

The Boston Red Sox Monday, April 8, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox bullpen comes up big to finish grueling West Coast swing

Alex Speier

PHOENIX — Sometimes, you win with stars. And sometimes, you win with the kitchen sink.

As the 2019 Red Sox completed an arduous 11-game, 11-day trip through the west, a supporting cast salvaged the finale and ensured a relaxed, 2,295-mile trip home with an unlikely 1-0 victory over the Diamondbacks in Arizona.

The team's third win may loom as one of the most unexpected of the year, a day when the team got its best start of the year from a bullpen member, when critical middle innings were provided by a pitcher who one day earlier had been in Syracuse, and when — for the first time in the 47-year era of the designated hitter — the Red Sox had two relief pitchers step to the plate for at-bats.

Before the game, any of those elements might have suggested another loss. Instead, the unusual deployment played a role in what was easily the most satisfying Red Sox win of the young season.

“Today,” said Matt Barnes, who contributed two scoreless innings, “was a big win for us. I’m not going to say it was needed, but it was a win we really wanted to have.”

The Red Sox had to work for it, as through six innings, their lineup did next to nothing against Diamondbacks starter Merrill Kelly. But in the top of the seventh, Mitch Moreland — who'd delivered the team's first victory of the year with a ninth-inning, three-run homer — slammed a first-pitch cutter from Kelly to deep right field.

Moreland wasn't sure if he'd gotten enough, and clenched his teeth as he watched right fielder Adam Jones track it to the fence and make a well-timed leap. As he rounded second base, Moreland couldn't tell whether the ball had gotten over the fence.

It had.

“I’ve seen [Jones] do it all too many times over the years, so I’m happy he didn’t do it again right there,” said Moreland. “I knew it was going to be close. Thankfully it was out of reach.”

After the struggles of the vaunted rotation, a surprising cast of arms ensured Moreland's homer would not go for naught.

Hector Velazquez — who got Sunday's start when lefthander Brian Johnson was pressed into duty during Friday's blowout — became the first Red Sox starter of the year to put up three zeroes to open a game.

He showed fantastic command of his full pitch mix, working at the top of the strike zone with a four-seam fastball (92-94 miles per hour), at the bottom with a two-seamer, and off the edges with his slider and changeup. He allowed just one hit, striking out three without a walk.

“Amazing,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora beamed.

“My mentality with each pitch is to give more than 100 percent,” Velazquez said via translator Daveson Perez. “I knew I wasn't going to be pitching a lot of innings today, but every pitch felt good.”

Yet Velazquez was spent by the conclusion of those three innings, forcing the Red Sox to lean on their bullpen in a scoreless tie — a task made more challenging by the absence of a DH in a National League park.

Brandon Workman followed with a dominant fourth inning; opponents are 0 for 15 with one walk and seven strikeouts against the righthander. Then came Marcus Walden, told just over two weeks ago he'd open the year in Triple A Pawtucket, but with a caveat.

"[Cora] said obviously you're going to be a big part of this team," said Walden. "I knew I was going to be up here eventually."

Walden gave up a double to the first batter he faced, Christian Walker, but worked around it when, with one out and Walker on third, he got a grounder to shortstop with the infield in. Xander Bogaerts threw out Walker at home, wiping out the most significant Arizona threat.

Cora knew that he wanted to use Walden for multiple innings, but he'd need the reliever to hit (or rather walk to home plate with a ceremonial bat in hand) in the top of the sixth. Walden struck out looking, then pitched a perfect sixth.

Barnes followed with two overpowering innings — a multi-inning effort that, like Walden's, required his first professional at-bat. Though Barnes was disappointed to be forbidden from swinging in his first at-bat in 11 years, the rush of his role made up for it.

"When they're high-leverage situations, it's physically impossible to not have the adrenaline or the energy to be focused because the game is constantly on the line," said Barnes. "I truly enjoy it."

Ryan Brasier worked around a two-out double to record his second save with a scoreless ninth, and the weary, relieved Red Sox finally could head home — armed with a disappointing 3-8 record, but mindful that 2-9 would have felt much worse.

"We love winning," said Cora. "[But] we're not going to get caught up on, if you win it's a relief and if you lose it's life and death. We don't play that here in this clubhouse. We know where we're going. We know how good we are. We know that we have to get better. . . . We learned a lot on this road trip but now that it's over, hopefully when we talk a few months from now, we'll say, you know what? It was a learning experience. It made us better."

Bullpen shows its worth in heartening victory

Alex Speier

PHOENIX — For the Red Sox, very little about the first 11 games of the season went according to expectations. But in at least one respect, the backwards start to 2019 proved a strength rather than a disappointment.

Five Red Sox relievers (if one considers starter Hector Velazquez thus) combined to deliver nine scoreless innings on just three hits, striking out eight, and walking one in Sunday's 1-0 win over the Diamondbacks. The shutout highlighted what has been the most consistent element of the Red Sox to date: The bullpen has been outstanding.

In particular, Matt Barnes (4½ scoreless innings, 1 hit, 6 strikeouts, no walks), Brandon Workman (5 hitless, scoreless innings, 7 strikeouts, 1 walk), and Ryan Brasier (5 scoreless innings, four strikeouts, 1 walk) dominated. The group is well aware that it offered the most compelling rebuttal possible to those who were skeptical of a bullpen that lacked an established closer to start the year.

“We were obviously really doubted coming into this thing,” said Workman. “I said late in camp, we’ve got the arms, just not the names. Everybody out there is capable of throwing the ball really well. That’s definitely something we’ve been trying to show.”

The Sox bullpen has a 3.61 ERA (inflated by Brian Johnson’s willingness to take one for the team in a seven-run, sixth-inning on Friday), holding opponents to a .229 average while striking out 10.0 and walking 2.8 batters per nine innings. The trio of Barnes (fastball, curveball, splitter), Brasier (fastball, slider, splitter), and Workman (fastball, cutter, curveball) has carved the strike zone with three-pitch mixes to establish what had been perceived as the team’s chief weakness as its greatest season-opening strength.

“Nobody thought it was going to be this way, the starters struggling, not great offense, the bullpen being great,” said manager Alex Cora. “That’s baseball. If that’s going to be our negatives, the pitching staff and our offense, we’ll take our chances. They’re going to be better.”

Pedroia on tap?

In the third — and perhaps final — game of his rehab assignment with the Single-A Greenville Drive, Dustin Pedroia went 0-for-4 with a walk, run, and strikeout. During his nine innings in the field, he started two double plays.

Pedroia was scheduled to fly to Boston after the game, and he and the team will meet on Monday to determine his next step, which could be activation from the injured list in time for Tuesday’s home opener against the Blue Jays. Given that the Red Sox entered Sunday with a .361 OPS from their second basemen, it’s possible that Pedroia could provide a boost. Cora noted Pedroia showed an impressive plate approach throughout the spring.

“His hand-eye coordination and his discipline, even with this year in spring training, he hasn’t played in a while, he was taking pitches off the edge of the zone,” said Cora. “I said, ‘How do you do that?’ He said, ‘I don’t know. That’s who I am.’”

Cora mostly used Pedroia in the sixth spot in the lineup during spring training. The manager hinted that the second baseman would hit in roughly that part of the lineup moving forward.

“In the spot that he’ll hit early in the season, he’s going to have a lot of traffic,” said Cora. ...

J.D. Martinez went 0-for-3 with a walk, ending his season-opening 10-game hitting streak — the longest by a Red Sox to start a season since Shea Hillenbrand’s 12-gamer in 2002. ... Andrew Benintendi went 2-for-4, his fourth straight multi-hit game, tied for the longest such streak of his career.

Mookie Betts had Sunday off in advance of Monday’s off-day, though he did enter in the ninth as a defensive replacement.

“It seems like whenever he has two off-days in a row, something special happens,” said Cora. “We’ll see how he reacts.”

Husky pride

On Friday, Diamondbacks shortstop Nick Ahmed received his Gold Glove Award in a pregame ceremony, with an interested onlooker on the other side of the field. Barnes, who played with Ahmed — a Springfield native and East Longmeadow High School alum — at UConn and was part of a remarkable Huskies draft class in 2011 that also included George Springer .

“It’s awesome. He’s one of the hardest workers I’ve ever been around. He’s a guy who, we would have practice and he would stay out there an extra 40 minutes taking grounders, so honestly I’m not surprised at all at what he’s doing,” said Barnes of Ahmed. “He’s developed into one of the best defensive shortstops in all of baseball, and he’s been able to tweak his approach at the plate and transform himself into a legitimate threat.”

Ahmed similarly has enjoyed seeing Barnes' big-league career path. The righthander was a starter who dominated with a fastball-heavy mix in college. Now, Barnes has emerged as the Red Sox' highest-leverage reliever, with a curveball that he uses with sometimes greater frequency than his fastball.

"In college, his fastball was just kind of overwhelming for most guys, so he threw it more. But at this level, you've got to have multiple pitches," said Ahmed.

Ahmed has enjoyed seeing teammates Springer and Barnes claim titles in consecutive years. That said, he'd like to spend a bit less time watching his former teammates winning the game's ultimate prize moving forward.

"Hopefully," he said, "it's my turn this year."

Season-opening Western grind offers silver linings for Red Sox

Peter Abraham

PHOENIX — Assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett made the comment early last week as a long road trip turned increasingly sour for the Red Sox.

"Last year was Disney World," he said. "This year is real baseball."

Barkett was being sarcastic, but there was plenty of truth behind his words. The Sox had a stress-free season in 2018. They were the only team in the majors not to lose four in a row, then blew away three playoff opponents.

The one bit of drama came when Hanley Ramirez was released in May, and that ultimately made them better. The Sox even survived Chris Sale spending a month on the injured list.

"If you think about it, it was such a perfect season," manager Alex Cora said before Sunday's game against the Arizona Diamondbacks. "It doesn't mean that we can't bounce back from this. There were periods last year we went through struggles . . . People forget we were in second place at one point last season."

Yes, for 12 whole days, when they were never more than two games out. Not exactly a mountain to climb.

But that's the feeling of invincibility the Sox want to recapture. A bad road trip was no reason to forget what is possible.

"Turning the page doesn't make sense for us because we can go to our memory bank," Cora said. "'OK, we did this. We did this. We adjusted this way.' We'll go back and make adjustments."

Sunday was a test of character, along with those adjustments, that the Sox passed with a 1-0 victory.

They stuck to their plan to give their rotation an extra day of rest and used five relievers. Hector Velazquez went three innings before Brandon Workman, Marcus Walden, Matt Barnes, and Ryan Brasier followed.

They combined to hold the Diamondbacks to three hits with one walk and eight strikeouts. Mitch Moreland's home run in the seventh inning was enough.

Walden, who had not pitched in the majors since last May 3, went two innings for the win. Barnes and Brasier then retired nine of the 10 batters they faced.

The 3-8 Sox may not have a closer, but they have some relief aces. Barnes has recorded 13 outs from the seventh inning on in the three victories. That he has one save is bookkeeping, not an indication of his value.

“It’s a lot of fun,” Barnes said. “I truly enjoy it. Over the course of 162 games, when you pitch in however many of them, there’s going to be days where you’re just kind of zoned out for whatever reason it is.

“When they’re high-leverage situations, it’s physically impossible to not have the adrenaline or the energy to be focused because the game is constantly on the line.”

Cora even kept Mookie Betts on the bench except for one inning in right field. He was determined to give the MVP two days off in a row ahead of the homestand. That paid off so often last season and Cora didn’t want to show panic by changing what he said he would do three days ago.

That led to Walden and Barnes taking their turns at bat — and being called out on strikes after being instructed not to swing. But it worked.

“I’ve been encouraged by myself,” the ever-confident manager said. “I’ve been able to sleep and stay calm and all that. I know a lot of people were questioning that. ‘How’s he going to react to a tough stretch?’

“Everybody knows my world. Tonight I go home and those two kids at 1:30 in the morning, I don’t care if they’re sleeping, the [20-month-old] twins are going to be up. We’re going to play for a while. That’s the way I see it. Everybody deals with adversity in different ways.”

Now, the Red Sox return to Fenway Park on Tuesday for six games against the tankerrific Blue Jays and Orioles.

“We’ll get our rings and get back to work,” Brasier said. “We’re going to be fine.”

The schedule will turn in their favor, too. Opening the season with 11 games in a row on the road was, in part, a product of playing two games in London in June and the adjustments that required.

Now the Sox have only six more games in the Pacific Time Zone and have 13 of their final 25 games at Fenway. The Yankees have a nine-game West Coast trip in August and close with 15 of 21 on the road.

Cora put the victory in the same perspective he did the losses that came before it.

“One thing for sure, we’re not going to get caught up in the, ‘If you win it’s a relief, and if you lose it’s life and death.’ We don’t play that here in this clubhouse,” he said. “We won, we enjoyed it. We know where we’re going; we know how we are. We know we have to get better. We learned a lot on this road trip and now it’s over.

“Hopefully when we talk about this road trip a few months from now we can look back and say, ‘You know what? It was a learning experience that made us better.’ ”

*** *The Boston Herald***

Alex Cora’s bold bet pays off in Red Sox’ 1-0 win over Diamondbacks

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — With the game scoreless to start the sixth inning, Alex Cora put the bat in Marcus Walden’s hands and let him hit for himself.

Walden, a reliever who didn’t make the team out of spring training and was called up Saturday to replace the injured Brian Johnson, struck out in a non-competitive at-bat.

Again in the eighth inning, Cora sent another reliever, Matt Barnes, to hit for himself. Again, he struck out easily.

But the manager's faith in those two relievers to keep the game scoreless rather than play for one more run spoke volumes about how the Red Sox are playing right now. And the unusual strategy actually worked.

Mitch Moreland hit a solo homer in the seventh inning and the Red Sox captured a crucial 1-0 victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks on Sunday to send them back to Boston with a much-needed off-day and a 3-8 record.

"We won that game because of our pitching," Moreland said. "Each guy that stepped up today did an outstanding job by being in situations they're not used to. We got relievers hitting. They kept going out there and throwing up zeroes for us. It was a big one for us."

The plan for this 11th game of the season had always been to use a sixth starter, but Hector Velazquez isn't exactly stretched out for a starter's share of innings. So Cora got three good innings out of Velazquez in an opener-style approach, then trusted four relievers to throw six innings of work.

Velazquez pitched perhaps the best game by a Red Sox starter this year, allowing just one hit and no walks while striking out three.

"Probably his best fastball the last two or three years," Cora said of Velazquez, who averaged 93.3 mph, his highest since last July. "Good split, good tempo. He was honest, too, after the third inning. I came down and talk to him. Was like, 'how are you feeling?' He was like, 'Whew, I don't feel my legs right now.' 'OK, you did a good job, we move on.'"

Despite using five pitchers in a National League game, Cora never went to his bench. Not once did he pinch-hit, not even with reigning MVP Mookie Betts out of the lineup for a routine day of rest (Betts was later used as a defensive replacement). And though all three at-bats by pitchers resulted in a strikeout, essentially making it just eight innings' worth of at-bats by the actual Red Sox offense, the Sox walked away with a much-needed win.

"I told all my pitchers not to swing the bat," Cora said.

The decision to let them hit for themselves "wasn't hard at all," he said. "Nobody on. We felt we lined up the bullpen the way we wanted. This was the way we're going to win this game, with our best arms pitching against their best hitters. Yesterday we didn't use Matt Barnes in that situation in the ninth because we trust one guy, Colten Brewer, in that spot, in the bottom third of the order, and it didn't work out. Today we were able to save Barnes with the middle of the order for six outs. What didn't work yesterday, worked today. That's baseball."

Brandon Workman pitched another strong inning in the fourth — he's tossed five scoreless innings to start the year — and then Cora turned to Walden for a quick fifth inning of work.

With the offense struggling against 30-year-old rookie right-hander Merrill Kelly and a variety of options on the bench, Cora chose not to use one. Instead, Walden hit for himself to lead off the sixth, struck out on four pitches and the Sox went to the bottom of the inning still tied, 0-0.

Walden, a 30-year-old who still has rookie status despite throwing 14- $\frac{2}{3}$ innings with a 3.68 ERA last year, pitched a strong sixth and turned the game over to Barnes in the seventh.

"When I had my meeting out of spring training he said, 'obviously you're going to be a big part of this team, but you're not going to break with the team,'" Walden said. "I know I have options. That happens. But I knew I was going to be up here eventually."

Making just his third appearance of the season, Barnes pitched brilliantly once again, and Cora trusted him for two innings while letting him hit for himself (struck out on three pitches, all looking) to keep him in the game.

Barnes said he wanted to swing while at the plate but Cora told him not to. He was taking huge hacks in the on-deck circle.

“I wanted to give the impression that I was gonna, but it didn’t work,” Barnes joked. “I was kind of surprised to hit, honestly, but it’s great. Guys were throwing the ball well. A day like today, you extend guys a little bit more to get through the nine innings. It was something we were OK with. It was awesome.”

Moreland barely cleared the fence for a homer in the seventh.

Ryan Brasier handled the ninth for his second save of the season and it was the bullpen, not the rotation, that can claim the first shutout win of the year.

“I’m not impressed,” Brasier said of the bullpen’s success. “Because we all knew what we had to do coming out of spring training. Everybody was talking about how we weren’t going to do this and that. I think everybody in the bullpen kind of used it as motivation and came out and did we do.”

Red Sox starting rotation allowing too many home runs: ‘Velocity is extremely important’

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — How is this Red Sox starting rotation going to get back on track after beginning the season with an MLB-worst 9.13 ERA and negative-1.3 WAR?

It could be as simple as continuing to build arm strength, increasing velocity and rediscovering power.

That might take a few more weeks.

Ask Brian Bannister what he sees with all the home runs flying off the bats of Red Sox pitchers and the answer is quite simple: it’s all about stuff. And the Red Sox need to rediscover their stuff.

“Our pitchers will continue to get back to their peak velocities and you’ll see improved production as that happens,” said Bannister, the team’s assistant pitching coach known for his understanding of pitch data.

Bannister estimates that it takes about six weeks for a pitcher to regain his full firing capacity in a new season. Six weeks is usually the duration of spring training, but the starting pitchers weren’t exactly letting it rip in spring training this year. Most didn’t see game action until early March, just three weeks before Opening Day.

Chris Sale’s spring debut wasn’t until March 16. He was throwing in only controlled environments until then. Six weeks from that date would put him near the beginning of May before he’s at his strongest.

David Price made his spring debut on March 12, Nathan Eovaldi on March 13 and Rick Porcello on March 10. Eduardo Rodriguez had the earliest start on Feb. 27.

It’s all part of the grander plan to keep them throwing harder later in the season. And it worked fine last year, but it seems to have come at a cost this time around.

Sale, Eovaldi and Rodriguez have all seen decreases in their average four seam velocity from last year, with Sale’s 91.3 mph down from 95.6 mph the most drastic. Eovaldi is averaging 97.4 mph after averaging 99 mph last October. Rodriguez is averaging 92.6 mph after averaging 94.1 mph last October.

Pitching coach Dana LeVangie said of Sale last week, “You guys want him to pitch the whole year or do you want him to go out and throw 100 mph right now and not be there for his team? He’s building.”

The results have not been good. Here are the five starter's slugging percentages they're allowing on their four-seam fastball this year compared to last year: Sale (2.000 vs. .339), Eovaldi (.400 vs. .309), Rodriguez (1.059 vs. .381), Porcello (.556 vs. .437) and Price (1.000 vs. .461).

Think of a golf swing. As a golfer tries to hit the ball harder, often times that comes at the sacrifice of accuracy. Pitching is similar.

As the power returns, Red Sox starters won't have to dig back and try harder to reach their average velocities, a mechanism that can result in too many misfires, and oftentimes bad location that's the cause of a lot of home runs.

Together, Red Sox starters have allowed 16 homers in 10 starts, easily the worst of any rotation in baseball.

Bannister explained what he's seeing from opposing hitters' approach.

"The goal of every hitter right now is to get on plane and hit the ball in the air," he said. "And getting on plane also gives you more margin for error as a hitter to handle the steadily increasing velocity across baseball.

"Whether we like it or not on the pitching side, velocity is extremely important. You see once again secondary pitches handily outperforming fastballs across the league. So there's a certain level of velocity you need to attain as a pitcher, and maintain it. And then you have to be able to get hitters off that plane to generate swing and miss. Hitters are completely content with an all-or-nothing approach right now. I think something like roughly like 40 percent of all runs right now are home runs. That's just the reality of modern pitching."

Through Sunday, 46 percent of the runs scored in Major League Baseball this season were scored on home runs. That number was just 42 percent last year.

Overall, home runs are up nine percent from just one year ago.

"You have to have velocity, you have to train for velocity and you have to be able to throw secondary pitches that can get off the bat plane of the hitter," Bannister said. "That's a mandatory requirement of all pitchers in today's game, where that wasn't the case 10 years ago, where hitters were trying to put the ball in play with two strikes, or move the runner over, or any of these things that are no longer part of today's hitting philosophies with the shifts and advanced defenses.

"It's velocity and spin, or die."

While the Red Sox did question the gameplan for Rodriguez in his first start, it's also easy to point to his diminished fastball velocity to understand why he hasn't had much confidence in the pitch this year.

Overall, the Red Sox are OK with their pitching strategy, which last year was summed up by fastballs up in the zone and breaking balls down.

"Nothing has changed in that department," Bannister said. "You're trying to stay off the swing plane of a hitter. It's just with every year, pitchers are throwing harder. Teams are finding a way to make the average pitch be faster, whether it's the use of an opener, more relievers, less pitches per outing for a starter, as well as more advanced training methods in the offseason and during the season. So there's just a very strong velocity component to everything that's done in pitching."

The Red Sox are hoping to see their pitchers' velocity increase soon.

"The other thing that happens as a side effect of that is only the hitters that can handle velocity remain at the major league level," Bannister said. "The guys that don't get on plane, the guys that can't handle velocity, through reaction time or eyesight or hand quickness, they're naturally filtered out of the major

leagues. And the only guys left over year after year are the guys that can handle velocity. So it just makes it even that more important that pitchers throw hard, but also have other ways to get off that plane to complement velocity.”

To Bannister, it all boils down to stuff.

“It’s the reality of today’s game,” he said. “You either train for stuff, go out and execute stuff, or it’s very hard to pitch to right now.”

Dustin Pedroia could be activated for Opening Day at Fenway Park

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — If Dustin Pedroia feels good Monday and the Red Sox medical team is happy with what they see when they examine him in Boston, Pedroia could be activated in time for Opening Day at Fenway Park on Tuesday.

“We’ll check him out and from there we’ll see,” manager Alex Cora said.

Pedroia was 0-for-4 with a walk and a strikeout in his rehab game for High-A Greenville on Sunday. Overall he was 3-for-9 over three games with the Drive, playing in back-to-back games on Thursday and Friday.

One thing Cora wants to see if the Red Sox activate Pedroia is more aggressiveness in his offensive approach early in the count.

“I think in the spot that he’ll hit early in the season, he’s going to have a lot of traffic,” Cora said. “There should be a lot of traffic. I don’t want to get ahead. I don’t want to tell who we play, Toronto, if Pedey plays this week, that he’s going to be more aggressive. But that’s something he understands, that the game is changing.

“We always go back to when we play or before I play, It used to be 91-92 mph, sinkers, cutters. And 0-1 was a comfortable count. Now, 0-1 is a very uncomfortable count. We’ll see. The thing with Pedey, his hand-eye coordination and his discipline, even with this year in spring training, he hasn’t played in a while, he was taking pitches off the edge of the zone. I talked to him about it. I said, ‘How do you do that?’ He said, ‘I don’t know. That’s who I am.’ We’ll see how he does.”

Red Sox willing to change: ‘Last year was Disneyworld, this year is real baseball’

Jason Mastrodonato

PHOENIX — Alex Cora was in a particularly reflective mood on Sunday morning.

With the Red Sox just 2-8 through 10 games and ranking 30th in MLB with a minus-27 run differential, the manager was open to sharing some thoughts on what exactly has gone wrong, and how he and his team have handled the mess.

“It’s a good learning experience,” Cora said. “I don’t want to say humble experience, because we’re a humble group, but we learned a lot from this one.”

To say the Red Sox have been humbled is certainly fair. The A’s have playoff talent and the Sox never play well in Oakland, so to lose three of four there wasn’t the biggest surprise. But few expected the Mariners and Diamondbacks to be particularly good this season, and they’re 5-1 against the Sox.

Cora summed it up simply with a few words from assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett.

“He said it sarcastically but it was true: Last year was Disneyworld, this year is real baseball,” Cora said. “And it’s true. If you think about it, it was such a perfect season that we didn’t go through this in 2018. It doesn’t mean that we can’t bounce back from this.”

WILLING TO CHANGE

Rather than bang their heads against the wall and wonder why their same style of baseball that led to 108 wins in 2018 isn’t working a year later, the Red Sox have been willing to look in the mirror and understand they need to change.

“We learned a lot from this road trip,” Cora said. “That’s for sure. It’s like, we never take things for granted. We know we’re a good team. We never took anything for granted last year, not during spring training and not this week, but there are a few things we need to get better at. For us to play at the level we know we can play, we know we need to clean a few things up.”

What have they learned?

“That there are a lot of good teams out there,” Cora said. “There are different approaches. There are a lot of ways we’re being attacked differently than last year. We have to make adjustments. Offensively, teams are buying into certain approaches, too. It’s not that we got ambushed with it, and the league is showing it... This is a game of adjustments. Teams are making adjustments with us, we’re going to have to make adjustments too.”

Starting the year with 11 games on the West Coast after playing the final two exhibition games vs. the Cubs in Arizona hasn’t been easy. Cora, nor the players, have used the schedule as an excuse, but they’re not hiding their eagerness to get back to Fenway Park on Tuesday.

“I’ve been encouraged by myself,” he said. “I’ve been able to sleep, stay calm. I know a lot of people were pushing that, ‘How’s he going to react to a tough stretch?’ In my world, everybody knows my world. Now, I go home, see my two kids at 1:30 in the morning. I don’t care if they’re sleeping, the twins are going to be up playing for a while.

“Everybody deals with adversity in different ways. On a personal note, it’s not that I’m glad that we’re going through this, but I always wonder how you’re going to react to something like this. I guess so far so good.”

LOOKING AT BETTS AND BRADLEY AS EXAMPLES

A lot can be learned about the Red Sox’ offensive approach when looking at Mookie Betts, who has been as timid as ever at the plate this season while hitting .262 with an .810 OPS entering Sunday.

He’s swinging at just 32 percent of the pitches he sees, a career-low and down 10 percent from a year ago. Even on pitches inside the strike zone, he’s swinging just 47.5 percent of the time, also a career low, and down 11 percent from a year ago.

“He’s been passive for a while,” Cora said. “He’s been passive since the second half last year. It seems like he’s getting there. You can see it as far as, like, even the takes, there are certain takes that we don’t like, predetermined takes, strike one and go from there. You can see it now, there’s intent. He’s looking for a pitch in certain spots. That’s good to see.

“We always talk to him that. It’s not that you have to swing at the first pitch, you just have to be ready to hit the first pitch. It’s going to send a message to the opposition that, instead of being 0-1, 0-1, 0-1, if it’s the perfect pitch right away and then it’s ball one, next pitch, ball two, then it’s a hitter’s count, then he can do the cool things he can do.”

With the quality of pitchers getting better and better across the league, players can't afford to get behind 0-1 by watching strike one go by. After falling behind 0-1, MLB hitters are batting just .202 with a .585 OPS this year. That's down from .218/.612 last year and .223/.627 in 2017.

"Last year I think we were looking for pitches in the middle of the zone and to do damage with it, but now, I don't know, for mixed reasons, sometimes we're very passive in the strike zone," Cora said. "We're 0-1. We play in an era that 0-1 is kind of like being 0-2. It's stuff that we face every day. Everybody knows that the pitches are going to go to the edges of the zone as soon as they get ahead. You're not going to see too many pitches in the middle of the zone. So, we'll adjust."

Jackie Bradley Jr., who hit so well at the end of last season, earning MVP honors in the American League Championship Series, is hitting just .171 with a .394 OPS.

"I think in the Oakland series, it seems like he was in between as far as, like, what to look for," Cora said. "They attacked him with a lot of spin and changeups. As a hitter, you start seeing that and you're like, 'You know what, I'll start looking for it.' But then they throw a fastball. Sometimes he's late and misses his pitch. But I think the swing is still the same. It's just a matter of harnessing the swing and getting back to swinging in the zone. I think as a whole, we're not doing that the way we did last year."

* **MassLive.com**

Mitch Moreland homers, five Boston Red Sox pitchers combine for three-hit shutout in win over Diamondbacks

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Mitch Moreland gave the Red Sox a 1-0 lead with a 98.0 mph, 376 foot home run to right field. Adam Jones jumped and reached over the wall but couldn't catch it.

A loud cheer from fans in right field and Jones' outstanding effort made Moreland unsure if he had actually homered as he turned past second base. He didn't know whether to keep running or head back to the dugout.

That home run was all the offense Boston needed. Five Red Sox pitchers combined to throw a three-hit shutout and strike out eight. The Red Sox beat the Diamondbacks 1-0 here at Chase Field.

Boston heads home on a positive note after a dismal opening road trip. The Red Sox went 3-8, losing all three of their series (at Seattle, Oakland and Arizona). Opening Day at Fenway Park is Tuesday.

Hector Velazquez started for Boston. He pitched 3 scoreless, allowing one hit and no walks while striking out three. Brandon Workman followed with a perfect fourth inning.

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

Marcus Walden hurled a scoreless fifth and sixth inning. He allowed one hit and one walk while striking out two.

Matt Barnes fired a perfect seventh and eighth. He struck out two.

Ryan Brasier earned the save with a scoreless ninth. He allowed a double with two outs but escaped.

Brandon Workman hasn't allowed a hit in 5 innings

Workman, who threw a perfect fourth inning, has dominated so far this season. He has thrown 5 scoreless and hitless innings in five appearances. He has allowed one walk and struck out seven.

Xander Bogaerts cuts down runner at plate

Christian Walker doubled off Walden to begin the fifth inning. He reached third base with one out on Ketel Marte's groundout to first base.

Bogaerts kept the game scoreless when he cut down Walker at the plate after Nick Ahmed hit an 85.5 mph grounder to shortstop.

Matt Barnes: Boston Red Sox bullpen 'might not have the names as some other teams have' but 'everybody's got the stuff'

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Matt Barnes is used to people doubting the Red Sox bullpen.

"There always have been (doubters)," Barnes told MassLive.com before Sunday's game against the Diamondbacks. "Even last year. We were a top-five bullpen in the league for the entire year and going into the postseason we got doubted. It is what it is."

Barnes hurled 2 perfect innings. He and four other Red Sox pitchers combined for a three-hit shutout here Sunday. The Red Sox won 1-0 over the Diamondbacks at Chase Field.

The Red Sox bullpen has been the team's lone bright spot so far. Everyone thought it would be the club's only weakness.

The pen has a 3.61 ERA (42.1 innings, 17 runs), 1.20 WHIP and .229 batting average against. The ERA should be lower. Brian Johnson, pitching with an elbow issue Friday, allowed seven runs in 1.1 innings. The Red Sox placed him on the injured list Saturday.

The Red Sox bullpen would boast a 2.20 ERA (41 innings, 10 runs) right now if you eliminated Johnson's appearance Friday.

"Everybody's got the stuff down there," Barnes said. "We might not have the names as some other teams have. But in terms of the arms and stuff, we're right there."

Barnes and Brandon Workman have been phenomenal. Workman has pitched 5 scoreless and hitless innings in five appearances. He has one walk and seven strikeouts. He pitched the fourth inning in Sunday's bullpen game. Hector Velazquez started for Boston and pitched three scoreless frames.

Barnes has hurled 4.1 scoreless innings, allowing one hit and no walks while striking out six.

"Guys are attacking the zone," Workman said. "They are making pitches and getting guys out. I think everybody's got a really good understanding of who they are as a pitcher and what makes them successful. And they're sticking to it and executing game-plans."

Barnes averaged 4.5 walks per nine innings last year. He wants to eliminate unnecessary walks. But he would rather miss on the edges and allow a walk instead of letting a slugger beat him on a pitch down the middle.

"Coming into this year, I wanted to try and limit dumb walks," Barnes said. "Up by two, nobody on and you walk a guy. That's a dumb walk. Obviously situations are going to dictate where I pitch carefully to a guy. And if I walk him, I'd rather do that than not walk him for the sake of not walking him and give up a hit."

“There’s a difference between a dumb walk and a smart walk,” Barnes added. “I just wanted to eliminate dumb walks this year as much as possible. And they’re going to happen. But to minimize and eliminate them as much as possible. And kind of be smarter in that aspect.”

Barnes has yet to issue any walks.

Barnes understands he must pitch carefully at times because of “the way that guys are hitting home runs right now, and the rate that they’re hitting home runs.” Sure, his walk rate was high last year, but he held opponents to a .204 batting average.

“If I get into a hitter-friendly count, I’m not going to give you something to hit when you can leave the yard,” Barnes explained. “I’ll make pitches. And if you walk, I’ll put you on first base. You still have to go 270 feet to score. And that’s just the way it is. And I’ll take my chances that I’ll get somebody out before you can get to home plate.”

Newcomer Colten Brewer allowed the game-winning hit Saturday. But he entered having pitched 3.2 scoreless innings.

“He’s got electric stuff,” Barnes said about Brewer. “He’s throwing a 95 mph cutter with a hammer curveball. He’s going to be a big part of this team this year and help us get some huge, crucial outs.

“Everybody’s looked great down there,” Barnes added. “Thorny’s (Tyler Thornburg’s) stuff I think it’s night-and-day from last year. I think you’re seeing who he really was when he was in Milwaukee and throwing the ball really well. I think we’ve got a really good bullpen down there. I really do.”

Alex Cora: Red Sox ‘learned a lot from this road trip’ and eventually will ‘see this trip as a positive’

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Red Sox manager Alex Cora said assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett summed it up best: last year was Disney World. This year is real baseball.

The Red Sox have lost eight of 10 games so far on their opening road trip out west. They play their three-game series finale in Arizona here Sunday before returning to Boston for Opening Day at Fenway Park on Tuesday.

“We’re going to see this trip as a positive,” Cora said. “Like, ‘You know what? It was good what they did to us early. So we react quickly.’”

The Red Sox are tied for their worst start in team history through 10 games just one year after winning the World Series.

“We learned a lot from this road trip,” Cora said. “That’s for sure. We never take things for granted. We know we’re a good team. We never took anything for granted last year, not during spring training and not during this week. But there’s a few things we need to get better at. And for us to play at the level we know we can play, we need to clean a few things up. We talk about it. We saw a few things that we can do a lot better. Hopefully today’s the beginning. If not, from Tuesday on we can get after it.”

What have the Red Sox learned?

“That there’s a lot of good teams out there,” Cora said. “There’s different approaches. There’s a lot of ways that people are attacking differently. They are attacking us differently than last year. So we have to make adjustments. Offensively, teams are buying into certain approaches, too. And it’s not that we got ambushed with it.”

Cora said baseball is a game of adjustments.

"Teams are making adjustments with us," he said. "We are going to have to make adjustments, too."

He said teams are attacking Red Sox pitchers and hitters differently.

"It's just a matter of us recognizing a few things and move forward," Cora said. "We will make adjustments. And we will be better. It was a good learning experience. I don't want to say humble experience because we're humble group. But we've learned a lot from this one."

Cora said he's glad with the way he's handled this tough stretch.

"I've been encouraged by myself," Cora said. "I've been able to sleep, stay calm, all that. I know a lot of people were questioning me: how's he going to react to a tough stretch? Everybody knows my world. Tonight I go home. And those two kids at 1:30 in the morning, I don't care if they're sleeping, the twins are going to be up. We're going to play for a while. That's the way. Everybody deals with adversity in different ways. On a personal note, it's not that I'm glad we're going through this. But I was wondering how you're going to react to something like this. I guess so far, so good."

Alex Cora, Boston Red Sox manager, wouldn't have done anything differently during spring training

Christopher Smith

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Red Sox manager Alex Cora feels his team's 2-8 start is due to the Mariners, Athletics and Diamondbacks attacking his pitchers and hitters in ways they didn't see last year.

"There's a lot of ways that people are attacking differently," Cora said. "They are attacking us differently than last year. So we have to make adjustments."

Starting pitching is the crux of the problem. Red Sox starters are 0-7 with a 9.13 ERA (46.1 innings, 47 earned runs) in 10 games.

The starters posted a 2.17 ERA (25 earned runs, 103.2 innings) during their incredible 17-2 stretch to begin 2018.

Cora, pitching coach Dana LeVangie and trainer Brad Pearson began mapping out spring training plans for all their pitchers in late November 2018.

But does Cora wish the Red Sox had done anything differently this spring training? Maybe something they did in 2018 that they didn't do in 2019?

"Nah, nah," Cora said. "There's a few things as you guys know schedule-wise we can't control in spring training. It's one of those that I honestly felt we were a little bit spread out the whole time from the get-go. I mentioned this to you guys. We went to Bradenton and Dunedin. And then we had a split squad (game). That's not the perfect way to start spring training when you're split apart. But those things we can't control."

"The schedule is the schedule and we did a good job fundamental-wise, take care of the players. At-bat wise, we're like five, six at-bats short from last year. Innings-wise, although people think that they were very short, it wasn't as off as people are portraying it. I think it just happened that they played better than us. Seattle, Oakland and so far (the) D-backs. They played better than us. Credit to them. And for us, we learn from it and we move on."

Chris Sale started two games and threw 9 innings this spring training compared to four starts and 14.2 innings during spring training 2018.

David Price made two starts and hurled 6.2 innings compared to three starts and 12 innings in 2018.

Rick Porcello started three games and threw 12 innings compared to four starts and 16 innings last year.

Nathan Eovaldi started two games and pitched 7 innings. Eovaldi started five games and pitched 16.2 innings last spring.

Eduardo Rodriguez started four games and hurled 13 innings this spring. Rodriguez didn't appear in any spring training games during 2018 as he returned from knee surgery.

Darwinzon Hernandez, Boston Red Sox top pitching prospect, strikes out 10 in 5 scoreless innings; Bobby Dalbec homers

Christopher Smith

Red Sox prospect Darwinzon Hernandez pitched 5 scoreless innings and struck out 10 in his 2019 debut for Double-A Portland on Sunday. He allowed two hits and four walks.

He earned the win in Portland's 6-0 victory over Reading.

Baseball America ranks the hard-throwing left-hander the No. 1 pitching prospect in the organization. It ranks him Boston's No. 3 prospect overall behind sluggers Bobby Dalbec and Michael Chavis.

The 22-year-old from Venezuela is on Boston's 40-man roster. Manager Alex Cora expects him to help out the big league club at some point this season. Hernandez allowed only one run and seven hits in 11 innings during spring training. He also struck out 12, but he walked eight. He needs to command the strike zone better. He averaged 5.6 walks per nine innings last year.

Darwinzon Hernandez recorded a 1.88 ERA (52.2 innings, 11 earned runs), 1.22 WHIP, .209 batting average against, 74 strikeouts and 25 walks in his final 10 starts for High-A Salem during 2018.

But he has electric stuff. His fastball reaches the upper-90s and he has a nasty slider. He recorded a 1.88 ERA (52.2 innings, 11 earned runs), 1.22 WHIP, .209 batting average against, 74 strikeouts and 25 walks in his final 10 starts for High-A Salem during 2018.

Bobby Dalbec homers

Bobby Dalbec, who Baseball America ranks the No. 1 prospect in the system, belted his first home run of the 2019 season in Portland's win. He crushed 32 homers between Salem and Portland last year.

The 23-year-old third baseman went 3-for-4 with two RBIs and two runs.

He's 4-for-14 (.286) with three RBIs, three walks and six strikeouts so far.

Bryan Mata doesn't walk anyone in gem

Bryan Mata — who is throwing an 89-91 mph slider this year — earned a victory in his season debut Saturday. He allowed just one run in 5.1 innings in High-A Salem's 2-1 win over Wilmington.

Mata allowed four hits and no walks while striking out three.

The best stat is the zero walks after he allowed 58 walks compared to 61 strikeouts in 72 innings for Salem last year.

His 2018 season ended prematurely because of "growth-related back discomfort," Baseball America reported.

One person in the Red Sox organization said he's much bigger than last year. A member of the Red Sox front office said Hernandez threw hard Saturday.

Baseball America ranks him the No. 6 prospect in the organization. He pitched in the MLB Futures Game last year.

*** *RedSox.com***

Red Sox cap tough trip on winning note

Jesse Sanchez

PHOENIX -- Last week, Red Sox assistant hitting coach Andy Barkett dropped a nugget of wisdom, albeit in a sarcastic tone, that best described the defending World Series champions' current state.

"Last year was Disney World," Barkett told Boston manager Alex Cora. "This year is real baseball."

It would be goofy to disagree.

The Red Sox wrapped up their 11-game road trip on Sunday afternoon with a 1-0 win against the D-backs at Chase Field, thanks to a solo home run by Mitch Moreland in the seventh. They'll return home to Boston with a 3-8 record.

"It's true if you think about it," Cora said of Barkett's quip. "It was such a perfect season and we didn't go through this. It doesn't mean we can't bounce back, because there were periods last year when we went through struggles. ... People forget we were in second place at one point of the season."

The Red Sox have previously started the season 3-8 five times -- 1932, '45, '58, '66 and '84. It's worth noting that the 1925 Pirates, '77 Yankees and 2002 Angels are the only teams to win the World Series after starting the season with that record.

Boston has never started the season with a 3-8 record and made the playoffs.

"It's always nice to win that last one headed home, a happy flight, but it was definitely a tough road trip for us and a tough way to open the season," Moreland said. "It's going to be nice to get back home and get in front of our fans and get rolling."

The trip through Seattle, Oakland and Phoenix was an eye-opening, if not humbling, experience for the defending World Series champs. The Red Sox didn't pitch, hit or defend particularly well the entire trip, and they lost all three series.

"We learned a lot from this road trip. That's for sure," Cora said. "We never take things for granted. We know we are good team and we never took anything for granted last year, not during Spring Training and not this week, but there are a few [things] that we need to get better at to play at the level we know we can play. We need to clean a few things up."

Cora said opponents are attacking his hitters and pitchers differently than last year, and although he didn't get into specifics, he did say his club will have to refine their approach and move forward.

Here's what we know: Boston's staff led MLB last year by throwing 38.1 percent of their fastballs in the top third of the zone and above, and they were at 31.9 percent for this season entering Sunday's finale. Opponents hit just .183 on those pitches, tied for the lowest mark in MLB. Opponent were hitting .260 and had hit four home runs off high fastballs through the first 10 games. It's worth noting, especially when you consider opponents combined to hit 29 during the entire 2018 season.

And while their opponents' swing rates against those high fastballs are similar -- 50.3 percent in 2018 and 45.5 percent this season, their swinging strike rate is also close at 15.5 percent in '18 and 13.1 percent this season. Opposing hitters seem better prepared and are getting better results.

"It seems like people are understanding how teams are attacking, and they are doing a better job of not swinging at that pitch," Cora said. "It seems like teams are establishing their limits in certain parts of the zones and we have to adjust."

A better approach by opponents and inconsistent performances by Red Sox pitching are the primary reasons Boston has allowed 72 runs and has only scored 46 times.

The road trip did have few highlights. Reliever Brandon Workman has retired 15 of the 16 batters he has faced to lead a bullpen that ranks among league leaders in strikeouts and walks per nine innings. J.D. Martinez has reached base safely in every game, including a 10-game hitting streak to start the season (snapped on Sunday), and Blake Swihart continues to impress at the plate.

The players remain confident they'll get back on track soon, and they have preached accountability and patience. The club could also get a boost if and when it activates Dustin Pedroia (left knee), who is traveling to Boston on Monday to be evaluated after his rehab assignment with Class A Greenville.

"We learned a lot. I learned a lot from this one," Cora said. "We will be better. It's just a matter of recognizing a few things and making a few adjustments. When that happens, we can look back and instead of seeing the [road trip] as a negative, we can see it as a positive and say, 'You know what? It was good what they did to us early.'"

*** *ESPNBoston.com***

What's going on with the world champion Red Sox?

Pedro Gomez

PHOENIX -- The World Series champs are limping. Badly.

The sample size is now more than 10 games, and there is no denying that the numbers for the 2019 Boston Red Sox do not lie. They are ugly.

With the Red Sox finally able to play a game at Fenway Park on Tuesday, the question is: What type of reaction will they receive from their normally fervent fans?

"Cheers, I hope," David Price said. "I don't think anybody has ever gotten their World Series rings and gotten booed. So I think we'll get cheered."

Will they, though?

Ringin' the early-season alarm

Chris Sale's velocity is down! Adalberto Mondesi is awesome! Strikeouts are up -- again! Does any of it mean anything?

Consider the numbers. The starters' ERA is the most glaring issue facing the club. It is easily the worst in all of baseball. Red Sox pitchers have allowed more home runs than any staff in the game. Through 10 games, it was the worst start for a World Series champion since the stripped-down 1998 Florida Marlins. Sitting in the AL East cellar with a 3-8 record has to have many fans in New England on edge.

"Can you tell the fans we've played exactly zero games at home this season?" Chris Sale said.

The Red Sox just concluded a season-opening, 11-game road trip during which they flew nearly 6,600 miles since leaving Fort Myers on March 24.

"Wow, that's a lot of miles on the engines," Jackie Bradley Jr. said. "We're just not playing together, not playing well as a team right now. We're not executing."

Along the way, the Red Sox managed just one victory in Seattle, one in Oakland and one in Phoenix before they finally head home to collect their World Series rings for what should have been a slam dunk of a glorious, championship-banner-raising home opener on Tuesday. Now who knows what the reaction will be?

The last time the Red Sox played in front of their home fans, they beat the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 2 of the World Series on Oct. 24, 2018. Although the difficult trip to start the season would make for an easy safety net of an excuse, you won't find that being used by this group.

"We don't travel in the middle seats, and we don't stay in motels," manager Alex Cora said. "The way they treat us in the clubhouses is five stars, so it's what the schedule says, and it's 11 games on the West Coast. We are not making excuses. We're just not playing well."

Said Sale, who will start the home opener against the Toronto Blue Jays: "We played in the last game of the year, so there's obviously a longer effect, but like I've said, we're not going to say we're making excuses. I can't wait to get to Fenway. It's part of the business. It's what we signed up for. At a certain point, we have to show up and win."

The problems have been apparent, whether it's running the bases, serving up home runs or committing errors. Looking for a silver lining? The bullpen has not blown a save. Of course, it has had only three save opportunities.

Many times, the key issue facing a losing club is its collective psyche. It's a time when cracks can surface and doubts set in. Oftentimes, younger clubs whose players have little time in the majors suffer from this. For the Red Sox, that doesn't seem to be the case. Much of that has to do with the track records of most every player on their roster.

"We have a lot of guys in this clubhouse who have faced adversity and know how to handle it," Bradley said. "I think we all know what it takes to get back to where we want to be."

It's a theme that permeates through the Red Sox clubhouse.

"We have to find the right balance, and that hasn't happened yet," shortstop Xander Bogaerts said. "Every club goes through a patch of rough waters. Our problem is that our record is so magnified because the season is just starting. If it was July or August, we wouldn't be hearing the same things."

"We just have to find a way to win. We're confident because we can look around this room and see the amount of winning that we've done together and know it's just a matter of time before we start winning again."

The leader of this club who made things go so smoothly a year ago as a rookie manager, Cora, insists the issues are superficial, that nothing negative is taking root inside the clubhouse. Cora was a master at making sure his players realized that although playing and winning are important, it is vital to have a work/life balance, and the bigger picture is far more important.

"There's no frustration," Cora said. "We just keep grinding, we show up tomorrow. ... We will go home and see the family on Monday, hang out with your kids and all of that. Kind of put everything into perspective and move forward."

A rare victory -- even by the 1-0 final score -- on Sunday provided a respite from the negativity and also ensured that Sunday night's four-plus-hour trip back to Boston would be what so many players dub a "happy flight," a way to wash away the dark clouds and start believing this could be the start of the turnaround.

"It's always nice to win the last one headed home, you know, a happy flight," said Mitch Moreland, whose solo home run provided the Red Sox with the only run in Sunday's win over the Diamondbacks. "It was definitely a tough road trip, a tough way to kind of start the season. It'll be nice to get back home and get in front of our fans."

The beginning of this season couldn't be more different than what the Red Sox enjoyed last season, when they busted out of the gates with a 17-2 record and never looked back while running away with the AL East crown before plowing through the postseason with an impressive 11-3 record, losing only one game in each of their three playoff rounds.

"Last year was Disney World," Cora said. "This year is real baseball."

Boston was in first place in the division for all but 12 days last season and never fell out of the top spot after June 26.

"It's frustrating," Price said of the current situation. "Everybody in here is frustrated, but we've been through a lot together, this group of guys, over the past two, three years. So we'll be OK. I think everybody in here understands that, and we have to take it one game at a time, just like we did last year when we won 108 games and 119 in the season, the World Series champions. We just need to get back home, and our fans will remind us how good we are."

*** *WEEL.com***

Red Sox Farm Report: Dustin Pedroia on verge of making his return

Nick Friar

Dustin Pedroia continues to make progress in his return to the bigs and could rejoin the Red Sox as early as Tuesday. The second baseman started the 2019 season with Single-A Greenville after appearing in seven Grape Fruit League games.

Tuesday's home opener has been Pedroia's target date since spring training. Alex Cora told reporters in Arizona there's a chance he'll achieve that goal, dependent on his evaluation on Monday.

"We'll check him out and from there we'll see what we decide," Cora said.

Pedroia played in three of the Greenville Drive's first four games, sitting out Saturday after playing Thursday and Friday back-to-back. He played nine innings Thursday, five on Friday, then nine again on Sunday.

Pedroia went 3 for 9 with a double, a run scored, two walks and a strikeout while with the Drive. He was also part of four double plays on defense.

Michael Chavis pranked, critiques culprits' approach

Shy wouldn't be a word to describe Red Sox prospect Michael Chavis. He owns a Will Ferrell, Talladega Nights inspired "If You Ain't First, You're Last" t-shirt. He's all too eager to share his takes on Game of Thrones and the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Apparently, he fancies himself an expert on mischief, too.

While in Syracuse over the weekend, Chavis received a call to his door, only to find out there was no one to be found. Well, there wasn't anyone right at his door. Because when he looked down the hall, he spotted the culprits.

Instead of scolding them like a parent or chasing them out of the hotel, Chavis saw this as a chance to give back and educate young pranksters. Impart some of his wisdom.

However, due to some complications, Chavis wasn't able to speak with them directly, so he made a tutorial video for the masses. (He spared no expenses either. This thing as visual transitions and everything.) He even posted a clip of one of his sample ding-dong ditches.

Chavis is almost a blend of Tom Emanski and Bam Margera.

If Chavis takes the same detailed approach to his hitting, then he's going to be all right. Through his first four games with Pawtucket in 2019, Chavis is 3 for 14 with a home run, two RBI, four strikeouts and two walks.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 1, Diamondbacks 0 – Moreland, bullpen to the rescue for Sox

Sean McAdam

Velazquez provides (half) a quality start: From the middle of spring training, Alex Cora determined that he was going to use a sixth starter on the first road trip. With 11 games in 11 days, Cora figured that his starters, not yet fully built up in terms of usage and arm strength, could use an extra day at some point. Initially, the plan was to have lefty Brian Johnson take the start, but that plan was abandoned when Johnson developed elbow soreness in a relief outing Friday night. Without any other options, Cora turned to Hector Velazquez, who was very nearly perfect over three innings. He retired the first seven hitters of the game before yielding a two-out single to catcher John-Ryan Murphy, but after a sacrifice pushed Murphy to scoring position, fanned Jarod Dyson to get out of the jam. Velazquez, who hadn't been stretched out himself since the early part of the spring, confessed to Cora that his legs were dead after three innings and 39 pitches, but give Velazquez credit for helping to set the tone for a big win with three terrific innings to start.

Moreland delivers in the clutch — again: There's likely not much call to name an MVP for a team off to a 3-8 start, but if there were, Mitch Moreland would be the logical choice. His three-run pinch-hit homer in the second game in Seattle gave the Sox their first win of the season. His bases-clearing double in Oakland last Wednesday helped the Sox erase an early A's lead. And on Sunday, Moreland provided the only run of the afternoon with a solo homer in the seventh, driving a cutter from Merrill Kelly over the fence in right — inches beyond the grasp of a leaping Adam Jones. Moreland can be as streaky as anyone in the game, but when he's going well, he's a force in the middle of the Boston lineup. On a day in which they were shutout for the first six innings and had only one baserunner in scoring position in that span, the Sox desperately needed a big hit and Moreland gave it to them.

Bullpen does the job: When Velazquez ran out of gas after three innings, it left the Red Sox wondering how they were going to cover the final 18 outs, especially after the bullpen had pitched 36.1 innings in the first 10 games — an average of more than three innings per outing. But the tag-team plan worked perfectly, with Brandon Workman giving the Sox an inning, Marcus Walden offering two more, followed by Matt Barnes' two and, finally, a ninth-inning save for Ryan Brasier. Workman, Barnes and Brasier has yet to allow a run this season, providing some stability for Cora. For all the failings of the starting rotation (9.13 ERA before Velazquez chipped in with three scoreless Sunday) and the inconsistency of the lineup and the shakiness of the defense, the bullpen has actually pitched quite well since the opener. On Sunday, the Sox

wouldn't have won without the contributions of four different relievers who stepped up and delivered on what was essentially a Bullpen Day.

SECOND GUESS

Cora made a few unorthodox moves on Sunday and lived to tell about it. He sent Walden to the plate to lead off the fifth in a scoreless game. Walden took a called third strike and walked back to the dugout. It ended up working out with the win, but keeping pinch-hitters on the bench to squeeze another inning out of Walden seemed a stretch.

TWO UP

Andrew Benintendi: Following a slow start to his season, Benintendi has cranked it up of late and is getting on base from the leadoff spot with consistency. He was 2-for-4 Sunday and has hit safely in six straight games.

Marcus Walden: Promoted Saturday when Brian Johnson went to the injured list, Walden came out of the bullpen to give the Red Sox two scoreless innings in the fifth and sixth innings.

ONE DOWN

Eduardo Nunez: Nunez was hitless in three trips to the plate and is now hitting just .167, providing the Red Sox with very little offensive help in the first week and a half of the season.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"It was a grind." Alex Cora.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

J.D. Martinez saw his 10-game hitting streak come to an end..
Two Red Sox pitchers — Marcus Walden and Matt Barnes — had their first at-bats in the big leagues.
Mitch Moreland took over the team lead in RBI with nine.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox enjoy their first off-day of the season Monday before their home opener Tuesday at 2:05 with LHP Chris Sale (0-2, 8.00) facing RHP Matt Shoemaker (2-0, 8.00) at 2:05 p.m.

Red Sox, Alex Cora manage a rare win that was even harder than it looked

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox have won just three of their first 10 games, and if the victories are going to be as arduous and hard-fought as they've been so far, the team might be exhausted by the All-Star break.

Unlike a year ago when the Red Sox sprinted from the starter's block to race to a 17-2 start, nothing is coming easy this season. The first win came of the year came thanks to a ninth-inning, pinch-hit three-run homer. The second one was the result of yet another ninth-inning rally.

And Sunday? Sunday was a slog, plain and simple, one long taffy pull over nine innings, with no margin for error.

Alex Cora had to manage this one like a playoff game, utilizing everything — and nearly everyone — at his disposal. The alternative would have been one more loss to cap an already dreadful road trip, and even more angst that's already been generated leading up to Tuesday's opener.

The Red Sox had to know this at least somewhat before the game even started. It was designated as a “bullpen game” even before it started, and when spot starter Hector Velazquez burnt after 39 pitches and just three innings, it became even more of one.

After Brandon Workman supplied a 1-2-3 fourth, Marcus Walden, summoned from Triple-A after Brian Johnson was placed on the IL Saturday, came out of nowhere to toss two shutout innings.

From there, it was two more from Matt Barnes, and finally, a standard-issue ninth-inning save situation for Ryan Brasier that became plenty hairy when David Peralta reached on a two-0ut double, representing the potential tying run in scoring position.

Five pitchers gave the Red Sox the final 18 outs, each one of them critical, each one like a root canal.

Let’s face it: the way the first 10 games went, it was logical to expect disaster to strike somewhere in there: a dropped fly ball, an errant throw ... something that would have ripped this one from the Red Sox’ grasp.

But for once, things worked according to plan. And there was a plan, right down to the two innings asked of Walden.

“That was the plan all along,” Cora told reporters after the Red Sox had held for dear life to a 1-0 shutout win, snapping a three-game losing skid. “At one point, if we got the lead, it was (going to be) Tyler (Thornburg) because we don’t just burn our multiple-inning guys with the lead.”

Cora refused to acknowledge that the win — which allowed the Sox to avoid a second four-game losing streak before they even so much as stepped foot in Fenway — felt like a relief.

He had another word for it.

“It was a grind,” he conceded. “Give credit to Ron (Roenicke, bench coach) and Dana (LeVangie, pitching coach). It was a total team effort from the coaching staff today, going back and forth, looking for the pinch-hitters, when not to pinch-hit. The bullpen game (against a team) in the National League, that’s the tough part. But you know what, we deserved to grind it today. We were pretty bad, so we had to think a little bit today and grind it out and it’s a good win.”

Thanks to a starting rotation which has repeatedly put the Red Sox behind early — or blown multi-inning leads in the middle of games Cora hasn’t had a lot of time to deploy his bullpen the way he likes. He’s been too busy trying to orchestrate comebacks to worry about lining up his relievers for particular roles and matchups.

But in a scoreless duel through six innings and 1-0 game over the final three frames, Cora had room to maneuver.

What’s clear after just a week and a half of games is that Cora views Matt Barnes as his best high-leverage reliever with Brasier right behind him. After Mitch Moreland’s solo homer in the top of the seventh gave the Red Sox their first lead of the day, he went to Barnes with nine outs to go.

The reason? The Diamondbacks had Adam Jones and Ketel Marte — their fourth and sixth hitters respectively — due up in the seventh, and the guys most likely to hit the ball out of the ballpark. So Cora tabbed Barnes for the seventh, and after a 14-pitch, 1-2-3 inning, sent him right back out for the eighth for the bottom third of the Arizona lineup.

That, in turn, left the ninth for Brasier who got two quick outs before yielding a double to the left-center field gap to Peralta. A base hit by Jones would have tied the game and likely sent the Sox spiraling again. But Brasier got him to ground out to Xander Bogaerts for the final out.

“We love winning,” said Cora, who has seen precious little of it to start his second season as manager. “We won and enjoyed it. We know where we’re going. We know how good we are. We know that we have to get better. We learned a lot on this road trip and now it’s over.”

And not a moment too soon.

* ***The Athletic***

The Red Sox can’t really be this bad, right? We’ll soon find out

Chad Jennings

Well, at least that’s over. Now it’s time to find out what’s really going on here. Was the West Coast trip just a brutal beginning to the season, when the rotation was not quite up to speed and the offense came out flat, or was it indicative of something far worse?

Time will tell, of course, but it is hard to believe the same team that won 108 games last year – almost literally the exact same team – could really be sitting at 3-8, on pace for fewer than 50 wins this year. It just seems almost impossible that the Red Sox could be this bad.

But, man, those first 11 games were hard to stomach. Here are a few thoughts on the team tied with the woeful Blue Jays and Reds for the most losses in baseball.

- Mookie Betts is incredible, and J.D. Martinez can hit with anyone, but what separates the Red Sox should be their rotation. If they’re going to reach peak performance, it will be because the five starters carry a significant amount of the burden. So far, though, no Red Sox starter has gotten a win, and their best starts have come from Hector Velazquez (three good innings serving more like an opener) and Chris Sale (in a start when his fastball sat at 89 mph). David Price has been all right, and Nathan Eovaldi made it work one night, but Rick Porcello is throwing water coolers in the dugout and Eduardo Rodriguez is apparently abandoning game plans for unknown reasons. The Red Sox believe – hope? – this is simply the byproduct of a light spring training workload which will pay off in the end, but it hasn’t looked good so far. Third turn through the rotation begins on Tuesday. Getting on track fittingly starts with Sale.

- Here’s a list of the Red Sox hitters with an OPS over .800 at this point: Betts, Martinez, Mitch Moreland, Blake Swihart and Price. That’s two MVP candidates, a platoon first baseman, a backup catcher and a starting pitcher (and Betts wouldn’t be particularly close to that number if not for a terrific game on Friday). Further evidence that spring training numbers are nonsense: Rafael Devers and Jackie Bradley Jr. have been basically non-factors at this point after looking great in the Grapefruit League, while Moreland has been the one clutch hitter on the team after going 6-for-32 with one RBI in the exhibition games. When the rotation is creating early deficits, and the offense is performing like it has been, it’s a wonder the Red Sox won even three games. Side note: man, J.D. Martinez is a really, really good hitter.

- The one thing that’s working, of course, is the Red Sox bullpen (just as we all predicted). Brandon Workman, who occasionally looked awful in spring training, has pitched five hitless innings. Ryan Brasier, who had never recorded a big league save, has saved two of the three wins. Matt Barnes has allowed one baserunner in 4 1/3 innings. The first shutout of the year came because Velazquez and Marcus Walden combined for five scoreless innings. Kind of remarkable, actually, and it really looks like the closer-by-committee thing is working. It obviously hasn’t been relevant very often – not nearly enough leads to protect – but Barnes has been effective in any inning and Brasier’s looked good in his first taste of the ninth inning. Still seems fair to wonder if these relievers can keep this pace, but the strategy itself looks sound (so far).

- Congratulations to Walden on his first career win on Sunday, which may very well be followed by his immediate demotion back to Triple-A. Just the way it goes in his role. Assuming the Red Sox activate Dustin Pedroia for Tuesday’s home opener, they would seem to have a choice of four players who can be

optioned back to the minors: Walden, Velazquez, Colten Brewer or Tzu-Wei Lin. Velazquez is surely too valuable as the go-to long man, so the choice is probably between Walden (another multi-inning guy) or Brewer (who looked awfully good before Saturday's debacle). Given the way the rotation has looked, I suppose it's possible they prefer to keep the extra reliever and send down Lin, instead.

- It took five games for Alex Cora to have second thoughts about his big offseason decision to put Betts in the 2-hole. After losing three of four in Seattle, the Red Sox had a new top of the lineup in Oakland. Betts was back in the leadoff spot with Andrew Benintendi batting second, just like it was for most of the games last season. "It's not that this is going to be our lineup," Cora said. "We're going to stay with those two on top. But you start watching the game, it's like, OK, this makes sense. With this team it makes sense. We'll roll with it." It certainly worked last year, and don't fix what's not broken. But also, maybe don't abandon a carefully considered strategy after just four games? Ultimately, I doubt it matters much either way. I mostly found it interesting that Cora would so quickly change his mind about something he'd thought about all winter.

- Martinez is under contract for another three years, but his first opt out is this offseason, and it seems a foregone conclusion that he's going to hit the open market again. "He and (Anthony) Rendon are probably going to be the two focused offensive players on the market as far as guys who are elite offensive players," Scott Boras said. "Not that I think about those things." No, no, Scott. Of course not (it is, of course, Boras' job to think about those things). Martinez might be an interesting test for the current state of free agency. A hitter like that shouldn't have any trouble finding a team, but he's going to be 32 and teams don't seem to like guys heading into their mid-30s, no matter how good they've been. His free agency will be a curious case for the league at large, and for the Red Sox in particular. How do they respond given the other soon-to-be free agents on their roster?

- After that brutal 1-0 loss in Oakland on Tuesday, Xander Bogaerts was sitting with teammates eating dinner when the media entered the clubhouse. There were maybe 10 of us, and we talked to Cora first, then Chris Sale, then Bogaerts actively waved us over to his locker. He'd just been thrown out at third base trying to stretch a double to a triple, and he knew he'd have to explain it. What struck me was the candid way he talked about his decision making, and the matter-of-fact explanation – "We've got to be honest," he said – that he'd felt some need to push the envelope because the Red Sox were struggling. It was both detailed and big-picture, it felt like something a veteran would do, and it came just one day after the press conference to announce his six-year extension. Bogaerts (26) is still young, but he's not a kid. Not on this roster. There aren't many guys on this team who have more experience in Boston, and there are responsibilities of leadership and accountability that come with that. Bogaerts doesn't do it in the style of David Ortiz or Dustin Pedroia, but I think he has that part covered.

- Speaking of Bogaerts being thrown out at third, that was one of three baserunners thrown out by Oakland center fielder Ramon Laureano in that series, and that was one of the surest signs that the Red Sox were trying to force some sort of offensive improvement. Bogaerts admitted it, said he was trying for third because the team was struggling and he felt it needed a spark (and needed 90 feet of help to actually score a run). In the series finale, it was Betts – one of the best baserunners in the game – who was thrown out trying to go first to third on a flare to center field when there were no outs and the team was down by four in the ninth. When Betts rounded second, I thought he would make it, but that's surely beside the point. There simply wasn't any benefit to getting there. Make it easier to pull within three? Just not worth it. Cora rightly called out the team for lacking in fundamentals, which surely drove him crazy this first week and a half. Even great players can go through bad stretches, so it's hard to be too stunned when a bunch of Red Sox slumped at once, but sloppy play was not at all what I expected out of the gate. The team really did seem pretty focused this spring. Maybe I just missed it, but they didn't seem to be taking a repeat for granted.

- In spring training, it really seemed that Eduardo Nunez might replace Brock Holt as the go-to backup at shortstop. Holt didn't make a single start at that position during spring training and instead got time at both first base and the outfield. Nunez, meanwhile, got considerable time at both shortstop and third base, and he was moving better than a year ago. But when Bogaerts got a day off in Oakland, it was Holt at short, and he made a tremendous play to basically save the game in the eighth inning. Holt's continued ability to handle

the shortstop position has let the Red Sox keep two utility infielders who actually have some offensive ability. They've called up Lin temporarily while Holt deals with this eye issue – and he's the best fielder of the bunch — but Bogaerts plays almost every day, so it's helpful to prioritize a little extra hitting ability off the bench. It only works, though, if one those two can play short, and Holt's showing that he still can.

- Pretty cool moment in the Red Sox clubhouse on Thursday morning. On that day, Price reached 10 years of service time. That milestone might have carried more weight several years ago when players weren't making as much as they're making today, but it's still a big one. Pensions fully vest after 10 years, which means a nice retirement paycheck, but there's also a level of respect for lasting a full decade at this level. Clubhouse manager Tom McLaughlin brought out a cake for Price and another for Porcello (that second cake said "Congratulations on 10.006 because Porcello had hit the milestone a few days before). Price joked about retiring right then and there, but there was also an over-the-top round of applause from Holt and much laughing and hollering from most everyone else. It was sort of tongue-in-check, but still pretty earnest. Ten years in the big leagues, man. That's not nothing. Steve Pearce could get there later this year.

- Hard to believe what's going on with the Yankees roster. They've put 11 players on the injured list, including their Opening Day shortstop, third baseman and left fielder, and the players who should have been their Opening Day starting pitcher, center fielder, setup man and No. 5 starter. And that's to say nothing of the guys who were hurt before spring training (Jacoby Ellsbury, Didi Gregorius and Jordan Montgomery). Can you imagine if the Red Sox currently had Bogaerts, Devers, Benintendi, Sale, Bradley, Rodriguez and Brasier? Would Gorkys Hernandez be the everyday left fielder? Would Tony Renda be the best hitter off the bench? Would Mike Shawaryn be scheduled to start Tuesday's home opener? I know, I know, it's the Yankees and I doubt they get much pity from people reading a Red Sox story, but it's hard to imagine what the Red Sox would look like if they were in a similar boat. One good thing about this slow start is that the Rays are really the only team in the American League that came out playing well. The initial deficit is not really insurmountable.

'How do you guys get along so well?': The unusual bond among Boston's uber-popular teams

Steve Buckley

The 2018 World Series had been over for nearly a week, and the Red Sox were still celebrating. On this particular night — Nov. 1 — the newly crowned champions of hardball had been invited to take in a Celtics game at TD Garden, where they'd watch some hoops, sure, but also to be serenaded on the parquet.

If you were there that night, you very likely bruised your hands with applause when, with 6:43 remaining in the first period and the Celtics holding a 13-7 lead over the Milwaukee Bucks, public-address announcer Eddie Palladino filled his lungs with air and then let it all out: "Laaaaaaaaaaaadies and gentlemen, introducing the two-thousand-and-eighteen world champion Bossston Redddd Sox!"

Hoisting the World Series trophy over his head, Sox manager Alex Cora led the delegation as a video on the Jumbotron showed highlights of the Sox' record-breaking season. Trailing Cora were his teenaged daughter, followed by Red Sox owners John Henry and Tom Werner, followed by many of Boston's October heroes: J.D. Martinez, Xander Bogaerts, Andrew Benintendi, Eduardo Nunez, Christian Vazquez, Blake Swihart ... and bringing up the rear, Chris Sale and David Price.

The opening to the video tribute had hinted at what was to follow, as sharp-eyed fans could see Cora & Co. emerging from the tunnel before Palladino had even turned on his mic. The coveted trophy was then passed from player to player, each one holding it high, the decibel level reaching call-your-otolaryngologist level when Price had his turn. The man who said he now holds all the cards was now holding the trophy, and Cora, understanding this to be the moment of the evening, responded accordingly: He extended his arms and bowed from the waist, as though greeting royalty.

Indeed, the ceremony was carried off with the precision of a coronation.

“Well, it always looks great when they’re on the court, but behind the scenes there’s a lot going on to make sure everything goes down the way it’s supposed to go down,” said Shawn Sullivan, who, as chief marketing officer/executive vice president for the Celtics, helped stage the ceremony.

OK, so we’re not talking about a Space Shuttle launch here. But one of the recurring themes of this non-stop run of championships by Boston’s professional sports franchises — a combined 12 titles by the Patriots, Red Sox, Celtics and Bruins during the first two decades of the 21st century — is that nary a night goes by when you don’t see your favorite athletes from one team showing up to support the athletes from another team, and perhaps taking a bow or two while they’re in the house.

If it’s not Patriots kicker/hockey nut Stephen Gostkowski (currently a free agent) cheering for the Bruins, it’s retired Red Sox legend David Ortiz sitting courtside at the Garden. If it’s not Celtics forward Jayson Tatum wandering around Fenway, it’s Bruins right winger David Pastrnak showing up ... well, just about anywhere.

By all accounts, Pastrnak is the Ultimate Boston Fan Boy (professional athlete division). Though raised in Havířov in the Czech Republic, it’d be easy to believe he was raised in Harvard Square in the People’s Republic of Cambridge. The kid loves his Boston sports.

“My first Patriots game was two or three years ago, and it was totally different than on TV,” said Pastrnak. “I like the Celtics because I think it’s cool that there are two totally different sports being played at the Garden. And seeing the Red Sox was an unbelievable experience. I played multiple sports growing up. I even played baseball growing up, obviously not on the same level as the Americans. I really like supporting the other teams.”

This isn’t completely new. Larry Bird was such an admirer of the Bruins — that is, Bobby Orr — that he was known to gaze upon The Greatest Hockey Player of All Time’s No. 4 banner during the playing of the national anthem. And way, way, way, way back in the day, Red Sox legend Johnny Pesky attended so many hockey games at the old Garden that he forged a close, lifelong friendship with Bruins legend Milt Schmidt. Having played hockey growing up in Portland, Ore., Pesky even worked out with the Bruins from time to time, though it’s not known if Sox manager Joe Cronin approved of the arrangement.

But this? We’ve never seen anything like ... this. One very obvious reason is that never in history have the four teams been this good at the same time, and, well, winners like to hang out with winners. There’s also the celebrity aspect: In an era of exploding social media and branding, athletes like to step out, be seen, have fun. And guess what: The teams love it.

“It’s really become almost like a community within a community, if that makes sense,” Sullivan said. “You can see the reaction from the fans when we put different players up on the Jumbotron. The players love it as well. And when our players go either to Fenway or Gillette or a Bruins game, same thing.”

Make no mistake: At the corporate level, the Patriots, Red Sox, Celtics and Bruins compete with each other. They compete for signage. They compete for program ads. They compete for the sales of fancy, high-priced suites. Even big companies have only so much advertising/marketing dough to throw around, and the Pats, Sox, Celtics and Bruins fight for it.

“Even though, yeah, you do compete for ad dollars and suite dollars, you don’t always feel that,” said Sullivan. “When I go to league meetings and I talk to people who have my job with other teams who have multiple teams in their cities, they all ask, ‘How do you guys get along so well?’ Because a lot of other cities don’t have what Boston has in terms of the teams having these relationships.”

On the surface, ice or otherwise, it’s not hard for Boston’s professional athletes to land tickets to the other teams’ games. All they have to do is ask — usually somebody from their own team’s media relations department. And in case you’re wondering, the reciprocal arrangements are such that the tickets are on the house.

Behind the scenes, various relationships have emerged.

“Everyone has their connections,” said Red Sox vice president of media relations Kevin Gregg. “Whether it’s PR or marketing or maybe even client services, they’ll reach out to their counterparts and work out some kind of accommodation. The team I deal the most with is the Celtics, and then the Patriots. (Vice president of fan services and entertainment) Sarah McKenna is our Bruins connection. If anyone ever needs anything with the Bruins, Sarah is there.”

Gregg will do more than help players get tickets to games. Sometimes he’ll even give them the shirt off his back. Literally. When the Red Sox arrived in Toronto last April 23 to enjoy an off-day before beginning a series against the Blue Jays, it so happened the Bruins were at the Air Canada Centre that very night playing the Maple Leafs in Game 6 of their opening-round Stanley Cup playoff series. After working with the Leafs and Bruins to procure tickets for the huge Sox contingent, Gregg and co-workers Abby Murphy and Daveson Perez, planning to watch the game themselves, dutifully bought Bruins sweaters on their way to the rink. Sox designated hitter Hanley Ramirez, seeing Gregg’s sweater, decided he simply had to have one. So Gregg simply gave him the one he was wearing — rather, he sold it to him. “I up-charged him,” Gregg said. “And he gladly paid it.”

Some savvy veteran players know their way around to the degree that they simply cut out the middle man.

“A lot of players already have a resource in terms of reaching out,” said Patriots vice president of media relations Stacey James. “I went to a Bruins game once, where they put me up in a suite, and I walk in and (former Patriots linebacker) Rob Ninkovich is there. He told me he comes to 10 games a year.”

Said Sullivan: “Yes, there are players from the other teams who’ve gotten to the point where they’ll just text us directly and say, ‘Hey, I’m thinking of coming over tonight. Do you have anything available?’”

When are you most likely to see an athlete from one team attend another team’s games? It’s not as simple as the players having a night off and looking for something to do. Offseason training regimens and other commitments also play a role. It can help, or it can hurt. If, say, the Bruins have a Saturday night home game and the Patriots are on the road the next day, chances are you’ll find injured/rehabbing members of the Pats at the Garden. The Pats having already flown out of town for their game, those players left behind have a free Saturday night.

Once the Pats’ season is over, those members of the team who live in the area will step up their fandom. And retired players are even more likely to be in attendance. As often as you’ll see Ortiz at a Celtics game, you’re just as likely to see retired Sox reliever Keith Foulke — who in Game 4 of the 2004 World Series threw Edgar Renteria’s comebacker to first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz to clinch Boston’s first World Series championship in 86 years — cheering for the Bruins.

It’s only when a championship celebration is involved that higher-ups in the organizations play a role. After the Patriots topped the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl LIII on Feb. 3 to earn their sixth Lombardi Trophy, Bruins president Cam Neely personally called Patriots president Jonathan Kraft to invite the boys to the Garden. The Pats went directly from being worshipped by 1.5 million fans at their rolling rally to being introduced at that night’s Bruins-Islanders game.

Team celebrations that include moving players around require planning on both sides. Again, it’s not a Space Shuttle launch. But when the Red Sox made their trip to the Garden back in November to be feted during the Celtics-Bucks game, it involved all kinds of bells and whistles. While the Celtics were getting everything ready on their end, the Red Sox were loading up their players in vans for the trip from Fenway Park to Causeway Street. One small problem: Chris Sale and David Price were having dinner with their wives and planned to arrive at the Garden via Uber. They were ruining late.

The Celtics communicated with the Sale/Price party on exactly where to be dropped off; from there, they’d be whisked through security to a waiting freight elevator. When they finally did arrive, they exited the

freight elevator on Level Four, were handed alternate red home jerseys to wear, and then, without breaking stride, joined the procession at the exact moment it was walking through the tunnel.

“That one was funny,” said Sullivan. “We kept asking, ‘How close are they?’ And we were telling our game operations staff at the scorer’s table, ‘They’re almost here,’ and ‘They’re on the elevator,’ and then, ‘Start the music.’”

And it’s not just Boston athletes who keep the teams hopping. The Bruins welcomed UFC superstar Conor McGregor to their March 16 game against the Columbus Blue Jackets, with the ever-uptempo Irishman delivering a thunderous pre-game locker room speech before dropping the ceremonial puck. (And inspiring a Twitter debate as to who’d emerge victorious in a street fight between McGregor and Zdeno Chara, the B’s 6-foot-9, 250-pound captain.)

But the best part of the evening occurred when a determined Bruins fan made his way to McGregor down by the Zamboni area and insisted on getting an autograph.

“He was wearing a Bergeron sweater and waving a piece of paper,” said Chmura. “He was really trying to get his attention. Turns out he had named his son after Conor McGregor, and he wanted him to sign his son’s birth certificate.

“We’ve had a lot of athletes come through here, but I had never seen that before.”

The Red Sox have invited the Patriots to take part in their April 9 home opener against the Blue Jays. Problem: It’ll be a week before the Pats begin their offseason conditioning program, meaning “... the players who do attend will probably be coming back just for that, along with the younger guys who are here year round. It’ll be kind of a mix,” said James.

But there will be a contingent, meaning the packed Fenway house will be celebrating two championships at once.

It doesn’t get much more 21st century Boston than that.

*** *The USA Today***

Too early to panic? Red Sox just want to go home after long, ugly road trip

Bob Nightengale

PHOENIX — The Boston Red Sox have never looked more forward to a 2,295-mile, 4 ½-hour flight in their lives.

Finally, for the first time in months, they will be home, sleeping in their own beds. On top of that, the team is anxiously awaiting Tuesday's home opener at Fenway Park and the presentation of their World Series championship rings.

They can be reminded that they once were a good baseball team. The best in all of baseball. Perhaps one day, this year’s version can be that good again.

But nowadays, as hard as it is to fathom, they have the most losses in the American League with a 3-8 record through Sunday and have been outscored by a major-league-worst 26 runs.

Considering the repulsiveness of the opening weeks— equalling the worst 10-game start in franchise history — the reception at Fenway Park may not be quite the warm, loving embrace they felt riding on those Duck Boats in their parade last fall.

“I don’t think anybody has ever gotten their World Series rings and gotten booed,” Red Sox starter David Price said. “We just need to get back home and have all our fans remind us how good we are.”

If nothing else, they can re-introduce themselves, considering they’re almost unrecognizable with their horrid play. It has been so ugly that the Red Sox have had a lead for only seven innings this season, and have yet to take a single lead into the ninth inning.

Through Saturday, the starting rotation – being paid \$88 million – had yielded a major-league worst 9.13 ERA, 16 home runs and .330 opponents' batting average.

Starter David Price produced the first RBI of his career Saturday, which is just two fewer than the combined total this season of third baseman Rafael Devers, center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. and shortstop Xander Bogaerts. Only two teams in baseball have committed more errors.

“It’s frustrating,” Price said, “everybody in here is frustrated. We’ve been through a lot together, this group of guys together, for the last two or three years. So, we’ll be OK. I think everybody in here understands that.”

Said Bradley Jr.: “We are a good team. Nobody here has forgotten that. I think it’s good that we experienced some adversity early like this. We got kicked in the teeth. Now, we got to fight back.”

This is a group that hasn’t experienced adversity like this during their time together. They’ve won three consecutive division titles. And last year they had perhaps the greatest team in Red Sox history, winning 108 games during the season, and 119 overall, going 11-3 in the postseason.

“Last year was Disney World,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “This year is real baseball. We never took anything from granted last year, but there are a few things we need to get better. They are attacking us different than last year. It’s not like we were ambushed. It’s just that teams have made adjustments to us. We have to make adjustments, too.

“We learned a lot from this road trip, that’s for sure.”

Still, there are ominous signs that are scaring the daylight out of Red Sox Nation.

Ace Chris Sale, who just signed a five-year, \$145 million contract extension, doesn't look like the man who has started the last three All-Star Games. His fastball averaged 95.57 mph last season but through two starts in 2019, Sale's velocity has dropped off to 91.31. He has thrown 50 four-seam fastballs this season, and is yet to generate a single swing-and-miss.

Former Cy Young winner Rick Porcello, throwing more fastballs up in the zone that most scouts have ever seen him against Arizona, has given up 16 runs (11 earned) and 16 hits in just 7 ⅓ innings. Designated hitter J.D. Martinez is the only regular hitting higher than .270.

“Just because the name on the back of their jersey is prominent,” said Arizona Diamondbacks outfielder Adam Jones, who tormented the Red Sox again during the weekend, “that doesn’t guarantee you anything. The roster says they’ll be good, but at the end of the day, you’ve got to play.”

The Red Sox should have known all along this odyssey to open the season would lead to the wacky and the bizarre.

What other team would have a 2-year-old son poke their dad in the right eye on opening day, and eight days later, necessitate a 10-day injured list stint for infielder Brock Holt?

“It’s not funny,” Holt said, “but it is funny. He [Griffin] walks around and tells everyone he poked me in the eye. Being a dad, he got me.”

What other World Series championship team do you know that had to employ an infielder to pitch in their ninth game of the season? The last time he pitched was 20 years ago in Little League. Yes, that was Eduardo Nunez on the mound trying to save the Red Sox bullpen in the eighth inning of their 15-8 loss to the Diamondbacks. It was the first time a Red Sox position player pitched in an inter-league game in 15 years.

“Hopefully,” Cora said, “we never have to do that again.”

And what other team would be on the road two months to open a season? The Red Sox opened spring training on Feb. 12 in Fort Myers, Fla., traveled 1,865 miles to Phoenix to play two exhibition games against the Chicago Cubs, another 1,111 miles to open the season in Seattle, 685 miles to Oakland to play the Athletics, 650 miles to Phoenix to play the Diamondbacks, and now 2,295 miles Sunday night to finally return to Boston.

If you’re counting, that’s 6,606 miles in 15 days.

It’s the longest road trip to open a season in franchise history.

“It feels like we’ve been on the road forever,” Red Sox reliever Heath Hembree said.

Said Bradley Jr.: “I love playing in warm weather, but I don’t even care what the weather is in Boston. I just want to get home.”

Certainly, the ruthless schedule, without a single off-day since opening day, would provide ample opportunity to make excuses for their awful performance. To the Red Sox’s credit, no one is complaining.

If nothing else, they got their worst trip out of the way, with only one eight-game west coast trip remaining, which includes two off-days. They are home 16 of the next 21 games. And, hey, their hated rivals, the New York Yankees, are only .500.

The Red Sox may stink right now, but sorry, Cora says, he’s not blaming the travel.

“It hasn’t been easy, but at the same time,” Cora says, “we don’t make any excuses. This is the big leagues. We don’t travel in middle seats. We don’t stay in motels. The way they treat us in the clubhouse is five stars.”

A World Series hangover, perhaps?

Uh, no.

“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.”

Well, considering their start, losing their first three series to three teams whose payroll are each at least \$100 million lower than the Red Sox, and have had their first four-game losing streak in two years, who can blame Red Sox Nation for having throbbing migraines these days?

“If I’m a Red Sox fan, or a person in the media,” Holt said, “I’m probably going to be panicking, too. We go from a 17-2 start last year to the way we started this year. It’s not pretty.

“Hopefully, when we get our World Series rings, we can look around and say, ‘Hey man, it’s the same group of guys. We know we’re a good team. Once we get going, we’ll be fine. It can only go up from here, right?’”

Said Sale: “Will you please tell people we’ve played zero home games. It’s obviously not the way we wanted to start, but there’s nothing we can do about it now.”

If the Red Sox had a do-over, perhaps they wouldn't have rested their starters as long as they did this spring. The Red Sox wanted to compensate for the postseason, and kept their starters grounded until late in the spring.

Who knows for sure if the result would have been any different, but in their first two times through the rotation, their five starters have yielded 54 runs (47 earned), 65 hits, 16 homers, 26 walks, 39 strikeouts in 46 ½ innings. That computes to a 9.13 ERA – nearly seven runs higher a game than they produced during their 17-2 start last season.

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

“Same thing we did things last year, we’re going to do it again. I keep telling the guys, we’re talented. We’re going to play good baseball.

“You’ve just got to stay calm.”

Go ahead, you try telling that to their fans who have watched the Red Sox already lose more games than they did all of last April when they were 21-7.

“It’s just one of things you live with,” reigning AL MVP Mookie Betts said. “We’re human. Things happen. But we know we’re better than this.

“We’ve got a whole lot of games left to go out there and prove it.”

Yes, and still 81 games played at home, too.

*** *AZCentral.com***

Adam Jones just misses HR robbery as Diamondbacks fall to Red Sox

Nick Piccoro

Adam Jones drifted back, neared the wall and timed his jump perfectly. For an instant, it looked like the Diamondbacks right fielder, who has a history of bringing back potential home runs, was about to do it again.

Instead, Mitch Moreland’s drive carried just beyond Jones’ outstretched glove, and the solo home run turned out to be the difference in the Diamondbacks’ 1-0 loss to the Boston Red Sox on Sunday afternoon, a shot that spoiled an otherwise excellent outing by right-hander Merrill Kelly.

“I should have had it,” Jones said. “But I didn’t.”

Adam Jones jumps at the wall but is unable to rob Mitch Moreland of his home run in the seventh inning of Sunday's Diamondbacks loss.

Adam Jones jumps at the wall but is unable to rob Mitch Moreland of his home run in the seventh inning of Sunday's Diamondbacks loss. (Photo: Patrick Breen/The Republic)

Rather than a sweep of the defending World Series champions, the Diamondbacks had to settle for taking two of three. They are 10 games into their season and own a .500 record; given the quality of the competition – they opened with series against the perennially strong Dodgers and the seemingly much-improved Padres – breaking even isn't a bad way to start.

“We haven’t (faced) anybody where the expectations were limited,” Diamondbacks manager Torey Lovullo said. “It was the world champs, the runner-ups and an upstart Padre team. We were walking into the season with a few unknowns. I say that because I felt that way myself. And over these 10 days I had a lot of questions answered.”

Through 10 games, the Diamondbacks have showed they still can score runs despite losing Paul Goldschmidt and A.J. Pollock in the offseason and Jake Lamb and Steven Souza Jr. to injuries. And their rotation, which got destroyed in the opening series at Dodger Stadium, bounced back the second time through.

Kelly was slotted in as the No. 5 starter, but he’s been the Diamondbacks’ most consistent pitcher through two starts. Kelly went eight innings on Sunday, allowing four hits and walking none. He struck out nine. He ruthlessly pounded the zone, firing strikes on 70 of his 94 pitches.

“That’s what I try to do,” Kelly said. “I try to limit the pitches as much as I can. The less pitches in an at-bat for me the better. If I can throw one pitch and get one out that’s great. Just trying to get ahead and I was able to do that.”

His one blemish came in the seventh. Facing Moreland for the third time, Kelly tried to start him with an inside cutter. The pitch caught more of the plate than Kelly wanted, diving down and in to the lefty-hitting Moreland. Moreland skied it in Jones’ direction in right.

“I saw him backing up,” Moreland said. “I knew I hit it decent but I didn’t hit it great. I knew it was going to be close. Thankfully it was out of reach.”

“It was just a little bit too far,” Jones said. “I’m going to go out there with (teammate Jarrod) Dyson the next couple days and work on that sticking-my-foot-in-the-fence-and-trying-to-jump-over (catch).”

The Diamondbacks’ offense had just its second no-show performance of the year. This one came against a slew of Red Sox pitchers on a so-called “bullpen day.” Other than one at-bat – Dyson, the leadoff man, facing starter Hector Velazquez again in the third – no Diamondbacks hitter got to face any pitcher more than once.

“There was just so much change we just never got into an offensive rhythm,” Lovullo said. “I think that might have had a small part to do with it.”

“Sometimes, that is tougher,” Jones said. “I wish I got to see Velazquez a second time. But every at-bat was against somebody different. That’s part of it. You’ve just got to make that adjustment.”

The Diamondbacks’ best chance came in the fifth. Christian Walker led off with a double and moved to third on a ground out, but he was thrown out by Xander Bogaerts while trying to score on Nick Ahmed’s grounder to short.

Lovullo said he figured the contact play would be his team’s best chance to score because if Ahmed made an out the Red Sox would have walked No. 8 hitter John Ryan Murphy, and Lovullo wasn’t going to take Kelly out of the game.

“I just felt like there were some wobbly defenders out there that I wanted to challenge,” Lovullo said. “Unfortunately, the ball got hit to one of their best.”

*** *Associated Press***

Moreland homer sends Red Sox home with 1-0 win over D-Backs

PHOENIX -- An awful opening trip ended with a win for the Boston Red Sox.

Mitch Moreland homered off Merrill Kelly on the first pitch of the seventh inning, and the World Series champions beat the Arizona Diamondbacks 1-0 on Sunday.

Boston went 3-8 against Seattle, Oakland and Arizona, its worst start since losing nine of 11 to begin a 2011 season that ended with a third-place finish in the AL East at 90-72.

"It's always nice to win that last one," Moreland said. "Tough road trip for us, tough way to open the season."

The last team to reach the postseason after losing at least eight its first 11 games was Tampa Bay, which finished 91-71 in 2011.

Boston hosts Toronto on Tuesday, its first game at Fenway Park since winning the World Series at Dodger Stadium last October, the fourth title for the Red Sox in 15 years.

"We know how good we are. We know that we have to get better," manager Alex Cora said. "We learned a lot on this road trip, and now it's over."

Hector Velazquez, Brandon Workman, Marcus Walden (1-0), Matt Barnes and Ryan Brasier combined on a three-hitter and Boston's first shutout this season. The Red Sox entered with a 6.97 ERA, ahead of only the Chicago White Sox at 7.87.

Walden, a 30-year-old right-hander who made his debut on April 1 last year, got six outs for his first major league victory. Boston stopped a three-game losing streak in the finale of the longest opening trip in franchise history.

Brasier allowed David Peralta's two-out double in the ninth, then got his second save when Adam Jones grounded out, finishing a game that took just 2 hours, 29 minutes.

"We won that game because of our pitching," Moreland said. "Each guy that stepped up for us today and did an outstanding job. It might be in situations they are not used to, and they kept going out there and throwing up zeros for us."

Boston had vocal support in a crowd of 31,565. Many booed when J.D. Martinez was intentionally walked with first base open and two outs in the ninth.

Moreland's third homer was just out of the reach of Jones, who leaped and stretched his glove over the right-field fence but could not come down with the ball.

"I've seen him do that all too many times over the years," Moreland said of Jones' knock for taking away homers. "I saw him backing up. I knew I hit it decent, but I didn't hit it great. I knew it was going to be close. Thankfully, it was out of reach."

Jones was disappointed.

"I should have had it, but I didn't," he said. "I just missed it. It went a little bit further than my glove."

Kelly (1-1) gave up four hits in eight innings, struck out nine and walked one.

Velazquez gave up one hit in three innings and threw 39 pitches, working entirely from the stretch. He made his first start after three relief appearances.

Arizona had its best scoring chance in the fifth inning, when Christian Walker doubled leading off and advanced on Ketel Marte's groundout but was thrown out at the plate by shortstop Xander Bogaerts on Nick Ahmed's grounder.

Boston loaded the bases with two outs in the ninth before Blake Swihart struck out against Jon Duplantier.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Diamondbacks: C Alex Avila was placed on the injured list after straining his left quadriceps while circling the bases on a home run Friday. IF/OF Tim Locastro was recalled from Triple-A Reno to take the roster spot.

Red Sox: 2B Dustin Pedroia (left knee) was 0 for 4 with a walk while playing nine innings for Class A Greenville on Sunday and is to meet the Red Sox in Boston on Monday, Cora said. Pedroia was 3 for 9 with a double and two walks in three injury rehabilitation games.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Chris Sale (0-2) is to start Tuesday against Toronto's Matt Shoemaker (2-0) in the last scheduled homer opener in the major leagues this season.

Diamondbacks: RHP Zack Greinke (1-1) starts Tuesday against Texas and LHP Mike Minor (1-1) in the opener of a two-game series. Greinke hit two homers and pitched six innings to win 8-5 at San Diego last Wednesday.

Red Sox could activate Pedroia for home opener

PHOENIX -- Boston second baseman Dustin Pedroia could be activated for Tuesday's home opener against Toronto.

Pedroia, 35, the 2008 AL MVP, has been slowed since a slide into his surgically repaired left knee at second base by Baltimore's Manny Machado on April 21, 2017. Pedroia had left knee surgery on Oct. 25, 2017, and was limited to three big league games in 2018, from May 26-29.

He played on Thursday and Friday for Class A Greenville, going 3 for 5 with a double and a walk, and was to play nine innings for the Drive on Sunday. Manager Alex Cora said Pedroia is to meet the Red Sox in Boston after the opening 11-game trip.

Eduardo Nunez started at second base, a day after Brock Holt was put on the injured list due to a scratched right cornea. Holt said he was hurt when his 2-year-old son Griff poked him in the eye on March 28.

"It was the morning of Opening Day," Holt told reporters. "I went up and got Griff out of bed, and one of his fingernails got me good. It's not funny, but it is funny."