

The Boston Red Sox Sunday, September 1, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

The Red Sox' plan for a bullpen game almost worked, right up to a disastrous 8th inning

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox needed 15 innings and seven relief pitchers to beat the Los Angeles Angels on Friday night. But when the team arrived at Angel Stadium on Saturday, there were no new faces in the clubhouse.

There had been ample time to summon a fresh arm from Triple A Pawtucket but the Sox stayed with the same roster even with the knowledge they didn't have a starting pitcher available for the game.

It was a decision that spoke to the organization's glaring lack of pitching depth at the highest levels of the minors. That or misplaced confidence in the team's ability to piece together nine innings. Probably both.

It almost worked. The Sox took a one-run lead into the eighth inning before Ryan Brasier allowed a staggering six runs. The result was a 10-4 loss against the Angels.

On a day both the Athletics and Indians lost, the Sox missed a chance to advance a step in the chase for a wild card playoff spot. They remain 5½ games behind but now with 26 left to play.

An uplifting victory followed by a crushing loss left the clubhouse quiet after the game.

"The up and down, that's part of it," manager Alex Cora said. "Pitch by pitch, inning by inning, play by play. That's the beauty of trying to make the playoffs. [Sunday] we'll show up, see where we're at and we'll go after it."

The Sox had a 4-3 lead on a dispirited Angels team that had lost seven of eight games. But Brasier gave them life, allowing singles by Justin Upton, Kole Calhoun and Andrelton Simmons within nine pitches. That tied it.

Brasier threw 20 pitches on Friday but said he was prepared to come back.

"We knew what we had to do today," he said. "We knew it was going to be a bullpen day, a tough day."

With two outs, Brasier had a chance to escape. But David Fletcher slammed a RBI double to left field. After Mike Trout was intentionally walked, Brian Goodwin singled in two more.

"Every hitter's big in a close game. Trying to get ahead and left the ball up a little bit," said Brasier, who had never given up more than four runs in an inning before.

An overmatched Josh Smith replaced Brasier and allowed a three-run homer by Albert Pujols.

"That's what we had left," said Cora, who used Matt Barnes against the top of the Angels order in the seventh and put Brasier in what he considered a workable position in the eighth with Brandon Workman left for the ninth.

The Angels had seven runs on six hits in the inning. All but one of the hits had exit velocities of at least 94 miles per hour.

The 39-year-old Pujols is 6 of 12 in the series with six RBIs.

J.D. Martinez was 2 for 3 with a walk and two RBIs for the Sox. He is 13 of 29 in the last seven games with seven extra-base hits and 17 RBIs.

The Sox were 2 for 10 with runners in scoring position. They left 10 men on base.

David Price will come off the injured list to start the series finale on Sunday. The Sox are 5-2 on their road trip but it hasn't been enough.

Lefthander Dillon Peters started for the Angels on what was his 27th birthday and faced 27 batters over 6½ innings. He allowed four runs.

Martinez had a two-out RBI double in the first inning. The Sox then took a 3-1 lead in the third and Martinez played a role again.

Mookie Betts led off with a double and was at third with two outs when Martinez grounded a single up the middle. Sam Travis reached on an error to extend the inning and Andrew Benintendi took advantage of the mistake with an RBI single.

The Sox created a run in the fourth inning.

Brock Holt led off with a double and took third when Sandy Leon dropped down his team-leading fourth sacrifice of the season. Betts's sacrifice fly to center field scored the run and Cora turned around in the dugout to applaud Leon for helping to make it happen.

The Sox tried a bunt again in the eighth inning. With runners on first and second, Benintendi gave himself up. Pinch hitter Mitch Moreland drew a walk to load the bases but Holt, a .340 hitter with runners in scoring position, grounded into a double play.

The Sox tried an opener for the first time this season. Lefthander Josh Taylor, pitching for the fourth time in five days, needed 31 pitches to get through the first inning but left the bases loaded.

That proved better than who initially followed.

Marcus Walden allowed a run on two singles and a walk in the third inning. Then Kole Calhoun and Luis Rengifo had RBI doubles off Brian Johnson in the fourth.

But Johnson went on to retire the final 10 batters he faced, three by strikeout, and handed a 4-3 lead off in the seventh inning.

Johnson's four innings marked his second-longest appearance of the season and his fastball averaged 91 m.p.h, his best this year.

Tony La Russa has seen the improbable happen before

Alex Speier

As he travels with a Red Sox team that is clinging to hope, team special assistant Tony La Russa is wearing his 2011 World Series ring. The choice of bling is not accidental.

The 2011 Cardinals team that was helmed by La Russa in his managerial swan song stands as a monument to remote possibility. That talented team struggled through most of the first five months of the season while navigating a dizzying array of injuries to key players.

On Aug. 24, the team had a 67-63 record. They were 10 games behind the Brewers in the NL Central and 10½ behind the Braves in the wild card. According to coolstandings.com, St. Louis had a 1.3 percent

chance of making the playoffs at the conclusion of that day — and just a 0.5 percent shot at claiming the wild card.

For most of the summer, through the injuries to players such as Albert Pujols and Adam Wainwright along with a sluggish start by Chris Carpenter, the Cardinals had shown sustained toughness on the field, and maintained belief in what remained possible despite the ominous state of the standings. But the August downturn — punctuated by a three-game sweep at the hands of the Dodgers — shook the belief of that team.

“They got discouraged,” said La Russa. “They thought that after all this work, it wasn’t going to happen.”

Red Sox lose to Angels, 10-4, widen AL wild-card deficit

As he felt the air escaping the balloon, La Russa addressed his team, hoping to patch the leak.

“The motivation for me was, look, all year long, people would come in — scouts, our peers, players, coaches — and say, ‘You guys are tough,’ ” said La Russa. “I said, ‘We’re getting ready to ruin every bit of respect that we’ve earned . . . We’ve got to finish over .500, finish as good as we can.’ That was the initial motivation.”

Yet in order to pursue that simple goal of playing to the best of their abilities, La Russa decided to play a card of last resort — the equivalent of an “in case of emergency, break glass” proclamation. With roughly five weeks left in the season and 32 games to play, he asked that everyone around the club — the manager, the coaches, the players — “play it like the seventh game of the World Series, the last game of your life.”

The response?

“Right away, the urgency picked up,” said La Russa, who noted that his message was amplified in a players-only meeting in which the members of the Cardinals roster challenged each other to elevate their level of play.

The wins for St. Louis started to come — two in a row, then four more, then 12 in 16 games, and 15 in 20. And while Milwaukee continued to cruise towards October, the Braves traveled the opposite trajectory. A cakewalk to a wild-card spot for Atlanta suddenly became imperiled, as the St. Louis hot streak coincided with a 6-7 stretch by the Braves entering a three-game series in St. Louis in mid-September.

In the first contest of that series, the Braves carried a 3-1 lead into the ninth inning. But Craig Kimbrel — amidst what had been one of the greatest seasons in history by a reliever — gave up a single and walked a pair of batters before a Pujols cue shot down the first base line scored two runs to tie the game in an eventual extra-innings, 4-3 win for the Cardinals.

That game marked the start of a three-game sweep, and suddenly, the goalposts shifted. Atlanta’s 10½-game lead had dwindled to 4½ with 16 to go. The Cardinals were no longer playing for pride — they were playing for the postseason, and treating every game with the urgency of a championship pursuit.

And on the last day of the year — on the same day that the Red Sox concluded their epic September collapse with a loss to the Orioles that allowed the Rays to claim the AL wild card — the Cardinals crushed the Astros while the Braves lost to the Phillies, with Kimbrel blowing the save, allowing St. Louis to claim the NL wild card.

Yet reaching the postseason in improbable fashion did not represent an end-point for that Cardinals club. The same edge with which St. Louis had been playing for five weeks, La Russa and pitching coach Dave Duncan recognized, could allow the team to cut a path through October.

“We’d gotten that thing and we just rolled,” La Russa said, smiling at the memory of a team that took down the Phillies in five games in the NLDS, advanced past the Brewers in six games in the NLCS, and finally beat the Rangers in an epic, seven-game World Series.

And now, La Russa sees the relevance of that experience with a 2019 Red Sox team that he is around on a daily basis. He sees the talent, sees the sharpened focus that has accompanied the team’s play in recent weeks — and the way that Red Sox manager Alex Cora has started managing games as if back in the postseason, recognizing the increased magnitude of each win and loss.

With decades of experience in the game, La Russa understands that the Red Sox’ odds of reaching the postseason are remote, that surpassing two of three teams ahead of them in contention for the wild card — Cleveland (6 games in front of the Sox), Oakland (5½ games), and Tampa Bay (5½ games) — is unlikely. Yet as he’s told members of the Red Sox coaching staff, there is also reason not to let go of whatever hope the team has, knowing that sometimes, the improbable can happen.

“It’s not impossible but very tough,” said La Russa. “You can’t fake it, but if the club will play with an urgency, you never know. It’s a very talented team. You never know. All of a sudden, Oakland, Tampa Bay, they see what’s coming . . . What you do is you play to the end, never give in, never give up, and you never know. The final carrot is that if we get in, nobody is going to want to play us because of the history of this club.

“Are we going to make it happen? I don’t know. But you can know that you took your best shot,” said La Russa. “Let’s see what happens.”

Mookie Betts kept the power on through Friday’s 15-inning win

Peter Abraham

Mookie Betts led off Friday night’s game against the Los Angeles Angels by getting ahead in the count and driving a high fastball from Jose Suarez into the visitors’ bullpen in left field.

It was 10:11 p.m. in Boston.

A little more than five hours later, Betts hit another home run to almost the same spot to give the Sox a 7-6 victory.

“We had to find a way to do it,” said Betts, who connected off Trevor Cahill for the game-winner. It was his 23rd homer of the season.

Betts said the home runs felt like they came in different games. But both were needed after the Sox blew a 6-3 lead and the game sailed into extra innings. It went on to last 5 hours 23 minutes, but the Sox won for the fifth time in six games.

“Everybody was tired. But every win is important and we had to pull ourselves together,” said Betts before going 3 for 3 in the Sox’ 10-4 loss Saturday night.

Betts became the second player in history to hit a home run in the first inning and another in the 15th inning or later in the same game. The first was Red Sox third baseman Vern Stephens on May 30, 1951, in the first game of a doubleheader against the Yankees at Fenway Park. Stephens hit the first off Eddie Lopat then had a walkoff in the 15th against Spec Shea.

Nate Eovaldi started Friday’s game for the Sox and allowed one run over four innings with eight strikeouts. It was the best he’s pitched since coming off the injured list in July.

“I wasn’t really worried about mechanics. I just went out and competed,” said Eovaldi, who had worked between starts on improving the rhythm of his delivery. That showed in the good tempo he had on the mound.

Andrew Cashner rescued the Sox with four innings of hitless relief. He walked two and struck out three.

“I tried to not necessarily nibble but stay on the edges,” he said. “I was just trying to stay locked in.”

Cashner was 1-4 with an 8.01 ERA in six starts for the Red Sox after being acquired from Baltimore. But he has allowed only one run on four hits over six games and 10 innings as a reliever with four walks and nine strikeouts.

Good communication with the coaching staff about when he will pitch has helped that, Cashner said. He also feels the role has made him more aggressive with his fastball.

Before Cashner came on, Darwinson Hernandez threw two scoreless innings and struck out five. The 22-year-old lefthander was unflappable in locating his 95-mile-per-hour fastball.

“High-leverage, no margin for error, facing the heart of the order,” manager Alex Cora said. “He had a good fastball; he threw a few sliders. He showed a lot of composure. He was relaxed and didn’t get ahead of himself. It was fun to watch.”

A blown lead

The Red Sox made a series of mistakes in the bottom of the ninth Friday that led to the game going deep into the night.

With a 6-4 lead, Cora left J.D. Martinez in right field instead of putting Jackie Bradley Jr. in to play center field and shifting Betts over to right.

Brandon Workman got ahead of leadoff hitter Brian Goodwin, 0 and 2, before walking him. The righthander essentially walked Mike Trout intentionally, missing high four times in a row.

Shohei Ohtani’s grounder to second was hit too slowly for a double play and the Sox took the out at second.

Workman got ahead of Albert Pujols, 0 and 2, and hung a curveball. Pujols slapped it into right field and Goodwin scored. Martinez let the ball get past him and Ohtani scored the tying run without a throw to the plate.

The Sox were fortunate to hold it there and force extra innings. But Cora did not regret his inaction.

“Not at all,” he said. “We’re playing in an era that a bloop and a fly ball is two runs. The way the ball flies nowadays, it’s not like back in the day.

“Up by three, Jackie was coming in. Up two, I’m keeping J.D. in the lineup.”

Chacin is added

The Red Sox signed 31-year-old righthander Jhoulys Chacin to a minor league deal. He was released by Milwaukee on Monday after going 3-10 with a 5.79 ERA.

Chacin, who has played for six teams in 11 seasons, worked out for the Sox at Angel Stadium on Friday.

Chacin has not appeared in a game since July 24. With the minor league season ending Monday, there is limited time to get him work. But the Sox are desperate for starters.

Lefthanded reliever Josh Taylor pitched the first inning of Saturday night's game, the first time the Sox have used an opener this season.

Price returns

David Price will come off the injured list to start Sunday's series finale. The lefthander has not pitched since Aug. 4 when he allowed seven runs on nine hits over 2⅔ innings against the Yankees. Four days later, the Sox placed Price on the injured list with a cyst in his left wrist. Price eschewed a minor league assignment and pitched a three-inning simulated game Tuesday at Coors Field in Denver . . . The Sox will call up five players, three of them pitchers, from Triple A Pawtucket on Sunday. Michael Chavis would have been one, Cora indicated, if not for soreness on his left side that developed Friday. Righthanders Ryan Weber and Hector Velazquez will be among those added, a team source said . . . Among the leftovers from Friday: Ohtani was 0 for 8, struck out a career-high four times and left eight runners on base. Several of his swings were so unbalanced that his helmet flew off . . . Pujols was 4 for 8 with three RBIs Friday and then went 2 for 4 with a three-run homer Saturday. His 2,064 RBIs are fifth all-time, 11 behind Cap Anson and 22 behind Alex Rodriguez.

Red Sox among teams with something to play for in September

Peter Abraham

“On Sept. 1 we'll talk about it. I've been saying that since April. I'm not going to deviate from that.”

— Alex Cora, when asked on Wednesday if the Red Sox still had a shot at the postseason.

That's something you hear often from managers of contending teams. Sept. 1 has become the day when it's not looking too far ahead if you talk about the postseason.

So now that we have Cora's permission, let's take a look at what September has in store for the Red Sox and other teams still playing for something.

American League

Astros — Houston is headed for its third consecutive AL West title and is fighting with the Yankees for the top seed in the league. The Astros are 51-17 at Minute Maid Park; so home-field advantage is significant for them. Their other task is to get shortstop Carlos Correa right after an injury-filled season.

Athletics — The Athletics are fighting with the Rays for the second wild card and will be aided by a weak schedule that includes 10 games against the Mariners, Royals, and Tigers. Lefthander Sean Manaea comes off the injured list on Sunday, adding to their starter depth. Matt Harvey will get a shot at working in relief.

Indians — Cleveland surged after the trade deadline and briefly passed the Twins before falling back. Carlos Carrasco returns on Sunday after overcoming leukemia. But Corey Kluber had a setback in his rehab and Jose Ramirez may not return this season after surgery to repair a broken hamate bone. Injuries have left the Indians vulnerable.

Rays — Even with pitchers Jose Alvarado, Yonny Chirinos, and Blake Snell on the injured list, the Rays could make the postseason for the first time since 2013. Righthanded reliever Nick Anderson, obtained from Miami at the deadline, allowed one earned run over 10⅔ innings in his first 11 appearances for the Rays and struck out 20. Snell should be back in a few weeks.

Red Sox — When the Sox lost eight in a row from July 28-Aug. 4 then lost Chris Sale for the remainder of the season with an elbow injury, a collapse seemed imminent. But Cora has held them together. The entitled masses won't be satisfied with 86-90 wins. But considering their poor starting pitching, that would be an achievement.

Twins — Minnesota hasn't won 90 or more games since 2010, when Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau were in their primes. Its last playoff series win was in 2002. The Twins' September will be focused on keeping the rotation as fresh as possible while trying to hold off the Indians, who they will play six more times. But the Twins end with 13 in a row against the White Sox, Royals, and Tigers.

Yankees — Manager Aaron Boone wants to finish with the top seed in the American League but at the same time rest his pitchers for what's to come. The Yankees have a weak rotation and a reliable bullpen, which will make for interesting postseason strategy. That DJ LeMahieu leads them in WAR with Mike Tauchman third and Gio Urshela fourth is remarkable. Giancarlo Stanton, who has played only nine games, could return.

National League

Braves — Atlanta has been in first place since June 12, something that largely has gone unnoticed with how well the Dodgers, Yankees, and Astros have played. General manager Alex Anthopoulos correctly bet that Josh Donaldson had a comeback season in him, and that has helped the Braves average 5.3 runs. Rookie Mike Soroka is probably their Game 2 or Game 3 starter in a postseason series. Anthopoulos did well to add shortstop Adeiny Hechavarria, center fielder Billy Hamilton, and catcher Francisco Cervelli to the roster in August to fill some holes.

Brewers — Milwaukee has a negative run differential but still has better playoffs odds than several teams in the plus column thanks to the erratic NL Central. That Opening Day starter Jhoulys Chacin was designated for assignment then released last Monday tells you how their pitching plans went. But they still have a shot.

Cardinals — The season has not gone as well as St. Louis hoped after some expensive roster additions. But the Cardinals enter the final month with a solid chance to win the Central. Their deep bullpen could lead to postseason success. Paul Goldschmidt has improved his OPS from .769 to .799 since the All-Star break but hasn't been the force they expected.

Cubs — This will be an interesting next few weeks for Chicago. The Cubs are talented enough to win the Central and get to the NLCS and inconsistent enough to miss the playoffs entirely. Joe Maddon's job could be on the line and it's easy to see Theo Epstein deciding to trade some big names — even Kris Bryant? — and changing the look of the team.

Diamondbacks — It's unlikely Arizona steals the second wild card. But after dealing Zack Greinke at the trade deadline, the Diamondbacks had a winning record in August. As they rebuild the roster, GM Mike Hazen and manager Torey Lovullo are still finding ways to stay competitive. They have been excellent defensively.

Dodgers — Los Angeles is in the same spot the Red Sox were in a year ago, entering the final month with a commanding lead in its division and the luxury of resting its players and lining up its pitching staff for the postseason. The difference is the Dodgers lost the World Series in 2017 and '18 and there is tremendous pressure to finally break through. Rookie Will Smith, 24, is now their primary catcher. Reliever Joe Kelly had a great August after a poor first four months. He showed up for the Sox last October. The wrist injury Max Muncy sustained on Wednesday is a concern.

Nationals — Dave Martinez was in danger of losing his job when the Nationals started 24-33. A 50-25 surge now has Washington lined up to host the wild-card game. Getting closer Sean Doolittle rested and right is the September priority. He went on the injured list with knee tendinitis, but it was more a case of being worn down. Third baseman Anthony Rendon is set up for a big payday as a free agent.

Phillies — Philadelphia has a dozen players on the injured list — Jake Arrieta, Jay Bruce, Andrew McCutchen, Pat Neshek, and David Robertson among them. Bruce is expected back Sunday, but the rest

are done for the season. So manager Gabe Kapler has done well to have his team in the mix. Bryce Harper has a .927 OPS in the second half.

Mets — Their resurgence was fun for a while, but the Mets are essentially done after being swept by the Braves and Cubs. Finishing over .500 may be the most they can accomplish. But Jed Lowie might play this month after being out all season. Is there an offseason trade to be made with the Red Sox?

PROMISE FULFILLED

Rodriguez stands tall this season

It will not be a season to remember for many Red Sox starters. But it has been a step forward for Eduardo Rodriguez, who has pitched beyond the fifth inning 21 times in his 28 starts and leads the team with 165 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings — already 36 more than last season with as many as five starts left.

Rodriguez is 16-5 with a 3.97 earned run average and the Sox are 21-7 when he starts. The last Red Sox lefthander with 20 wins was Mel Parnell in 1953.

It doesn't seem like a coincidence that Rodriguez was the only Sox starter who had a normal buildup in spring training. It paid off with durability.

“We do believe that he's strong enough that he can handle the workload,” Alex Cora said. “We always try to stay around 95-105 pitches to certain guys. But with him I feel 115 is good for him. He's that strong. He's that smooth with his delivery. There's not much effort. We talked about it and he's very honest. He likes the challenge.”

A few other observations on the Red Sox:

Even with his blown save on Friday, Brandon Workman is a closer to build around. He has 40 appearances without a hit or a run and is averaging 13 strikeouts per nine innings.

Workman throws his curveball nearly half the time and locates it all around the strike zone. He has too many walks (5.3 per nine) but makes up for it by being difficult to make good contact against. Opposing hitters have a .174 slugging percentage against him.

A bullpen core of Workman, Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier, Darwinzon Hernandez, Josh Taylor, and Marcus Walden is a good place to start in 2020. But the Sox should not assume that's enough given the volatility of relievers.

Heath Hembree is not included on this list because his elbow injury appears to be more than what the Sox are acknowledging.

Rick Porcello should be in the running for a Gold Glove. He's one of only nine pitchers in the American League with a positive DRS. The righthander also is second in putouts (14) and third in assists (20) in the league and has one error.

“It goes back to playing infield when I was in high school,” said Porcello, who was a shortstop at Seton Hall Prep in New Jersey when he didn't pitch. “I take pride in fielding my position.”

Porcello said Kenny Rogers, a teammate with the 2010 Tigers, impressed on him the need to work on his fielding.

From personal observation, Porcello is by leaps and bounds the Red Sox pitcher who works the hardest in spring training fielding drills.

Dallas Keuchel, now with the Braves, won four of the last five Gold Gloves in the AL.

Cora is reading “The Big Book of Saban. The Philosophy, Strategy, and Leadership Style of Nick Saban.” He also has read a similar book about Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola and his methods.

Given how baseball is changing, the players getting younger and more diverse in terms of their backgrounds, learning from coaches in other sports only makes sense.

Dustin Pedroia told me he is sure the Red Sox will allow him to continue trying to make a comeback until that is deemed impossible. And maybe they will.

But when the Sox have to set their 40-man roster after the season, all players on the injured list revert back to active status and are counted.

Related: ‘It would be nice to not hurt.’ Dustin Pedroia knows he’s playing the long game now

The Sox should have enough room to keep Pedroia on the 40 given the number of marginal players they’re carrying on it.

But that also could become the time when Pedroia, his agents, and the Sox have to get together and determine whether a comeback is still realistic and what should come next in terms of relationship with the organization.

Roster spots can become valuable in the offseason and there’s often a crunch.

ETC.

Oh mercy, here’s another hot topic

Last week’s column focused on defensive shifts and there was a lot of feedback from readers, both pro and con.

What do you think of a mercy rule?

Yankees manager Aaron Boone would like to see it given the number of lopsided games and position players forced to pitch.

“I think there would be a lot of benefit to that,” Boone told reporters earlier this month. “You would probably eliminate a lot of the unwritten rules of people running or swinging at 3-0 pitches. Just be like, if you get to this point after seven innings or whatever, there might be some merit to that worth exploring.”

The World Baseball Classic has a mercy rule, ending games after five innings if a team leads by 15 runs, or 10 after the seventh inning. But that’s a different level of competition.

Boone has good intentions. But here’s why it’ll likely never happen: television. Ads are sold for nine innings and regional sports networks such as NESN and YES won’t want to give up that content.

There will be changes for position players pitching. Starting next season, position players won’t be allowed to pitch until extra innings or if one team leads by at least seven runs. There will be exceptions for designated two-way players such as Shohei Ohtani.

A pitch clock likely won’t be implemented until 2022. There’s a clock in the minors and the NCAA will have a 20-second pitch clock in all divisions starting next season.

Extra bases

Through Friday, Mike Yastrzemski had 18 homers and 48 RBIs. The last Giants rookie with at least 20 home runs and 50 RBIs was Dave Kingman in 1972. Mike Yaz and the Giants will be at Fenway Sept. 17-19. But Pablo Sandoval, who needs Tommy John surgery, probably won't make the trip. He gave the Giants 1.1 WAR the last three seasons with the Sox paying for it. Mercifully, that deal ends after this season . . . Javy Guerra was one of the four prospects the Red Sox traded to the Padres to acquire Craig Kimbrel in 2015. He was a shortstop with a strong arm who struggled to hit in the higher levels of the minors. The Padres called him up in 2018, but Guerra was 2 for 16 with strikeouts. The 23-year-old from Panama could return this month as a relief pitcher. He moved to the mound this season and had 28 strikeouts over 20½ innings in his first 20 games in the minors. Guerra is on the 40-man roster and the Padres could call him up in September . . . The Mets and Yankees paid Yoenis Cespedes and Jacoby Ellsbury \$50 million this season and neither will play a game . . . The inspiration for Players' Weekend was to give the players three days to express their individuality, which is great. Keep it coming. But the all-black and all-white uniforms used this season made it almost impossible to see their names and numbers, completely defeating the purpose. Instead of individuality, everybody looked the same . . . The visiting team clubhouse at Petco Park in San Diego is the chilliest spot in baseball. There are two acoustic guitars available for anybody who wants to play, a display of skateboard decks in the hallway leading to the dugout and some framed concert posters near the manager's office. Clubhouse manager TJ Laidlaw did a great job creating the environment . . . Happy birthday to Merlin Nippert, who is 81. The righthanded pitcher appeared in four games for the Sox in 1962, all on the road, and allowed three runs over six innings. Nippert played for manager Johnny Pesky in Triple A that season and had a 2.00 ERA in 58 relief appearances for the Seattle Rainiers. Pesky became manager of the Sox in 1963, but Nippert never made it back to the majors and returned to his native Oklahoma two years later and became a banker. Nippert was one of the Sox players who returned to Fenway Park in 2012 for the 100th anniversary of Fenway Park.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox' momentum comes to crushing halt in 10-4 loss

Michael Silverman

After Friday night's marathon 15-inning win over the Angels, Red Sox manager Alex Cora downplayed the victory by emphasizing "We've got to keep going, we can't stop now."

That meant Saturday night's game became a referendum on momentum for a ballclub that had won 10 of its last 13 games.

The referendum passed.

And Red Sox momentum was denied.

The Red Sox could not make a 4-3 lead hold in the eighth inning, when Ryan Brasier allowed six runs on five hits and Josh Smith allowed a three-run home run as the Red Sox fell, hard, 10-4 to the Angels. The outcome meant the Red Sox wasted a chance at making a dent in their AL wild card deficit, which is at 5-½ games. Part of the outcome could be traced to the taxed bullpen situation the Red Sox were in, to be sure, after using eight pitchers the night before.

But the effort fell short in the end.

And the result was not at all what a team with playoff hopes needed or wanted.

"We only had one bad inning, it wasn't a horrible game, it was just one bad inning," said Cora. "This is baseball. We had bases loaded with one out with a chance to add on, it doesn't happen, they came back and they scored seven. Up till there we felt good, we had good at-bats, we played the game right, it just didn't happen."

Said Brasier: “Last night was a huge win and then we had a chance to make up a game on a couple teams tonight and weren’t able to do it.”

J.D. Martinez bruised his right knee on a hard slide in the eighth inning, but the Red Sox indicated afterwards that as long as he reported to work Sunday morning without too much discomfort, the plan for him to DH was still in effect.

The Red Sox did begin on somewhat of a roll, scoring right away when Martinez doubled in Rafael Devers for the 1-0 lead after half an inning.

Opener Josh Taylor somehow overcame two walks and a single to escape the first inning unscathed. His replacement, Marcus Walden was almost but not quite as lucky. A two-out bloop single by Mike Trout brought in the tying run that stalled the momentum train.

In the top of the third, the Red Sox regained the outright lead.

After a leadoff double, Friday night-Saturday morning hero Mookie Betts scored on Martinez’ RBI single. Martinez scored next on Andrew Benintendi’s single to put the Red Sox on top, 3-1.

It was Brian Johnson’s turn next, but the lefty started out shaky before finding his groove. His third inning began with a double allowed to Albert Pujols of all people, the slow-moving Hall-of-Famer in waiting sliding into second base on a ball hit to right fielder Martinez. Kole Calhoun doubled in Pujols, before Calhoun scored on Luis Rengifo’s double to tie the game at 3.

The even state of affairs was brief.

Brock Holt led off the fourth with a double. A groundout later, he scored on Betts’ sacrifice fly and the Red Sox were back on top, 4-3.

Johnson truly settled in after the Rengifo affront. He retired the next 10 batters in order, an act of charity for the stressed bullpen.

“BJ, he struggled that first inning but after that he did an outstanding job,” said Cora. “JT, I know he struggled in the first, but he gave us what he gave us. It was three runs going into the eighth inning so, I mean, for how short-handed we were, we battled and we had the lead in the eighth.”

The Red Sox wasted a golden opportunity to expand their lead in the eighth, when they left the bases loaded. Brock Holt ended the inning by grounding into a double play.

“Brock with the bases loaded, it just didn’t happen, you know?” said Cora. “He’s been so clutch the whole season, it just so happened he hit into a double play and it’s part of the game.”

During the inning, Martinez’ foot got tangled up with shortstop Andrelton Simmons’ foot on a slide into second base. Martinez stayed in the game and at second base, but in the bottom of the eighth, he did not come out to play right field.

Brasier’s performance was sub-optimal.

The Angels singled three straight times against him, the last one by Andrelton Simmons tying the game at 4. He did retire the Nos. 8 and 9 batters in the order, which likely led Cora to believe Brasier should take a crack at the entire lineup from the start. The badness escalated quickly. David Fletcher doubled in the go-ahead run. The Red Sox understandably walked Trout intentionally, but they also left in Brasier. Brian Goodwin promptly singled in two more runs, for the 7-4 Angels lead and Brasier’s hook.

“It’s my job to get ready to go and to go out there and perform and tonight I didn’t get the job done,” said Brasier. “Every hitter is big in a close game. Obviously, trying to get ahead and leaving the ball up a little

bit. They had a couple balls fall that I thought weren't hit real good, and they hit a couple balls hard that scored some runs."

Josh Smith came in and closed the deal, giving up a three-run home run to Pujols for the 10-4 lead.

Return of David Price on Sunday marks key moment in Red Sox' final push

Michael Silverman

No matter what happened Saturday night to the Red Sox against the Angels, the biggest development on the team front was that their best available pitcher, David Price, is returning to work Sunday afternoon.

With an opportunity to be pitching for either the series win or sweep, Price returns to action after missing nearly a month because of a cyst that developed on his left wrist.

Since Price has been out, Chris Sale has gone down for good for the rest of the season with his elbow issue.

To say Price's return Sunday is vital to the September run the club hopes to make is the understatement of the season.

"Where we're at, he's very important regardless, he's a guy that is one of the best pitchers in the big leagues when healthy and he's a guy we saw what he did last year in the second half from the ALCS on," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "He's healthy. He's fresh right now. See how it goes. I don't want to put a limit on Sunday but we'll take care of him obviously, that's the most important thing. He's in a good spot. That simulated game (earlier on this trip) was very aggressive, you don't see that very often. He's ready to go. He's very important for us. If we're going to do this, he's obviously part of the equation."

Price has made only 21 starts this season and thrown 105½ innings, so his freshness is not in question. What's clear is that his current 4.36 ERA and .260 batting average against assumed its bloated look in large part because of the last four starts in which he likely was battling the cyst issue. Batters were cuffing him around at a .375 clip, and his ERA over the 17 innings was 10.59.

That's not the Price the Red Sox are expecting.

"I do feel like the last three or four, maybe something was going on and he just tried to grind it out," Cora said. "As you guys know with David, yeah velocity goes up and down and the changeup and the pitches blend, but the location, to be precise, that's never been a problem. It happened in Baltimore, you saw the shape of the cutter and the changeup, so I do feel like he wasn't feeling great but they know they have to find ways to help us out. But he was really good at the beginning of the season, he was actually the most consistent guy that we had, regardless of the score in Oakland, it was one pitch. Arizona, it was one inning, but he was good. Let's see where he goes now."

Price turned 34 during his down time, and he is signed for three more seasons. With uncertainty lingering about Sale's health, that only increases the attention the Red Sox will have to pay to Price.

"We know what we have to do with him," Cora said. "He's a guy that the last few years everybody talked about health, whatever he had some issues in '17. For us, it's very important to take care of him. If it's six innings, it's six innings, if it's 90 pitches, 95 pitches. I think people forget he went on the IL early, it was kind of like a building process for him."

Chacin on board

The Red Sox signed Jhoulys Chacin to a minor league deal. The immediate plans are unknown, but in order for him to start pitching on the big-league club, the Sox will have to add him to the 40-man roster.

"Right now, I don't know where we're at," with Chacin, Cora said.

The manager said the club will have three pitchers and two position players ready for action Sunday, when September begins and rosters can expand to anyone on the 40-man roster.

One of the position players was going to be Michael Chavis but on Friday Chavis reported soreness during a rehab stint in Pawtucket.

“I talked to him this morning,” Cora said. “Hopefully it’s not that bad. It’s the side but not the oblique, his side. He just said that in between games he was swinging the bat, they asked him how it feels, and he said, ‘Just a little bit tight.’ They were going to check on him today, see how he reacted, how he feels, do the same thing tomorrow, most likely we’ll see him on Monday in Fenway, see where he’s at, and go from there.”

J.D. right again

Cora put J.D. Martinez back in right field and Christian Vazquez back at first base for the second night in a row.

“Trying to get (Martinez) another Silver Slugger, that’s what I’m trying to do,” Cora said with a smile. “He’s fine. I think the off days have benefited him. We’ve had two, three, whatever it is and then we have Monday off, he’ll play the outfield today, he’ll DH (Sunday), it’s just one of those things that we have to maximize our lineup. They’ve got all these lefties starting, so we decided, Christian caught yesterday, I wasn’t planning on that so put him at first again, try to maximize the right-handed hitters and then we’ll manage the game accordingly.” ...

The eight strikeouts Nathan Eovaldi recorded Friday night were a season high, and his four innings pitched were his most since April 17, when he went six against the Yankees. ...

Heading into Saturday, the Red Sox had won seven of their last eight road games and nine of their last 11 against the Angels. The victory in 15 innings improved their bonus panels record to 9-5. ...

The home run Mookie Betts hit to open the game Friday was his 18th career leadoff long ball, extending his franchise record. By scoring his 120th run, Betts joined Ted Williams (8), Dom DiMaggio (3) and Jimmie Foxx (3) as the only Red Sox with 120-plus runs in three or more seasons. His 15th inning home run was the latest by a Red Sox player since Hanley Ramirez hit one in the 15th inning against the Toronto Blues on July 18, 2017.

Red Sox to discover soon value of long, late night in Anaheim

Michael Silverman

Something about Friday nights and early Saturday mornings in southern California seems to bring out the ... extra in the Red Sox.

And while nobody in their groggy mind would dare to compare the significance and meaning of Friday night’s late-August regular season 5:23, 15-inning win over the Angels Friday night-Saturday morning to the 7:20, 18-inning World Series Game 3 3-2 loss at Dodger Stadium last October 26-27, it would border on narrative negligence to just ignore it.

After all, the 2018 Red Sox used the Max Muncy home run off of heroic-in-relief Nathan Eovaldi that capped off that epic duel as fuel for their steamrolling of the Dodgers over the next two games to cap off their historic season with a title.

So it was Irony Town Friday night when the Red Sox let a 6-4 lead slip through their fingers, thanks to a shaky and out of character blown save from Brandon Workman and a botched fielding attempt from right

fielder J.D. Martinez that combined push a Friday night game into Saturday morning for the second time in as many tries by the Red Sox in greater Los Angeles.

Six full innings later, Mookie Betts salvaged the two-day affair with a home run – his second of the game, which he led off with a homer – that led to the 7-6 win.

Had the evening Bandersnatched into a loss, no doubt Red Sox scriveners would be called in for autopsy duties, elbow-deep into the cadaver, prioritizing out the 15 or so different causes of death while calling for heads to roll.

But besides ruining a planned night of beauty sleep, what the victory meant in the immediate was that the Red Sox ended their Friday and began their Saturday in the exact same position they began: 5½ games out of the AL wild card.

With far less drama and many fewer innings, two of the teams ahead of the Red Sox, the A's and the Rays, each won, meaning the Red Sox stayed in place while another day was scratched off the baseball calendar.

Gearing up for Saturday night's game, the 73-62 Red Sox stood very much in the shadow of both their 2019 foes and their 2018 selves who they had been led to believe they would resemble.

Their first 134 games have done little to show that the Red Sox have that “extra” something last year's team had.

If the victory earned in nine plus six extra innings in Game 135 opened the door to finally allowing the 2019 Red Sox to become the best they can be, they sounded ready to rush through the threshold.

“We're about to find out – we've got to show up tomorrow, we've got to keep winning,” said manager Alex Cora, sporting a 12:45 a.m. Pacific time shadow. “We did a few good things today, others not that good. If we want to play in October, we better play better, honestly. It's not easy, I know it's going to be hard to pull this off. We've got the talent, but we've got to get locked in, we've got to do it. There's a lot of good teams playing out there, and the teams that we're chasing, they're playing pretty solid baseball. We've got to keep going, we can't stop now. We've been playing good for 10 or 12 days, and it's not the time now to relax and end up not doing it.”

Betts sounded as curious and as tired as anyone.

“It felt like yesterday, I guess it kind of was yesterday – just, I don't even know how long that game was,” said Betts. “Every win is important, so we have to pull ourselves together.

“Every win is going to give us that fuel. It's crunch time. Every little thing is magnified. I'm glad we won today.”

One of the more twisted threads to the most recent Friday long night in LA was that Eovaldi started the game and pitched very well, allowing (again) just one run in four innings. And similar-but-different to how Eovaldi was brought to the Red Sox last year to bolster their rotation, the 2019 rotation replacement solution, Andrew Cashner, dominated with his four hitless innings of final relief.

“Thankfully, we were able to come out on top of this one,” said Eovaldi, before leaving with the rest of the team for a quick night's sleep in an Orange County hotel.

The Red Sox had two more games left to play against a Los Angeles baseball team.

Not much time left to find out how this saga will end.

Brock Holt's career year deserves more of Red Sox' attention

Jason Mastrodonato

Brock Holt hasn't been this hot since 2014, when John Farrell discovered he was more than just a second baseman.

Which is why some of us are still scratching our heads over the Red Sox benching Holt last Sunday, when they had a chance to sweep the Padres and gain a crucial game in the wild card standings.

Chris Owings got the start, entered the game 1-for-13 with nine strikeouts and then went 0-for-2 in the Red Sox' 3-1 loss.

Manager Alex Cora's reasoning was that Holt needs rest. He has a history of breaking down from frequent everyday use and Cora doesn't want that to happen.

Hold on a second. Rest in April and May is easy to understand. Cora's rest schedule worked well in 2018. But how does rest remain the priority on a team that's got a 2 percent chance to make the postseason and will probably have October off? There are 30 games left in the season and the Sox are worried about a guy who had played in just 60 games this year breaking down now.

What are the Red Sox saving Holt for, so that he can be at optimal health and well-rested entering free agency?

The only logical explanation is that Holt has an injury that Cora is covering up for. But Holt didn't look hurt when he played Tuesday in Colorado and went 3-for-4 with 2 RBI and a walk. He played again Wednesday, though he went 0-for-5 in that game.

It's been a remarkable season for Holt, who entered Wednesday with the league's best average (.357) since May 27, when he returned from an eye injury. His .423 on-base percentage was tied with Alex Bregman for best in the league in that span.

We live in an age when hitting the ball as hard as you can and as high as you can seems to be the priority. Holt is one of the few remaining holdovers, a pure contact hitter who rarely gets beat by a fastball and can hold his own against lefties or righties. He's a quality at-bat at a time when most teams aren't prioritizing quality at-bats.

The well-rested Holt should get paid decently in free agency. He's not quite on Ben Zobrist's level of dominance and consistency, and will not get anywhere close to Zobrist's four-year, \$56 million deal he signed with the Cubs before the 2016 season. Zobrist was older, entering his age 35 season, but he'd been a more valuable everyday player.

In Zobrist's five years before free agency, he hit .272 with a .796 OPS while averaging 148 games a year.

In Holt's five seasons before free agency, he's hit .272 with a .733 OPS while averaging just 92 games per year, largely due to trouble with concussions.

But Holt is just 31 years old and can still play a great second base while proving more than serviceable around the the infield and outfield.

A better comparison might be the former Pirates' All-Star utility man, Josh Harrison, who hit .284 with a .743 OPS in his five years before entering free agency at 30. But Harrison's numbers had faded over his recent years in Pittsburgh and he ended up getting a one-year deal with the Tigers worth just \$2 million. He was released in August after hitting just .176.

How much money Holt deserves is probably not the same as how much money he'll get, given the Sox are going to be extremely limited financially if they want to avoid the highest tier of the luxury tax again in

2020. But he's so connected to the club and city that one might think he'd be interested in sticking around at a discounted price.

The Sox sure could use him. Besides Holt, it's largely been a disaster at second base this year.

Second base looks bright again

Cora has made a lot of impressive moves in his two years as manager but sticking with Eduardo Nunez as often as he did was not one of them. Nunez, statistically one of the least valuable major leaguers since the start of the 2018 season, got 174 plate appearances at second base for this year's Red Sox team. He hit .228 with two homers and played well-below average defense before he was let go.

Owings, Tzu-Wei Lin and Dustin Pedroia totaled 61 plate appearances at second base and hit .125 without a home run.

One could look to Michael Chavis and feel OK about his work at second base going forward. For someone who had barely played the position, he played well enough to think he might become above average with regular work there. He's got a ton of power and is clearly a determined individual, but he cooled off quickly after a hot start and it remains to be seen if his all-or-nothing approach at the plate will be sustainable, particularly if MLB fixes the problem with the baseballs next year.

BOSTON, MA. – JUNE 13: Jeff Mathis #2 of the Texas Rangers watches as Marco Hernandez #40 of the Boston Red Sox celebrates his home run during the fifth inning of the MLB game at Fenway Park on June 13, 2019 in Boston, Massachusetts. (Staff Photo By Matt Stone/MediaNews Group/Boston Herald)
Chavis is one guy they might have to consider trading if he can net them a quality young pitcher. Especially if Holt returns next year.

And don't sleep on Marco Hernandez at second base. Hernandez clearly deserves a shot at some regular playing time. He entered Wednesday hitting .325 in 39 games at second this year after a remarkable comeback from shoulder surgery.

"He's healthy," Cora said this week. "He can run, he can put pressure on the defense and we'll see where it takes us. We do believe in him. We think that he's a guy that can contribute but obviously he hasn't been healthy for a while. The fact that he's here that's the first step. We'll see where it takes us."

Holt and Hernandez is not a bad combination at second base. If Chavis is there too, there's some depth at the position for the first time since Pedroia was a healthy regular.

The search begins for more starting pitching

As soon as the Red Sox fall out of the wild card race, maybe they can use the final few weeks of the regular season to get a look at some pitchers who might be able to contribute in 2020.

Problem is, the list isn't a long one.

Red Sox prospect Tanner Houck pitches for the Lowell Spinners during the 2017 season at Lelacheur Park in Lowell. Photo by Kelly O'Connor of the Lowell Spinners.

Tanner Houck, the first-round pick in 2017, was moved to the bullpen after being promoted to Triple-A Pawtucket. The 23-year-old is having success in that role, with a 2.21 ERA and 23 strikeouts to 12 walks in 20- $\frac{1}{3}$ innings since his promotion.

Jay Groome, drafted No. 7 overall in 2016, just started pitching again after Tommy John surgery and still needs significant time to develop.

Denyi Reyes (4.24 ERA) and Bryan Mata (5.79 ERA) have been getting knocked around a bit since their promotions to Double-A this year.

There isn't a ton of depth to point to. Finding young and cost-controlled starters is going to be the clear priority this winter.

Especially given the Sox' two more expensive and important starters, Chris Sale and David Price, recently got injections to deal with injuries that don't always go away.

Price had an injection meant to kill a cyst on his left wrist. Cysts in the wrist can often be related to carpal tunnel, which Price experienced last year. These injuries are fairly unique for pitchers.

Chad Gaudin had been the only person in the last decade to need time on the injured list with carpal tunnel until Brett Cecil this year. Cecil hasn't pitched all year after undergoing surgery to relieve carpal tunnel in April.

Gaudin had carpal tunnel in 2013 and that ended his big league career at age 30. He's been pitching in Mexico since 2016.

Price has continued to be quite durable throughout his career, but it's something the Sox will have to consider when trying to avoid the same lack of starting depth that hurt them so badly in 2019.

Sale's issue is an entirely different situation.

He said he has no ligament damage and no tear in his elbow, but pitchers with elbow inflammation don't have the most encouraging track record of returning quickly and effectively.

Obviously, every elbow is different and every player returns from elbow inflammation in different timetables with different effectiveness.

But it's worth a look at some recent history to determine the risk in relying on 200 innings from Sale next year.

Taking a look at last year, there were 10 pitchers who went on the disabled list with elbow inflammation during the regular season, eight of whom were younger than Sale. Four of the 10 have not thrown a single inning in the big leagues this year, while four others are having better seasons than they did a year ago. Two have been worse.

Combined, the 10 pitchers have thrown 371 big league innings this year (37 innings each, on average) and posted a 4.72 ERA.

What does this mean for Sale? Not a whole lot except to say anything could happen. Maybe he's better, maybe he's worse, maybe he doesn't pitch at all.

But with the two staff aces coming off seasons in which they needed injections for injuries, the Red Sox front office must be diligently prepared with starting depth going into next season.

Here's the list of pitchers who spent time on the DL for elbow inflammation during the 2018 season:

Erik Goeddel, 29, Dodgers
Time on DL: Aug. 16 until Nov. 1
2018 stats: 36.2 IP, 2.95 ERA
2019 stats: N/A

Shelby Miller, 27, Diamondbacks
Time on DL: July 12 until Sept. 29
2018 stats: 16 IP, 10.69 ERA
2019 stats: 44 IP, 8.59 ERA

Ryan Tepera, 30, Blue Jays
Time on DL: June 28 until July 15
2018 stats: 64.2 IP, 3.62 ERA
2019 stats: 11 IP, 6.55 ERA

Jordan Lyles, 27, Brewers
Time on DL: June 24 until July 29
2018 stats: 87.2 IP, 4.11 ERA
2019 stats: 109.1 IP, 4.69 ERA

Evan Marshall, 28, Indians
Time on DL: June 19 until Aug. 8
2018 stats: 7 IP, 7.71 ERA
2019 stats: 38 IP, 2.84 ERA

Jose Valdez, 28, Giants
Time on DL: May 19 until June 1
2018 stats: 5 IP, 12.60 ERA
2019 stats: N/A

Adam Wainwright, 36, Cardinals
Time on DL: May 14 until Sept. 10
2018 stats: 40.1 IP, 4.46 ERA
2019 stats: 135.1 IP, 4.52 ERA

Braden Shipley, 26, Diamondbacks
Time on DL: May 5 until May 18
2018 stats: 5 IP, 7.20 ERA
2019 stats: N/A (85.1 IP, 6.54 ERA in Triple-A)

Nick Goody, 27, Indians
Time on DL: May 3 until Nov. 1
2018 stats: 11.2 IP, 6.94 ERA
2019 stats: 33.1 IP, 2.16 ERA

Keynan Middleton, 24, Angels
Time on DL: April 29 until May 10
2018 stats: 17.2 IP, 2.04 ERA
2019 stats: N/A (9 IP, 1.00 ERA in minors)

Red Sox losing ground in New England
Sports fans in New England aren't paying the Red Sox as much attention as they used to.

At the All-Star break, TV ratings on NESN were down 14 percent from last year and it's hard to imagine those have improved as they've fallen further out of the playoff picture.

There was similar data this week in the annual New England Sports Survey, which was conducted by Channel Media and Market Research.

More than 16,000 New Englanders were surveyed this August.

Asked which team was their favorite, 50 percent of the participants chose the Patriots, 26 percent chose the Red Sox, 11 percent the Bruins and 10 percent the Celtics.

Asked which team fans would follow if they could only follow one, 58 percent chose the Pats, 15 percent chose the Bruins, 14 percent chose the Sox and 9 percent the Celtics.

Fans evidently weren't too happy with Red Sox leadership, despite the World Series title last year.

Asked which ownership group has done the best job, 67 percent chose Robert Kraft's Patriots, 14 percent chose Jeremy Jacobs' Bruins, 7 percent chose Kraft's Revolution and 6 percent each chose Wyc Grousbeck's Celtics and John Henry's Red Sox. Henry has had the highest payroll in baseball each of the last two years.

Asked which coach they most admire, 63 percent said Bill Belichick, 16 percent said Cora and 9 percent each said Brad Stevens and Bruce Cassidy.

Asked if they were satisfied with the general manager's performance, 84 percent were pleased with Belichick, 46 percent with Don Sweeney, 34 percent with Bruce Arenas, 29 percent with Danny Ainge and just 20 percent with Dave Dombrowski.

*** *MassLive.com***

Jimenez, Red Sox rising prospect, hits corn kernels that cousins pitch to him in Dominican Republic

Christopher Smith

Red Sox prospect Gilberto Jimenez's favorite hitting drill involves cereal grain instead of a baseball.

"I hit corn. Little pieces of corn. The little kernels," Jimenez told MassLive.com on Friday through a translator. "It's to focus on my concentration."

His cousins pitch the kernels overhand to him. They also use them for soft toss.

He said he started doing it because of "the limited resources" he had in the Dominican Republic.

"It's not going to hurt anybody and it's just so small ... when I go to the game, now I see a ball that looks like a beach ball," he said.

"I love doing it," he added.

The 19-year-old outfielder has emerged as a top organizational prospect. Both MLB Pipeline and SoxProspects.com rank him the No. 7 prospect in the organization.

The speedy switch-hitter is batting .366 with a .398 on-base percentage, .480 slugging percentage, .878 OPS, three homers, three triples, 11 doubles and 19 RBIs in 57 games (246 plate appearances) for Short Season Lowell.

He went 82-for-257 (.319) with a .384 on-base percentage, .420 slugging percentage, .804 OPS, 10 doubles, eight triples, 22 RBIs, 42 runs and 16 steals in 67 games for the Dominican Summer League Red Sox last year.

Jimenez — a big fan of Red Sox star Mookie Betts — has come a long way in a brief time.

He never played baseball until 13 years old. He turned 19 on July 8, and so he has played the sport for only six years.

"I just didn't have plans to play," Jimenez said. "I just kind of said, 'All right. I'm going to go for it.'"

Nobody encouraged him to try it. He decided on his own to give baseball a chance.

"I saw I can play," he said.

Tag was the game Jimenez played the most during his childhood in the Dominican.

"That was a big part of my growing up," Jimenez said.

He received only a \$10,000 bonus when Boston signed him out of the Dominican Republic on Aug. 2, 2017. Most top amateur international prospects sign on the day each new signing period begins (July 2 each year).

Some scouts "didn't like me as a player," he said. "Just kind of went under the radar."

Jimenez — who also is a big fan of Rafael Devers' favorite restaurant (Chipotle) — said Red Sox scouts first saw him play in his hometown.

"Just because he didn't get a high bonus doesn't mean he wasn't somebody we liked. He's somebody that wasn't on the showcase circuit," Red Sox assistant GM Eddie Romero told MassLive.com in July. "We loved his athleticism. He was a little raw when we saw him. But he was somebody that was coming along quickly. Now that he's gotten into pro ball, he's kind just of taken off."

He obviously enjoyed tag because he's so speedy. He wants to improve as a base stealer entering next season, but he has swiped 14 bases in 19 attempts this summer.

"Obviously there's exciting four- or-five tool potential there," Romero said. "And for him to have success this early on, especially with not having been a switch-hitter for a long time, we're really excited to see about his potential. The fact that he's gotten off to this kind of start is really, really good for him."

Jimenez added, "I've got to work on the power."

Ryan Brasier, Boston Red Sox bullpen give up 7 runs in eighth, suffer AL-leading 26th blown save in loss to Angels

Christopher Smith

Ryan Brasier failed to hold a one-run lead in the eighth inning and the Red Sox suffered their American League-leading 26th blown save. Boston is one behind the Nationals (27) for the major league lead.

A 4-3 Red Sox lead against the Angels turned into a 10-4 loss at Angel Stadium. Brasier gave up six earned runs on five hits (four singles, one double) and one walk. His ERA inflated to 5.06.

Kole Calhoun's RBI single tied it. David Fletcher's RBI double gave the Angels the lead. Albert Pujols' three-run homer against Josh Smith put the game well out of reach.

The Red Sox could have added to their one-run lead in the top of the eighth. They loaded the bases with one out but failed to score when Brock Holt grounded into a double play.

J.D. Martinez went 2-for-3 with a double, two RBIs and one run. He's 13-for-29 (.448) with five homers, two doubles, 17 RBIs and 10 runs in seven games on the trip.

Betts has gone 11-for-31 (.355) with two homers, two doubles, five RBIs and six runs on the trip.

Martinez's 348-foot double to right field put the Red Sox ahead 1-0 in the first inning.

Mike Trout's RBI single tied the game in the bottom of the second. But Martinez put the Red Sox ahead 2-1 in the third with a single to center.

Andrew Benintendi added another RBI single during the third to make it 3-1. The Angels tied it in the third, then Betts' sacrifice fly in the fourth put Boston ahead 4-3.

Boston Red Sox sign starter Jhoulys Chacin to minor-league deal, per source

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox have agreed to a minor-league deal with starter Jhoulys Chacin, multiple sources confirmed Saturday afternoon. The expectation is Chacin will join the major-league roster after rosters expand Sept. 1.

Chacin, 31, is an 11-year major-league veteran who had a 3-10 record and 5.79 ERA in 19 starts for the Brewers this season. The righty was released Monday by Milwaukee and threw a bullpen in front of Sox evaluators Friday at Angel Stadium.

Chacin will give the Sox an innings-eater throughout September with lefty Chris Sale out for the season with an elbow injury. It's unclear whether the team views Chacin as a starter or a reliever, as he made 12 relief appearances for the Angels two years ago.

The Sox currently have David Price, Eduardo Rodriguez, Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi in its rotation approaching a stretch of 10 games in 10 days, so it would make sense to install Chacin in the rotation. Later in September, when the schedule includes more off days, he may be used as a reliever.

Chacin owns a 4.00 ERA in 249 big-league appearances (221 starts) with the Rockies, Diamondbacks, Braves, Angels, Padres and Brewers. He had a 15-8 record and 3.50 ERA in 35 starts for Milwaukee last year.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Can the Red Sox make a playoff surge in September?

Kevin Thomas

So far it's been the year of the tease.

Remember when the Boston Red Sox overcame that lousy 6-13 start to the season by winning 16 of their next 22 games?

On their way to the top? No. Instead, Boston then went 7-10 and stumbled back into so-so land.

Then there was the sizzling July that began with a 14-7 record ... to be followed by an eight-game losing streak – including four defeats to the Tampa Bay Rays, a team Boston continues to chase.

Heading into Saturday night's game in Anaheim, the Red Sox are trying to make another run – winning 10 of 13.

Sustainable?

This Red Sox team offers no proof that it can keep winning. Despite its \$227 million payroll – compared to Tampa Bay's \$62 million – and an array of All-Stars, Boston has failed to make a meaningful push.

The Red Sox feature a fearsome foursome – Mookie Betts, Rafael Devers, Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez – that is the best quartet atop any lineup.

But the other foursome has faltered. The rotation is a wreck:

- Chris Sale (4.40 ERA) is out for the season with elbow trouble.
- David Price (4.36) last won a game on July 7 and has been on the injured list since Aug. 4. Price is due back Sunday, when his outing likely will be limited.
- Rick Porcello has a 5.42 ERA.
- Nathan Eovaldi was a reliever for a month after coming off the injured list. Back in the rotation, he's made three starts, the longest lasting four innings.

The "fifth" starter, Eduardo Rodriguez has become the ace (16-5, 3.97).

The starting troubles have worn down the bullpen.

So when we ask if the Red Sox can put together a sustainable streak to vault them into the postseason, color it doubtful ... but not completely out of the question.

Heading into Saturday, Boston was 5½ games behind Oakland for a playoff spot (with Tampa Bay also in the way, one game behind the A's).

A sizable hurdle but other teams have pulled it off.

The most recent memory is a painful one for Boston fans. On Sept. 1, 2011, the Red Sox led the American League East by a half-game over the Yankees.

Regardless, Boston seemed playoff-bound with a nine-game lead over Tampa Bay, should the Red Sox have to settle for a wild-card spot.

But not only did New York vault past the Red Sox, so did Tampa Bay – going 17-9 in its last 26 games while Boston stumbled in at 7-19.

Going back a bit farther, the 1995 Seattle Mariners trailed the Los Angeles Angels by 6 1/2 games with 27 to go. Seattle went 18-9, the Angels 11-15, with the Mariners then beating the Angels in the tiebreaker game.

But Boston's hurdle involves multiple teams.

In 1964, the St. Louis Cardinals were in third place, trailing the Phillies by 8 1/2 games and the Reds by two. In the stretch run, St. Louis went 19-8 to win the pennant as Philadelphia (10-18) faltered, and Cincinnati (16-11) couldn't keep up.

The 2007 Colorado Rockies offer the brightest example of hope.

With 27 games to go, the Rockies had only the seventh-best record in the National League (69-66), with one wild-card spot available. The Rockies needed a remarkable run combined with the opposition crumbling. Colorado went 20-7 while San Diego (14-13), the Mets (13-14) and Dodgers (12-15) all tumbled. The Rockies beat the Padres in a tiebreaker and kept rolling until meeting pitcher Josh Beckett and the Red Sox in the World Series.

So Boston needs a surge, and two of the three other wild-card contenders to trip up.

Cleveland, which recently led the American League Central, is now contending for the first wild-card spot. After Friday's loss in Tampa Bay, the Indians have gone 7-19. They lead Oakland by a half-game, Tampa Bay by one and Boston by six.

The Indians have a favorable schedule, although there are six games with division-leading Minnesota. Cleveland's weakness is offense (10th in the American League in runs), but it features a league-leading ERA (3.62).

Tampa Bay, which is ninth in runs, looked ready to fade in July, but has the pitching (3.65 ERA) to remain ahead. Tampa Bay plays three games this week against Baltimore, and also has seven games against the Blue Jays. Its key homestand is Sept. 20-25 – four games with Boston, two with the Yankees.

Oakland is rolling. On June 8 the A's were 32-33. Since then they are 46-23 with their longest losing streak three games (once). Oakland can score runs (fifth-best in the league) and pitch (4.06 ERA, fourth in the AL). The schedule is favorable with four games against Detroit and three against Kansas City.

Boston has the offense (third in runs) but it's 4.65 ERA ranks seventh in the league. The pitching staff must reinvent itself quickly.

Two key parts of the schedule: this week's homestand against Minnesota (three games) and the Yankees (four), and the four games later at Tampa Bay.

The Red Sox have no more time to tease.

*** *RedSox.com***

'One bad inning' dooms Red Sox's bullpen game

Sarah Wexler

A bullpen game the day after a 15-inning marathon didn't sound like a recipe for success for the Red Sox.

Sure enough, things didn't work out for Boston on Saturday night at Angel Stadium, as Ryan Brasier couldn't hold a one-run lead in the eighth and the Red Sox fell to the Angels, 10-4.

"It wasn't a horrible game, it was just one bad inning," manager Alex Cora said. "We had bases loaded with one out [in the top of the eighth] with the chance to add on. It doesn't happen. They came back and they scored seven. Up 'til there, we felt good. We had good at-bats, we played the game right, it just didn't happen."

Eight pitchers were required to get through 11 innings on Friday. Four of them pitched on Saturday, including Brasier. Coming off that 20-pitch outing, Brasier was knocked around in his two-thirds of an inning, getting tagged for five earned runs on five hits and an intentional walk in a seven-run inning for the Halos.

"Ball just kind of falling back to the middle of the plate," Brasier said of what went wrong. "I made a couple good pitches that got slapped off for singles, and they just fell today."

Brian Goodwin's two-run single brought Brasier's night to a close, as he was lifted for Josh A. Smith, who deepened the deficit by allowing a three-run homer to Albert Pujols.

Prior to Friday and Saturday, Brasier had pitched on back-to-back days 18 times in 2019. In those games, he's allowed nine earned runs in 16 1/3 innings (4.96 ERA), with a .281 batting average and a .813 OPS allowed. On one or more days of rest, he has a 3.48 ERA (12 earned runs in 31 innings).

"It's our job," said Brasier, about pitching on consecutive days when needed. "It's my job to get ready to go and go out there and perform, and tonight, I didn't get the job done."

Overall, it's been a taxing couple of games for Red Sox relievers, who threw a combined 337 pitches between Friday and Saturday. The bright side is that the timing is as good as any in the season, with big league rosters expanding on Sunday and the reinforcements coming in the form of three yet-to-be-named pitchers. The Red Sox also have a day off on Monday to further refresh.

The A's lost and the Rays won on Saturday, so those teams are currently tied for the second American League Wild Card spot, while the Red Sox are 5 1/2 games back, having missed the chance to pick up a game in that hunt.

"The up and down? That's part of it," said Cora. "Pitch by pitch, inning by inning, play by play, that's the beauty of trying to make it to the playoffs. Tomorrow, we'll show up and see where we're at, and we'll go after it."

Red Sox sign ex-Brewer Chacin to Minors deal

Sarah Wexler

The Red Sox made a move to bolster their pitching depth by signing right-hander Jhoulys Chacin to a Minor League deal on Saturday.

Chacin, who was released by the Brewers on Monday, worked out with the Red Sox on Friday at Angel Stadium and threw a bullpen session. The 31-year-old has been on the injured list since July 25 with a right oblique strain. In 19 starts this season, he has a 5.79 ERA (5.69 FIP) and a 1.56 WHIP, with 80 strikeouts vs. 39 walks.

Even with his numbers down compared to last year, the Red Sox liked what they saw from Chacin enough to take the flier on him.

"I just saw part of the bullpen," manager Alex Cora said. "The slider's still good. Good fastball command. He's healthy."

Big league rosters expand on Sunday, and Cora noted that the Red Sox will be bringing up three pitchers and two position players, though he could not yet provide names. Whether Chacin joins the Red Sox when rosters expand or at a later date, signing him prior to Saturday's 11:59 p.m. ET ensures that he is eligible for postseason rosters, should Boston get there. The Red Sox entered Saturday 5 1/2 games out of the second American League Wild Card slot.

Chacin's potential role with the Red Sox is also not yet clear. They've got enough uncertainty in the rotation that there could be room for Chacin at the back end. However, Chacin hasn't started in over a month and would likely require some stretching out -- though time is running out for that, as the Minor League regular seasons end on Monday.

Chavis sits again

Second baseman Michael Chavis, on rehab assignment with Triple-A Pawtucket, was not in the lineup on Saturday after being scratched from the second game of a doubleheader on Friday with soreness in his right side.

"Hopefully, it's not that bad," said Cora. "It's kind of like the side, but it's not the oblique, it's the side. He just said that between games, he was swinging the bat, and they asked him how he's feeling, and he said, 'Oh, just a little tight.'"

Were it not for the setback, Chavis likely would have joined the Red Sox on Sunday for the series finale at Angel Stadium. Now things are a bit more up in the air, although Pawtucket's season ending Monday eliminates him staying there as a possibility.

“They were gonna check on him today, see how he reacted, how he feels, do the same thing tomorrow,” said Cora. “Most likely we’ll see him on Monday at Fenway, see where he’s at, and we’ll go from there.”

* **WEEI.com**

Red Sox reality check: Sept. 1 has finally arrived

Rob Bradford

There have been two phrases you could count on Alex Cora busting out at least a few times a week over the past month.

"We have been consistently inconsistent."

"We will see where we're at on Sept. 1."

Well, the first one seemed to be drifting off until Saturday night when the Angels' seven-run eighth inning led to a disastrous 10-4 loss for the Red Sox at Angel Stadium. All that goodwill which had built up heading into the final few innings, with Cora's club seemingly on its way to its sixth win in seven tries on the current road trip, just took a hard turn for the worse. (For a complete recap of the Sox' loss, [click here](#).)

Instead of making up some ground on Oakland and Cleveland, both of which had already lost by the time the collapse came around, the Red Sox found themselves heading into the series finale 5 1/2 games out of a Wild Card berth.

So that leads us to No. 2. August is officially over so according to Cora, it is fair to take stock of the situation.

The reactionary approach toward figuring out the Red Sox' lot in life would be to highlight their 25th blown save of the season, along with the inability by Ryan Brasier -- one of the bullpen's original foundation pieces -- to hold the lead, instead getting charged with six runs on five hits over just 2/3 innings. But uncovering this team's true existence should be more about the beginning than the end.

Up until Brasier came in the bullpen did what it had been doing for the past month, picking up the slack. This time it was the combination of Josh Taylor (who is understandably running on fumes), Marcus Walden, Brian Johnson (4 innings) and Matt Barnes that allowed the Red Sox' to cling to their lead.

Since Aug. 1 the Red Sox bullpen has thrown the fourth-most innings in the majors while allowing the second-lowest ERA and batting average against.

That's all well and good. The danger here, at this designated check-in point, is two-fold: 1. That these relievers aren't equipped to do this for another month; 2. That the starters never allow for a relief-pitching respite.

Brandon Workman has pitched in 18 more games than his previous career-high. Marcus Walden is already at 68 2/3 innings. This is the first time Darwinzon Hernandez is being asked to pitch an extra month. Matt Barnes has pitched in 200 games over the past three seasons. All potential red flags.

After the disastrous start to August, it has worked for the most part, allowing the Red Sox hang around heading into the final 26 games. But it's hard to imagine the Sox duplicating their recent success without some sort of starting pitching cavalry coming to the rescue. That conversation obviously starts with the return of David Price -- who gets his first chance to grab the role of a get-on-my-back-boys-kind-of-ace Sunday. Then there is Nathan Eovaldi, who showed signs of stepping up Friday night with four solid innings. And, of course, there are Eduardo Rodriguez and Rick Porcello, who each have helped keep their club's head above water over the past few weeks.

Maybe the Sox can catch lightning in a bottle with newly-signed Jhoulys Chacin, whose last two outings with the Brewers resulted in a combined 11 runs over 5 2/3 innings. It might be a longshot, but without Chris Sale or a productive Hector Velazquez that -- along with some extra arms due to roster expansion -- seem to be where they are at.

To this point, it is hard to comprehend the starting rotation stepping up out of nowhere and changing a narrative that that was built on the 10th-fewest innings of any group of starters in the big leagues along with a collective ERA of 4.99. That is the Sept. 1 here and now. As Cora pointed out all along the way, this is the time to figure out how to adjust to where you're at and what you have.

Now that we've checked in, maybe we should reschedule once again. See you in a week.

Red Sox take a look at free-agent starting pitcher Jhoulys Chacin

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox may be on the verge of signing a pitcher who served as a major league team's Opening Day starter this season.

Before anyone gets too excited the pitcher in question is Jhoulys Chacin, who was just recently released by Milwaukee -- a team also in need of pitching -- after a horrific 2019 campaign. The 31-year-old had totaled a 5.79 ERA in 19 starts with the Brewers, who were forced to eat the remainder of the \$6 million owed Chacin this season.

According to the Boston Herald, Chacin worked out at Angel Stadium for both Dave Dombrowski and Alex Cora after the Red Sox president of baseball operations got a positive report from scout Steve Peck following a workout in Arizona.

Despite his subpar 2019 season, Chacin does represent a starting pitcher with a track record of success. In 2018 he went 15-8 with a 3.50 ERA in a National League-best 35 starts. The year before he went 13-10 with a 3.89 ERA with San Diego.

"Usual, same stuff -- slider, sinker, veteran guy, see where it takes us," Cora told reporters.

Dombrowski told the Herald that if the Red Sox do sign Chacin he would not be added to the team prior to Sept. 1 when rosters expand.

Chacin actually won his Opening Day start this season, beating the Cardinals by allowing three runs over 5 1/3 innings.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

MLB Notebook: Red Sox, Chris Sale far from out of the woods

Sean McAdam

When the Red Sox announced that Chris Sale's visit to Dr. James Andrews earlier this month resulted in the famed surgeon recommending a treatment of platelet-rich plasma injections for his ailing left elbow, it was seen as a significant victory for the pitcher and the franchise.

After all, whenever a pitcher is linked to the nationally-known orthopedist, the prognosis is generally not positive. Far more often than not, Andrews is in a position of confirming a known diagnosis and Tommy John surgery is frequently the suggested course of action.

When the Red Sox put out a release that made no mention of any such procedure, it came with the proverbial good news/bad news element: Sale wouldn't be available for the rest of this season, thus dimming the team's already faint playoff hopes; on the other hand, the implication was that, with the PRP regiment, rest and rehab, Sale would be good to go in the spring of 2020, just when his five-year, \$145-million contract kicked in.

Twice, in a media availability in the Red Sox clubhouse the day after he returned from seeing Andrews in Pensacola, Fla., Sale was asked directly if he had been assured by the surgeon that he hadn't suffered a tear in his ulnar collateral ligament — the condition which often leads to a Tommy John procedure.

Twice, Sale answered in the affirmative. In other words, Andrews had given him that assurance.

But weeks later, a grimmer reality has surfaced, based on a number of factors.

1. Sale is notoriously controlling when it comes to releasing information about his own health.

Last summer, when Sale was sidelined with a shoulder injury for much of the final two months, the pitcher specifically instructed the organization to offer little in the way of specifics related to the injury.

The Red Sox announced only that Sale was dealing with "shoulder inflammation." When reporters asked for a more detailed diagnosis — bursitis? rotator cuff impingement? — the Sox countered by saying that they couldn't provide any additional information because of federal HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) laws which safeguard medical information if the patient requests.

A Red Sox source later confirmed that Sale had specifically asked the team to withhold an official diagnosis, and as they must under federal law, the organization complied.

Sale's penchant for secrecy surfaced again in the postseason when he was hospitalized with an intestinal infection. When he was released, Sale, straight-faced, insisted that the condition had come about because a belly ring had become infected. It was a humorous bit of misdirection, but again, telling: rare among modern pro athletes, Sale zealously guards any details about any injury or personal setback.

(A baseball source later confirmed, as many suspected, that Sale had developed an intestinal reaction to anti-inflammatory medication, prescribed for his ailing shoulder).

This month, it's been more of the same. When I emailed president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski to confirm what Sale twice said to be true — namely, that Andrews had assured him that he was not suffering from a sprain or tear of the ulnar collateral ligament — Dombrowski responded thusly:

"Due to HIPPA laws, I can only release what you've been given. You have to ask Chris if you have additional questions."

On the face of it, that would sound ominous. If Sale indeed got a clean bill of health in terms of the structural soundness of the UCL, you would think he and the Red Sox would highlight that.

2. The very nature of PRP treatment is to sometimes treat small tendon and ligament tears.

According to the U.S Health and Human Service's web site: "Platelet-rich plasma (PRP) therapy uses injections of a concentrate on of a patient's own platelets to accelerate the healing of injured tendons, ligaments, muscles and joints. In this way, PRP injections use each individual patient's own healing system to improve musculoskeletal problems."

That would seem to indicate that Sale could be suffering from some sort of tear, slight or not, with the team and Sale hoping — perhaps against hope — that the PRP treatment could forestall a surgical procedure that could sideline him into the 2021 season.

Indeed, often, PRP treatments are viewed as something of a last resort, a last-ditch effort to avoid surgery. Sale's teammate Brandon Workman hoped that PRP therapy would do that for him in mid-April of 2015. But when the treatment didn't alleviate the issue, he underwent Tommy John surgery two months later. He didn't pitch again in the majors until 2017.

Dr. Thomas Gill, who served as the Red Sox medical director and is currently the director of Boston Sports Medicine, said recently that PRP treatment only occasionally works well enough to forego Tommy John surgery.

"Generally speaking," said Gill, "when you're treating an elbow with PRP, there are three scenarios: One, the ligament is intact, but it hurts. Two, there's a partial tear. Depending on the severity of the tear, you can sometimes continue to pitch effectively. Or three, there's a complete tear that has to be repaired."

The exact scenario facing Sale likely won't be known until the end of September or early October when he's again examined by Andrews.

3. Precedent isn't encouraging.

While the evidence suggests that Sale is suffering from some form of a tear, we don't know that with certainty.

However, if indeed there is a tear — regardless of the degree — it would seem as though it's only a matter of time before the ligament gives way completely.

"It's like a piece of rope," explained Gill, "and eventually, it becomes more and more frayed."

There are some exceptions to this case. Soon after he signed with the New York Yankees, Masahiro Tanaka was found to have a slight tear in his UCL. Somewhat miraculously, Tanaka has remained durable and effective in spite of the tear. As Joel Sherman of the New York Post noted recently, Tanaka is 22nd in the number of starts made since 2015 and 20th in innings.

But, Sherman also pointed out that while Tanaka has remained largely healthy and durable, he's never again reached the level of dominance he displayed in the first half of his first season with the Yankees (12-4, 2.51).

Or, it may well be that Sale experiences the same path followed by former Red Sox starter John Lackey. When Lackey was signed to a five-year deal, Gill cautioned then-GM Theo Epstein that Lackey's elbow was suspect and could well eventually need Tommy John.

Epstein structured a deal whereby Lackey effectively gave the Red Sox an "extra" year, at the major league minimum, if he were to miss a season with Tommy John surgery. Indeed, after two seasons in Boston, Lackey underwent the procedure.

It's easy to think the business of baseball is on a downturn.

It appears as though MLB attendance will drop for a fourth straight season. National TV ratings remain minuscule for all but the All-Star Game and postseason. Add in the gathering some clouds on the labor horizon — with many expecting a work stoppage when the current collective bargaining agreement expires after the 2021 season — and it seems like a bad time to be an owner.

Unless, that is, you happen to be an owner who is selling.

David Glass bought the Kansas City Royals from the Kauffman family in 2000 for \$96 million. He's about to sell the Royals, 20 years later, for an even \$1 billion. That's quite a return on investment.

While the Royals were his, Glass continually had one of the game's smallest payrolls. Only four times — 2015-2018 — did the Royals crack \$100 million in payroll expenditures. (The first time the Royals spent more than \$100 million in payroll was the year they won their first title in 35 years — 2015).

In 14 of the first 19 years of his ownership, the Royals were in the bottom third in payroll. In seven of those seasons, they were in the bottom five.

Unsurprisingly, expending little in the way of resources resulted in a mostly poor product on the field. Only five times in the 20-year Glass ownership did the Royals post a winning record. Only twice did they reach the postseason.

So while the Kauffman family insisted on local ownership committed to keeping the team in Kansas City, and to that extent, Glass fit the bill. Under him, Kauffman Stadium even got a huge modern makeover, bringing up to date a ballpark which is now almost a half-century old. (Of course, much of the funding for the stadium upgrades came from taxpayers — yet another example of the benefits of ownership).

In 20 years time, then, Glass has seen his investment increase ten-fold. He bought the Royals for under \$100 million and will fetch \$1 billion as his sale price.

Part of the reason for the explosion in franchise value is tied to local media rights. The team's TV deal is up after this year and a new long-term deal with a regional sports network is likely to net at least \$500 million for the next 10 years. It's possible the deal could be for as long as 15 years, but even a 10-year deal would cover half the cost of the franchise purchase for new owner John Sherman.

Think of that the next time you hear owners complain about salaries and other associated costs. The profit margin may not be realized on an annual basis, but the pending Royals' sale is a reminder that there's always a potential buyer eager to take a franchise off your hands.

And if you think the Royals — situated in one of the three smallest markets in the game — have seen their valuation go through the roof, what do you think that means for the Red Sox.

If the Royals are worth \$1 billion, then surely the Red Sox are, conservatively speaking, worth three times that. The current ownership group, led by John Henry and Tom Werner, paid \$660 million in 2002.

The Sox brand name, one of the strongest in North American professional sports, adds value. So, too, do the four titles won on this ownership's watch. And don't forget the real estate: while many franchises have sweetheart lease deals with local municipalities, the Sox own their own ballpark. The land alone is worth hundreds and hundreds of millions.

BSJ Game Report: Angels 10, Red Sox 4 – Bullpen blows it in 8th, costing Sox a chance to gain ground

Sean McAdam

Brasier meltdown does in Sox: Ryan Brasier came into the game in the eighth inning, with the Red Sox leading by a run and just six outs away from closing to within 4.5 games of the second wild-card spot. But by the end of the inning, Brasier had given up five hits, blown the lead and watched as the Angels went up 7-4. (Later, after Brasier left, Josh Smith gave up a three-run homer to Albert Pujols). It was the 26th blown save of the season for the Sox bullpen and second in as many nights. (The Sox coughed up a two-run lead in the ninth Friday night, but came back to win the game in the 15th). Since being promoted back from Pawtucket, Brasier has appeared in seven games before Saturday night and allowed just two hits and one run in seven innings. But Saturday, Brasier's location was poor as he continually left pitches out over the middle and paid the price with predictable results. "He just wasn't able to execute," offered Alex Cora.

Martinez continues to rake: J.D. Martinez has been the hottest hitter in the league for the last few weeks, and that didn't change Saturday night. In the first inning, he doubled home Mookie Betts for the first Red

Sox run of the night. In the third inning, it was more of the same, with Martinez singling Betts home from third. Those two plate appearances produced two RBI, giving Martinez 17 RBI in the seven games on this road trip. But this isn't just a hot week — Martinez has knocked in 41 runs in his last 39 games. On the current trip, the Sox have been getting very little from a slumping Rafael Devers (6-for-31, two RBI) and the bottom of the half of the Red Sox lineup hasn't been very productive. Martinez's hot streak over the last month has at times carried the Boston offense. On Saturday, through no fault of Martinez, it wasn't enough.

Sox get bunt happy: In a real departure from their usual approach, the Red Sox got down two successful sacrifice bunts Saturday and attempted a third, too, with the Angels committing an error on the try. In the fourth inning, with the game tied 3-3 and Brock Holt on board after a leadoff double, Sandy Leon pushed a bunt up the first baseline, advancing Holt to third, from where he scored when Betts followed with a sacrifice fly. In the eighth inning, leading by a run, the Sox had baserunners at first and second with no outs when Andrew Benintendi laid down a bunt to third, which succeeded in moving both runners into scoring position. But after a walk to load the bases, a double play ended the inning and the Sox didn't score. In all likelihood, Cora was playing for a run at a time, knowing that he navigate a tightrope on a bullpen game.

TURNING POINT

In that fateful eighth, Brock Holt, one of the team's better hitters in clutch situations, came to the plate with two down and the bases loaded. A single would have broken the game open and given the Sox a three-run lead. Instead, Holt bounced into a rally-killing 4-6-3 inning-ending double play and the Angels were out of a huge jam.

ONE DOWN

Brian Johnson: As the Red Sox attempted to piece together a bullpen game, it didn't begin well for Brian Johnson, who allowed two runs to the first five hitters he faced. But Johnson made some nice adjustments and retired 10 in a row, including three straight innings in which the Angels were set down 1-2-3.

ONE DOWN

Marco Hernandez: For the second straight night, Hernandez came off the bench to hit for Sam Travis when the Angels went to a righty reliever. On Saturday, Hernandez came up twice in the final two innings and went hitless, stranding four baserunners.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"It's my job to be ready and go out there and perform and I didn't get the job done." Ryan Brasier, when asked how difficult it was for so many relievers to pitch on back-to-back nights.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:

The Red Sox saw their streak of hitting a homer stop at 19 games, the second-longest streak in franchise history.

Martinez extended his hitting streak to eight straight games.

The seven runs allowed by the Boston bullpen in the eighth inning were the most runs allowed in any eighth inning for the Sox this season.

UP NEXT

In the series finale at 4:07 p.m., it will be LHP David Price (7-5, 4.36) vs. LHP Andrew Heaney (3-3, 3.95).

*** *The New York Times***

The Yankees Have a ‘Little Pedro.’ Will the Results Match the Resemblance?

James Wagner

Baseball players, even very good ones, have always come in all shapes and sizes. Look no further than Brett Gardner (5-foot-11) and Aaron Judge (6-foot-7), who patrol the Yankees outfield together.

Pitching, however, remains the domain of the tall.

Of the 8,981 players who have logged at least one appearance on the mound in the major leagues since 1901, only 4 percent — 367 players in more than a century of games — have been 5-9 or shorter, according to the statistics website Baseball Reference. As of Friday, in fact, there were only three pitchers of that stature in the majors, the most notable being the Mets starter Marcus Stroman, who is 5-7.

Those ranks may be about to grow. The Yankees’ top prospect, Deivi Garcia, 20, who is 5-9 and 163 pounds, could become the latest undersized pitcher to reach the major leagues when rosters expand on Sunday. (Even if he is not called up then, the team said he would be a key part of its future.)

The first-place Yankees, who decided not to add any pitching help at the July 31 trade deadline, may deploy Garcia during the final push toward the playoffs. He is a right-hander known as Pedrito or Little Pedro because of his similarities — in size, homeland and strikeout arsenal — to the Hall of Famer Pedro Martinez.

“I’ve had that nickname for a long time,” Garcia said in Spanish in an interview at PNC Field, the home of the Yankees’ Class AAA Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders. “Since before I really knew about Pedro.”

Like many young men in the Dominican Republic, Garcia dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player. As a boy, he usually played in the infield, and he said he loved hitting. But when he was 13, Garcia, his coaches and — soon enough — major league scouts discovered that his dazzling right arm might be more effective off a mound. The discovery was almost accidental, he said; he was asked to pitch one day and struck out most of the batters he faced.

Garcia embraced the switch because he saw in it a quicker path to signing with a major league organization. The play worked: In 2015, at 16, he accepted a \$200,000 signing bonus to join the Yankees.

That potent arm and an arsenal of pitches were what propelled Garcia through the minor leagues this season. He began the year with Class A Tampa, but after he dominated there he was promoted to Class AA Trenton, where he did the same. That led to another move, to Class AAA, but his results — despite the increasingly difficult opposition — remained impressive: In his combined statistics this season, Garcia has struck out batters at an exceptionally high rate: 161 times in just over 107 innings, through Friday.

Garcia’s jump to Scranton/Wilkes-Barre came after an appearance in the Futures Game, a showcase of baseball’s best prospects held during All-Star weekend in July. He has sputtered at his most recent stop, posting a 5.25 E.R.A. that his coaches suggested could be a byproduct of uneven command and perhaps his struggles adjusting to the new home run-prone ball in Class AAA this season. Also, Garcia’s curveball, one of his best pitches, hasn’t been as sharp as it was earlier in the year.

Regardless, coaches and teammates have raved about Garcia, the son of a doctor and a baseball trainer. He has been imperturbable on the mound and shown a curiosity to improve off it, from sharpening his already solid English to perfecting his craft.

“I’ll tell you what’s impressive for his age: his makeup, his poise, his competitiveness, and what I’m learning, his aptitude,” said Tommy Phelps, the RailRiders pitching coach. “He’s able to make adjustments and understand what he’s doing.”

Behind home plate during a recent start was the best vantage point to see how Garcia fooled opposing batters despite his limited velocity and his size, which he joked wasn't intimidating anyone. As he wound up to throw, Garcia twisted, angled his back toward home plate and dropped his arm behind his body, hiding the ball from the hitter. The ball reappeared, with a quick whip of his arm, at the last moment before being released.

Some coaches have tried minor adjustments to Garcia's delivery, but he said that this was his natural way of throwing. It helped Garcia that his fastball possessed above-average spin and fooled batters into thinking the ball was rising, which induced swings and misses even with velocity in the low 90s. Garcia is able to slip his fastball by batters because it appears faster, Phelps said, thanks to his ability to release the ball closer to the plate than a hitter might expect of a pitcher his size. "It's sneaky," Phelps said.

The Yankees so coveted Garcia that they resisted dealing him for pitching help at the trading deadline, even though they had said publicly that their staff was a weakness. As a result, there was more pressure to improve from within. They banked on starter Luis Severino and reliever Dellin Betances to return from injuries in September, but also on the potential call-up of Garcia, who could be eased into the major leagues by working out of the bullpen, like other top pitching prospects.

A signal that his call could come soon is that Yankees minor-league coaches have been careful with Garcia's pitch counts all season; he was recently moved to the RailRiders' bullpen because he had never thrown as many innings in a season as he did this year. But the switch had an added benefit: It served to audition him for a September in pinstripes.

"I have a big responsibility with this team," Garcia said. "Although I'm 20 years old, I want to show that they made a good decision by not trading me and leaving me on the team to help in any which way I can."

To do so, he will have to push back against deeply held conventional wisdom about pitchers. With pitchers throwing harder than ever these days, durability is always a concern. Add in Garcia's size, and some talent evaluators have wondered how his body will hold up to the demands of being a starting pitcher in the major leagues.

"When I was coming up, there wasn't much belief in the people of medium statures," said Martinez, 47, now an analyst for MLB Network. "Thankfully I was able to stay healthy and be successful in the big leagues, and doors have opened with new studies and new ways of thinking about the players of smaller statures.

"My suggestion is that maybe he can do the things I did to stay healthy and show the world that someone of medium stature, with good mechanics, control, work habits and a lot of discipline, can also last in the big leagues."

Growing up, Garcia said he heard often that his size would prevent him from signing with a team.

The comparisons to Martinez started when Garcia was a teenager. So he began learning more about Martinez's career and devouring videos of his pitching, particularly examining the way Martinez threw his changeup. There is a particular three-minute YouTube video of Martinez highlights that Garcia has watched before every start for the past two years.

"It motivates me to try to strike hitters out the same way," he said.

Yet while there are some similarities between the two pitchers, there are also many differences. Martinez was bigger (5-11, 170 pounds); he threw harder in his younger years (95 miles per hour or more); and his changeup is still considered one of the best pitches of all time. Still, when coaches or teammates call Garcia Pedrito or Little Pedro, he wears the name with pride.

While the two have never met — Martinez's commenting on one of Garcia's Instagram posts in July remains their sole interaction — Martinez called it an honor that Garcia looked up to him.

“I hope the future holds a lot of good for him, like it did for me,” Martinez said. “Or better.”

*** *The Los Angeles Times***

Mike Trout calls latest Tyler Skaggs news ‘tough’; Angels defeat Red Sox

Jack Harris

As he stuttered through his sentences, Mike Trout uttered the same word over and over again. A day after the revelation that late Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs had opioids in his system at the time of his passing, “tough” was the adjective Trout kept coming back to.

“When you have a relative or a teammate pass away, it’s tough.”

“It’s been a tough year for us emotionally, and obviously mentally.”

“Just a tough situation when this came out. Tough to put your mind to it.”

The pain caused by Friday’s release of Skaggs’ autopsy report — which revealed that fentanyl and oxycodone, along with a blood-alcohol level that surpassed the legal impairment limit, were found in the 27-year-old’s system when he died in his Texas hotel room July 1 — cut deep. A tender wound that had only recently begun to heal was ripped open, sending emotional shockwaves through the Angels’ clubhouse all over again.

“Every time you talk about anything Tyler has done, or did, it definitely reopens it,” Trout said. “We’re always thinking about him.

“It doesn’t change my view on Tyler. He made a big impact on my life, this team. I was kind of shocked when the news came out like that.”

Friday was the latest step in a difficult healing process. The Angels remain surrounded by Skaggs’ memory. His locker is still set up in the clubhouse. Images of his left-handed release and No. 45 are plastered around Angel Stadium.

Since Skaggs’ death, the rhythm of the season has offered the Angels their greatest distraction. Friday’s news sunk them back into a somber state.

“Trying to process it yourself, understand and move forward and create a new normal – it’s never normal,” pitcher Andrew Heaney, one of Skaggs’ closest friends on the team, said after Friday’s game. “It’s never going to be the same.

“It keeps getting brought up. It makes you think about the negative side of it and not being reminded of all the positive things. In that sense it’s tough. I think every day I think of him it’s always something positive.”

Tyler Skaggs

Instead of receiving closure, the Angels are facing a new series of questions that were triggered by the Tarrant County (Texas) medical examiner’s office’s report, and the subsequent statement from Skaggs’ family.

Trout and Heaney both said they weren’t aware of Skaggs having any sort of drug-related issues.

“Obviously, if I knew I would definitely have said something or did something,” Trout said. “It’s tough. You love Tyler. We didn’t know he was going through this.”

The Skaggs family also said in their statement that the circumstances surrounding Skaggs' death "may involve an employee of the Los Angeles Angels" and that they "will not rest until we learn the truth about how Tyler came into possession of these narcotics, including who supplied them."

Neither Trout nor Heaney had knowledge of that assertion.

"That was a shock to me," Trout said. "Leading up to it, I knew nothing about it. It's disappointing, but I don't know anything about that."

Echoed Heaney: "We don't have answers. Nobody has answers."

The Angels were offered more temporary respite Saturday night, coming from behind from to beat the Boston Red Sox 10-4 in front of 43,036 at Angel Stadium. Left-hander Dillon Peters kept the Angels close during a solid 6 1/3-inning, four-run, seven-hit, six-strikeout display. Then their offense exploded for a seven-run eighth inning.

Andrelton Simmons tied the score with an RBI single. David Fletcher lined a go-ahead double down the left-field line. Albert Pujols put an exclamation point on the inning with a three-run home run, tying him for 14th in all-time hits with Cal Ripken Jr. and giving him his 17th season with at least 20 home runs. With 653 all-time, he is seven behind Willie Mays for fifth place.

Trout went one for three with two walks (one intentional) in the win — which concluded a season-worst 9-17 month of August for the team — and recorded his 200th career stolen base in the second inning. That set another personal milestone for the two-time MVP, making him the youngest player to accumulate at least 200 stolen bases and 275 home runs. Yet, at just 28 years old, he's continually reminded of all the personal loss he's experienced too.

Last August, Trout's brother-in-law and former Angels pitching prospect Aaron Cox committed suicide, leading to Trout wearing the name "A. Cox" across the back of his jersey for a game. That tragedy left him "emotionally drained," he said. Skaggs' death hasn't been any easier to handle.

"Mentally it's a grind to get over it," Trout said. "Every time you do something, Tyler pops into your mind. Every day I still think about Aaron. It's tough."

Bedrosian put on IL

Pitcher Cam Bedrosian was put on the 10-day injured list because of a right forearm strain. Bedrosian, who also experienced elbow inflammation and tightness, had an MRI. However, neither Bedrosian — who has previously undergone Tommy John surgery — nor manager Brad Ausmus believes the injury to be serious.

"It's that time of year where things creep up," Bedrosian said. "I don't want to get to something where it gets worse and having to do something in the offseason. Just a precaution right now."

Ausmus said had it not been for the Angels 15-inning, bullpen-draining loss Friday, Bedrosian might not have needed to go on the injured list. Bedrosian said he'll be shut down for five to six days, but he expects to return before the end of the season.

*** *Associated Press***

Pujols, Trout help Angels rally for 10-4 win over Red Sox

Mike Trout and Albert Pujols have had plenty of big nights for the Los Angeles Angels, yet Saturday night's 10-4 victory over the Boston Red Sox was one of those games in which both reached milestones.

Trout became the youngest player to reach at least 275 home runs and 200 stolen bases, while Pujols' three-run drive in the eighth gave him his 17th season of 20 home runs or more.

Pujols' shot to right-center off Josh Smith helped cap a seven-run eighth inning. It is the 3,184th hit of Pujols' career, tying him with Cal Ripken Jr. for 14th all-time. It made him the fifth player with at least 17 seasons of 20 or more homers, joining Hank Aaron (20 seasons), Barry Bonds (19), Frank Robinson and Willie Mays (17).

"I've had an unbelievable career and still have another couple years left," the 39-year old first baseman said. "I just try to stay focused even through it has been challenging. Injuries happen. It hasn't been good since I left St. Louis but I work hard and don't take anything for granted."

Pujols has had a good weekend against Boston pitching with six hits and six RBI. He had his first four-hit game in two years in Friday's 15-inning loss.

Manager Brad Ausmus kept Pujols in Saturday's lineup because they were facing a lefty. Pujols was adamant that he was good to play, but Ausmus wanted to see for himself.

"I know he's going to tell me he feels great regardless. Usually I talk to guys face to face and I can tell by the body language. I guess he was right," Ausmus said.

Trout -- who was 1 for 3 with an RBI -- stole his 200th base during the second inning, becoming the first player to have at least 275 home runs and 200 stolen bases before their age-28 season. Trout turned 28 on Aug. 7, but age-season is defined by how old they are on June 30.

He is the seventh player in American League history to reach those marks -- Alex Rodriguez, Reggie Jackson, Jose Canseco, Joe Carter, Don Baylor and George Brett are the others.

Trout leads the majors with 43 homers this season and has 283 in his nine-year career.

"It's a pretty cool accomplishment. I was sitting on that one for a while, so I'm just happy I got it over with," he said.

Los Angeles trailed 4-3 going into the bottom of the eighth before blowing it open with six runs and five hits off Ryan Brasier (2-4). Andrelton Simmons' single drove in Justin Upton with the tying run before he scored on Fletcher's two-out double to left to put the Angels on top. Brian Goodwin added a two-run single with the bases loaded before Pujols' blast.

Luis Garcia (2-1) worked a scoreless eighth to get the win. The Red Sox had the bases loaded with one out but Garcia got Brock Holt to ground into a double play to get out of the inning.

"We had the matchups we liked and it just didn't happen. Brock has been clutch the whole season and he happened to hit into a double play," Boston manager Alex Cora said. "We didn't have a horrible game. We had just one bad inning."

J.D. Martinez extended his hitting streak to eight games with two hits along with two RBI. Mookie Betts added three hits.

FOR STARTERS

Boston went with an opener for the first time in Cora's two seasons due to Friday's extra-inning game.

Josh Taylor worked the first inning and got out of a one out, bases-loaded jam when he struck out Justin Upton and got Calhoun to fly out to left. The right-hander allowed one hit and walked two.

Dillon Peters went 6 1/3 innings for his second-longest outing of the season. The left-hander surrendered four runs (three earned) on seven hits with strikeouts.

ROSTER MOVE

The Red Sox signed pitcher Jhoulys Chacin to a minor-league deal. The right-hander threw a bullpen session Friday before being signed on Saturday.

Chacin was 3-10 with a 5.79 ERA in 19 starts for Milwaukee this season before being released on Monday. Cora said he did not know if Chacin would be added when rosters are expanded on Sunday.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Angels: P Cam Bedrosian was placed on the injured list due to right forearm strain. The right-hander is the 25th player to go on the IL this season, tying the club record from last year.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: David Price (7-5, 4.36 ERA) comes off the injured list and makes his first start since Aug. 4. The left hander missed at least four starts due to a cyst on his left wrist.

Angels: LHP Andrew Heaney (3-3, 3.95 ERA) has 24 strikeouts in his last two starts.