spring training. A year ago, he thought his club had a penchant for giving away at-bats, particularly when it came to swinging early in counts. He has liked the approach his players have had so far this season.

"It's not rocket science," Lovullo said. "It's about waiting for the pitch you're trying to get. You don't have to get it done on the first pitch, maybe go more into a thought where you can just wait out the pitcher. ... We're doing a really nice job. We're staying behind the ball and impacting the ball and putting it on the barrel."

On Friday, they scored four times in the fourth and seven times in the sixth, benefitting from a combination of well-struck, well-placed and poorly played balls. They sent eight batters to the plate in the fourth and 10 in the sixth.

"Just having quality at-bats," Diamondbacks catcher Alex Avila said. "Regardless of who's in the lineup, that's going to be the key to any offense. Being able to have quality at-bats, knowing your strength as a hitter, trying to stick to those and know when it's time to take team at-bats. If you're able to do that, like today, one through nine, it usually means a good day."

Zack Godley bounced back from a rough first start at Dodger Stadium by giving up one run in 5 2/3 innings. It was a 14-1 lead for the Diamondbacks when the Red Sox went to work on long reliever Matt Koch, scoring seven times off him in the final two innings. But it was the offense that was the story of the night – that remained the story of the opening stretch of the Diamondbacks' season.

"It's everything you kind of dream about for (a home opener)," Lovullo said. "It was a pretty complete game for us."

## **\* Associated Press**

### **Marte 2 HRs, 5 RBIs, Diamondbacks rout wobbling Red Sox 15-8**

PHOENIX -- Adam Jones wanted to make one thing perfectly clear.

"I'm not replacing Paul (Goldschmidt), by any stretch," Jones said after hitting his fourth homer of the season Friday.

So far, Jones and the rest of the Diamondbacks are doing a pretty good impression.

Ketel Marte homered from both sides of the plate, including a grand slam, and Jones also doubled while extending his hitting streak to eight games when Arizona kept the Boston Red Sox in a season-opening funk with a 15-8 romp Friday night in the Diamondbacks' home opener.

"It's just the fact of being aggressive," Jones said. "Right now it's going good. It's easy when it is going good. We are just trying to ride the wave and just have quality at-bats every single day."

Marte set a career high with five RBI. His performance marked the seventh time in team history a hitter has homered as a lefty and righty in the same game.

Nick Ahmed and Jarrod Dyson had three hits apiece for the Diamondbacks, who have scored at least five runs in seven of their eight games despite losing top run producers Paul Goldschmidt and A.J. Pollock in the offseason.

"It's everything you kind of dream about for opening day," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said.

"The runs just kept coming. I can't say enough about what we did offensively. It's a pretty constant theme. We are going to grind out some at-bats and take fearless approaches with men in scoring position. It's something that we highlighted this offseason."

Mookie Betts, who had three hits, and Mitch Moreland homered for Boston after Arizona built a 14-1 lead through seven innings.

The defending World Series champions have lost seven of their first nine on an 11-game road trip, the longest to open a season in franchise history. They are off to their worst start since 2011, when they began 2-10 before finishing 92-70 and missing the playoffs by one game.

"We will be OK," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "We will keep working. We understand that we are not playing good baseball. It is a tough spot right now, but we will be OK. There were some positives. Later in the game we hit the ball hard. I think in the last two or three innings was the hardest we hit the ball the whole season."

Rick Porcello (0-2) gave up 10 hits and seven runs in 4 2/3 innings. He flung a water cooler against the back wall of the Red Sox dugout after being removed in the fifth.

Porcello has given up 16 runs, 11 earned, in 7 1/3 innings in his first two starts. Boston has allowed double-digit runs three times, and its starting rotation has given up 43 earned runs in 40 1/3 innings.

"Very frustrating," Porcello said. "I am not doing my job right now and I don't take that lightly. I take full responsibility for these first two starts, not throwing the ball like I need to. I feel fine, felt great out there. Just got my butt kicked."

Red Sox infielder Eduardo Nunez came in to pitch the eighth and gave up a home run to Alex Avila.

Zack Godley (1-1) gave up three hits and one run in 5 2/3 innings. He also singled twice, scoring one run and driving in another.

Marte hit a solo homer in the fourth. His grand slam off reliever Brian Johnson came in a big sixth that also included a pinch-hit homer by Ildemaro Vargas, recalled earlier Friday when Jake Lamb was placed on the injured list.

Marte's slam came after the Red Sox intentionally walked Christian Walker with runners on second and third and one out.

"I go aggressive every time," Marte said. "Trying to see the ball and put a good swing. I feel great right now. I'm stronger. My mind is ready. We have a good team here. We're going to have fun."

#### WE MEET AGAIN

The teams have a strong connection -- Diamondbacks general manager Mike Hazen spent 11 seasons in Boston's front office before being hired to replace Tony La Russa/Dave Stewart before the 2017 season. D-Backs manager Torey Lovullo was Boston's bench coach from 2013-16 before Hazen hired him to manage Arizona. Lovullo has traded texts with several former Red Sox, including Dustin Pedroia.

The teams met for the first time this weekend since the moves.

#### DAY(S) OF REST

Opening day started Chris Sale will be pushed back to Tuesday, the Red Sox home opener.

"That was our plan from the get-go, going with a sixth starter on the last day of the road trip," manager Alex Cora said.

Sale is 0-2 with an 8.00 ERA in two starts, giving up nine hits and four walks in nine innings.

Jackie Bradley Jr. pinch-hit Friday, and J.D. Martinez and Mookie Betts will get time off in the final two games of the series.

"I think it is good for each one of them to have a day off," Cora said.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: 2B Dustin Pedroia (left knee) was 2 for 3 with a double and a walk in nine innings of a rehab game for Class A Greenville on Thursday. He was to play again Friday, take Saturday off and be reevaluated Sunday, manager Alex Cora said.

Diamondbacks: LHP T.J. McFarland (shoulder) is to pitch in a simulated game Saturday.

#### UP NEXT

Red Sox left-hander David Price (0-1) will oppose Diamondbacks right-hander Luke Weaver (0-0) in the second game of a three-game series. Weaver will make his first career appearance both against the Red Sox and at Chase Field.