

The Boston Red Sox Wednesday, September 11, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Mookie Betts finds himself back in the swing

Julian McWilliams

When manager Alex Cora came over from the Houston Astros, one of the main adjustments he wanted to make to Mookie Betts's game was for him to be aggressive early in the count.

Houston's leadoff batter was — and still is — George Springer, who was aggressive in the strike zone from the start of the game.

“For me it's all about, I'm ready to hit from the first pitch and that's it,” Springer said prior to the 2019 All-Star Game in Cleveland. “The first, the second, the fifth, I can make an out on any of them, so I might as well do damage on the first.

Betts is an overall better hitter than Springer. But Cora's idea was that Betts, like Springer, could benefit from this approach, too. It didn't quite stick last year, and how could it? Betts had an MVP season doing it the way he's always done by working the count.

But this season, as Betts tried at certain points to find his swing, he decided to give it a shot. In his game against the Minnesota Twins in last week's 6-2 win, Betts swung at first pitches in separate at-bats. He homered on both of them.

Tuesday night in Toronto, he did it again on the first pitch of the game.

“It couldn't get any worse,” Betts following the Sox' 4-3 loss on why he made the adjustment. “I was hitting in some tough counts and spots, 0-2, 1-2, 2-2. I just said it is what it is at this point. Something has to change and that was it.”

From the start of the season through June 30, Betts swung at the first pitch 22.86 percent of the time. From July 2 through Monday, Betts upped that total to 37.6 percent, and he's hit .329 with 15 homers in that span.

Numbers suggest that he has success when he swings at the first pitch.

Entering Tuesday, he had 21 homers when swinging at the first pitch to go along with a .321 batting average and 72 RBIs.

Taking pitches was something he was taught as a kid in the leadoff spot, Betts said, and he had to break that habit. Now, it's paying off.

“I just had to keep talking to him. He feels good about his swing,” Cora said. “You guys see it. He's on top of the ball and I think it started in Anaheim. When he starts hitting line drives and they go out of the ballpark, he's in a great place. I'm happy he's buying into it and feels good.

“The thing is, he has to feel good to be aggressive. Right now, he's in a great frame of mind and his swing looks great.”

The grim reality was obvious in the Red Sox' loss Tuesday night

Peter Abraham

The Red Sox are still in contention for a playoff spot, hard as that may be to believe considering president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski was fired during the game on Sunday and the roster has only three healthy starting pitchers.

But that's just a technicality at this point, a false hope.

A 4-3 loss against the Toronto Blue Jays on Tuesday night offered a more realistic assessment of where the Sox are now, and it's grim.

Playing in front of crowd of only 17,819 at the Rogers Centre, the Sox fell to a rebuilding Blue Jays team that had lost seven in a row. Worse, they managed only one hit over the final four innings, an infield single.

Mookie Betts, who belted the first pitch of the game for his 28th home run, drew a walk off Toronto closer Ken Giles with two outs in the ninth inning. But Rafael Devers popped up to center field to leave two runners stranded.

The Sox have lost four straight and seven of 10. They are now nine games behind in the wild-card race with 17 left to play.

At 76-69, the Sox should be able to finish over .500. But that's not a lock given the last week and the emotional letdown in its wake.

The Sox have scored only nine runs in the last four games, and on Tuesday Toronto's bullpen retired 13 of the final 15 Sox hitters.

Nathan Eovaldi pitched well in his two previous starts, giving up two runs on four hits over nine innings and striking out 11. But he was erratic against the Blue Jays, quickly running up his pitch count against one of the least productive lineups in the American League.

Eovaldi needed 82 pitches to get through four innings but allowed solo homers by Cavan Biggio and Reese McGuire.

"I thought tonight was my best fastball command, but what got me in trouble was not being to navigate with my splitter," Eovaldi said. "It was real inconsistent and caused me not to get by some situations.

"I was using the curveball early for strike one and fastballs up in the zone. A lot of times as the game continues I'm able to find a feel for my splitter, and tonight I wasn't able to do that. It's frustrating. I've got to go out there and get deep into ballgames."

The issue is not the quality of his pitches; it's the ability to go deeper into games. The Blue Jays fouled off 22 pitches, 14 of them fastballs.

"It's the foul balls, and that will always be there because of his stuff," manager Alex Cora said. "They keep fouling off pitches and the pitch count goes up. I think he went to the fastball when he was supposed to. But they kept battling."

The Sox took a 3-2 lead in the fifth inning. Devers and J.D. Martinez had back-to-back doubles off T.J. Zeuch, a 24-year-old rookie making his first start.

It was the 50th double of the season for Devers. He is the eighth Red Sox player to reach that mark, the first since Dustin Pedroia had 54 in 2008. The last Red Sox third baseman with 50 double was Wade Boggs, who had 51 in 1989.

Andrew Benintendi then delivered a single to center off Buddy Boshers.

Eovaldi's response was to walk Biggio on five pitches to open the bottom of the inning. He came back to strike out Vladimir Guerrero Jr., and Cora called in lefthander Josh Taylor to face Rowdy Tellez, a burly lefthanded-hitting slugger who has tormented the Sox this season.

Taylor, pitching for the ninth time in 13 games, threw a fastball over the middle that Tellez drove over the fence in right-center.

Tellez is 15 of 35 (.429) against the Red Sox this season with three doubles, six home runs, and 13 RBIs. He has otherwise hit .198 with 12 home runs and 34 RBIs.

The six home runs are the most by a player against the Sox this season. Gleyber Torres of the Yankees has five.

"It seems like he's hitting home runs in the same spot, down and in," Cora said. "He's made some adjustments. Everything down he's getting to."

Eovaldi was charged with three runs on six hits over 4½ innings. He has a 5.81 earned run average — 5.94 in nine starts.

Toronto threatened again in the sixth inning, loading the bases with two outs. But Ryan Brasier got Guerrero to ground into a force at second base.

Despite a heavy workload, Christian Vazquez getting it done at plate for Red Sox

Peter Abraham

Christian Vazquez has been one of the best hitting catchers in baseball this season, ranking in the top 10 in most categories, including home runs (19), doubles (24), RBIs (59), and runs (57).

He's also carried a heavy load. Tuesday night's 4-3 loss to the Blue Jays was the 109th Vazquez has caught this season, the most in the American League and fourth overall in the majors.

Jarrod Saltalamacchia knows how difficult that is. He hit 25 home runs and drove in 59 runs for the 2012 Red Sox and caught 104 games.

"It's tough to do that for a team like the Red Sox and in a division like the AL East because of the competition," said Saltalamacchia, now retired after 12 seasons in the majors, including four with the Sox. "I would get to the park at 11 a.m. looking at scouting reports to be prepared for my pitchers. Catchers don't get much time to work on their hitting.

"Christian has done a great job. He's doing a lot of the team."

Saltalamacchia, who is now with NESN as an analyst, said the grind is as much mental as physical.

"Christian's offense is the best it has been and that's probably because he has played a lot more and gotten more at-bats and been able to make adjustments," Saltalamacchia said. "But that also wears you down. You have to take care of your body and get those days off to clear your mind."

Manager Alex Cora plans to give Vazquez some extra days off in the coming weeks.

"He's been doing an outstanding job," Cora said. "But we'll mix it up."

The Sox called up Juan Centeno as their third catcher on Sept. 1, and he has yet to play. Cora said he would get in a game soon.

No answers

Sox president Sam Kennedy appeared on the team's flagship radio station, WEEI, on Tuesday but revealed little about the firing of Dave Dombrowski or why he and ownership have so far declined comment on why the change was made.

"We just knew it would have been a wholly unsatisfactory experience given that we're just not going to expand on the statements we provided [Monday]," Kennedy said.

"I understand the desire for one and the frustration for not having one, but given that we're not going to expand on what we said in our press statement, it just wouldn't have been satisfactory to anyone."

Kennedy gave essentially the same answer to several questions about the team's lack of accountability. He did say ownership supports Cora continuing as manager.

Assistant general managers Brian O'Halloran and Eddie Romero accompanied the team to Toronto.

Winding it down

The Sox are still mathematically alive in the wild-card race but understand they have little realistic chance.

That helps to explain why shortstop Xander Bogaerts and second baseman Brock Holt were out of the lineup on Tuesday. It was the first game Bogaerts had not started since Aug. 6.

"He's been playing a lot. Brock, too," Cora said. "Their effort has been great. We'll stay away from them [Tuesday] and then they'll play the rest of the week."

Cora plans to give Rafael Devers a day off on Thursday ahead of Friday's scheduled day off. Mookie Betts will likely be out of the lineup on Wednesday.

"Little by little, we'll take care of them," Cora said.

Relievers Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor will have their use dialed back.

Hernandez is being used as a reliever for the first time in his career and Taylor has made 66 appearances counting Triple A. He was in 48 games last season.

David Price accompanied the team on the trip and continues to throw.

The lefthander has made one start since Aug. 4 because of inflammation in his wrist. He could pitch next week.

Spinners fall

Single A Lowell dropped the third and deciding game of the New York-Penn League championship series, 4-3 at Brooklyn.

Jay Groome started and allowed two runs on four hits in 2⅓ innings. Marino Campana homered for the Spinners. Lowell took a 3-2 lead in the seventh before Brooklyn scored twice in the bottom of the inning.

Rotation changed

Lefthander Bobby Poyner gets the start on Wednesday in what will be a bullpen game. Jhoulys Chacin, who has retired nine of 10 batters since joining the Red Sox on Sept. 1, was bumped back to start on Thursday against Clay Buchholz, who will be facing the Sox for the first time in his career . . . Triple A hitting coach Rich Gedman has joined the coaching staff for the road trip . . . The Blue Jays had a moment

of silence before the game to mark the death of former Cardinals outfielder Chris Duncan last week. Duncan's brother, Shelley, works in baseball operations for Toronto . . . Major league teams will mark the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks on Wednesday with a moment of silence before games. Players will wear a "We Shall Not Forget" ribbon on their caps and the ribbon will be displayed on the bases and lineup cards.

Dave Dombrowski's firing makes sense, but the timing does not

Chad Finn

Dave Dombrowski, hired as president of baseball operations by the Red Sox on Aug. 18, 2015, in a manner just as abrupt and obtuse as his firing Sunday night, could not survive four full seasons in the role.

Yet in his three full seasons, the Red Sox finished in first place three times in the fierce American League East. And last season, they won a franchise-record 108 games, then blasted through three superb teams — the Yankees, Astros, and Dodgers — to win the World Series with just three total postseason losses.

Ten months after doing exactly what he was brought here to do, Dombrowski is out of work, dismissed on a Sunday night with the faded Red Sox playing an irrelevant game against the Yankees opposite the Patriots' season opener on "Sunday Night Football."

And we thought the February 2017 firing of Claude Julien by the Bruins just as the champion Patriots were making their way down Boylston Street on duck boats was a clumsy attempt at a news dump.

The rationale for firing Dombrowski has been spelled out with much clarity elsewhere in this newspaper and on the website. He was brought in to do a specific job: Take the young talent that predecessor Ben Cherington had developed and (wisely) protected, add the right high-end, high-priced talent either via free agency or trade, and win a World Series.

Mission accomplished. He traded for Chris Sale and Craig Kimbrel, signed David Price and J.D. Martinez, and built a Red Sox team that for a single year was probably the best ball club the franchise has ever had.

In a career that has spanned more than 30 years and is accomplished enough that it should land him in Cooperstown, Dombrowski developed a reputation for having a particular set of skills — specifically, the ability to procure high-end talent.

I don't think that tells his full story; he developed and acquired several terrific young players with the Marlins and Expos, and he stole Max Scherzer and Martinez among others during his time with the Tigers. But that's his rep — the hired gun, the closer, the exec who can build a single-season monster but fails at the calculus of building a thriving organization — and it's one he's not going to shake now.

When it comes to firing him, I get the why. This season has been a disaster by modern Red Sox standards. (It would have looked great on Butch Hobson's résumé, though.) They have the highest payroll in baseball (roughly \$236 million) and they're playing meaningless games (for them, anyway) against a Yankees team that leads them by 17½ games in the division. They also trail Tampa Bay in the AL East, and the Rays pay their players in old Zayre's gift cards.

There are some huge bills coming due, and a couple — starting with Sale at \$145 million — that they never should have agreed to pay in the first place. It's a relative mess, and the worst sequel to something great since "Caddyshack II."

What I don't get is the "why now?" aspect? Why did they do it just past midnight Sunday, when no one was paying attention? There were pieces missing on the team Dombrowski put together this year. Are there pieces missing in the story of why this had to happen now?

And then no news conference to explain it, leaving Alex Cora and the players to answer all the questions about why a de facto GM whose team is the defending champion doesn't make it to the next October. Lousy look for management, as if they're trying to avoid something.

It wouldn't be too hard for them to justify, after all. And you don't have to look past Foxborough to know that Boston sports fans can get on board with ruthlessness when there's rationale for it. Red Sox management dumped Cherington, who oversaw the 2013 champs, in part because he was too conservative in roster construction. Dombrowski was bolder, and that approach brought a championship, too.

The conventional wisdom now is that Dombrowski wasn't the right choice for the next phase of Red Sox roster construction. It's clear there will be some payroll reductions, and that some of his decision-making could lead, as colleague Alex Speier put it, to the Red Sox "likely end up parting with J.D. Martinez, Mookie Betts, or possibly even both this winter."

The possibility of losing one of those players, let alone both, stinks. Martinez has filled the David Ortiz void in the lineup, and no one needs a reminder of how large that void was. Betts is trending toward being one of the best players in franchise history. The Red Sox should be able to retain those elite talents — especially Betts — to partner with Xander Bogaerts and Rafael Devers for the foreseeable future.

But paying too much for lesser talent — the \$68 million committed to Nate Eovaldi is a hard lesson in the perils of sentimentality — might prevent it. Probably will prevent it. That's not the cost of doing business so much as it is the fallout of having Dombrowski know the combination to the vault at times when money doesn't need to be spent.

Maybe he wouldn't have been the right choice going forward. Maybe management did the right thing. Maybe Eddie Romero, who has been with the organization since the Theo Epstein era, or one of the other lieutenants (Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott, Raquel Ferreira) helping to steer the ship in the interim would be a fine permanent choice.

But less than a full year after the easiest championship the Red Sox will ever win, they've hit a tenuous and tumultuous time. They're looking at hiring their fourth GM in 10 years, and whoever it is will have to make immediate, crucial, future-shaping decisions on Martinez and Betts while rebuilding the farm system. And if you screw it up, well, you might just find yourself out of work after a random Sunday night game, with no further explanation forthcoming.

No, maybe it wasn't a job for Dombrowski. But I'm not sure it's a gig for a GM novice, either, given the stakes.

It seems like a task for an experienced GM with a proven eye for young talent.

Say, anyone know how to reach Ben Cherington? He fits the latest parameters and requirements. And at least he'd know what he'd be getting into.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Rowdy Tellez torches Red Sox again

Steve Hewitt

Alex Cora has leaned on Josh Taylor more than he probably expected to this season, and the left-hander has mostly backed his manager's faith with a terrific rookie season.

But the Red Sox have also been no match for Rowdy Tellez this season. Even Taylor wasn't going to stop that from continuing.

Tellez, who has been a monster against the Red Sox, was again a thorn in their side on Tuesday night. The Blue Jays hit three homers, and Tellez's two-run shot off Taylor in the fifth was the difference in the Red Sox' 4-3 loss, their fourth consecutive defeat.

"We didn't keep the ball in the ballpark," Cora said. "When you don't do that, you pay the price at this level."

Cora, though he said pregame he would lessen Taylor's workload the rest of the season, turned to his valuable lefty after Nathan Eovaldi produced just 4½ innings. The Red Sox led 3-2 when Taylor came on with one out and one on to get a lefty-on-lefty matchup against Tellez, but the results didn't end well. Tellez got all of Taylor's 1-1 fastball that was on the inside part of the other plate as he sent it to the seats in right to give the Blue Jays a lead that held.

It was Tellez's 18th homer of the season, with six of them coming in 10 games against the Red Sox. His batting average against them rose to .428.

"We did everything possible to send him down and not see him the last time," Cora joked. "I called their GM and said, you know what, send him out to Triple-A, we don't want to see him. It's one of those, it seems like he's hitting home runs in the same spot, down and in and obviously you have to show him there, but he's made some adjustments.

"We've been trying to go to other places. We got him out a few times but in that particular time, 1-1, we felt going in, it wasn't in enough and he put a good swing on it."

Mookie Betts gave the Red Sox (76-69) a quick lead by hitting the first pitch of the game off the left-field pole for his 28th homer of the season, and eighth on the first pitch. But Eovaldi couldn't hold it, giving up solo homers to Calvin Biggio and Reese McGuire in the third and fourth innings, respectively.

Though Eovaldi took a step back from his five-inning performance last Thursday, he felt like he made progress. The righty said his fastball command was as good as it's been, but his pitch count got up quickly and couldn't control his splitter, including on the go-ahead homer to McGuire.

"A lot of the times as the game continues, I'm able to find the feel for my splitter, and tonight I just wasn't able to do that," Eovaldi said. "It's frustrating, especially looking at where we're at now, I have to try to go out there and try to go deep into ballgames. I'm just not being able to do that, it's frustrating. ...

It's certainly been an uneven season for Eovaldi, who missed most of the season to injury before returning as a reliever and then back as a starter, but with at least three or four starts left in the season, he has a chance to finish strong.

"Any time you can finish on a high note going into the offseason, it makes a little easier," he said. "We'll get there. ...

"Right now, I feel really good, so just focus on the next start and go out there and compete."

Rafael Devers became the youngest player in Red Sox history to hit 50 doubles in a season when he hit one to right in the fifth. J.D. Martinez drove him in with a double of his own before Andrew Benintendi's RBI single gave the Sox the lead again.

Sam Kennedy addresses Dave Dombrowski's firing from Red Sox

Steve Hewitt

Red Sox ownership has broken its silence. Well, at least one of them.

A day after the Red Sox announced the firing of president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski but didn't hold a press conference to explain the decision — which sparked heavy criticism — team president Sam Kennedy appeared on WEEI's "Ordway, Merloni & Fauria" show on Tuesday to take questions on the matter.

News of Dombrowski's firing first broke late Sunday night before the team issued an official press release Monday morning. Kennedy said he understood the frustration of the timing, and explained the process of their decision.

"What's really important is out of respect to Dave and what he accomplished here we wanted to delay our final decision to part ways as soon as that decision had been made final, which was over the weekend and it happened to be on Sunday," Kennedy said. "There is never a good time to do these things but in the interest of transparency and being direct we wanted to relay that news to him. The plan to announce it on Monday and it obviously broke Sunday night, and we regret Alex Cora was put in a very difficult position as he has to do his pregame and postgame press conferences every game — so that was unfortunate.

"What really was important to us was to make sure we were direct and honest with Dave once we had come to a final decision which had occurred over the weekend."

Kennedy said owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner will not hold a formal press conference to discuss the decision. Though he acknowledged it was protocol to have one, Kennedy said it would have been a "wholly unsatisfactory experience given that we're just not going to expand on the statements we provided (Monday)."

Kennedy said Henry and Werner will address the decision "in their own way and time."

"Instead, we spent the day yesterday focusing entirely on internal communication," Kennedy said. "John Henry, Tom Werner, myself, spent the day meeting with the players, everybody in the clubhouse, staff, the baseball operations department and our larger front office and we go on from there. It was a difficult 48 hours but we're moving forward."

Cora was left alone to take questions about a decision he had no part of prior to Monday's game against the Yankees, and even Kennedy acknowledged that was a bad look.

"There is no question Alex was in a bad spot and we definitely regret that," Kennedy said. "I said that at the outset. The nature of baseball he's required to do those two availabilities pre and postgame. We regret that. But now I'm obviously available to speak to you guys and answer any questions you have as we go forward."

As for Cora, there may have been some question on his future — the manager was hired by Dombrowski — but Kennedy assured him he would be back for the 2020 season.

"John Henry, Tom Werner and I spent a lot of time yesterday with Alex, spent some time with the players and expressed our confidence and support for Alex and the incredible job that he has done," Kennedy said. "He has been everything you ever want in a manager. I can't speak more highly of Alex and the job that he has done and the job that he will do as we move forward. It's no doubt it's been a difficult season for all of us, but we're really, really confident in Alex Cora."

When asked why Dombrowski was dismissed, Kennedy decided not to get into details and instead heaped praise on the former GM and his accomplishments. He made clear they're looking toward the future.

"I'm not going to engage on specifics related to Dave other than to say the guy has done an incredible job here. We won a world championship, a couple of division championships. On a personal level, I enjoyed working with him. But obviously, you don't make a change unless you're ready for new leadership in that specific department. We're moving forward.

“We’re going to have new leadership. Right now we have our senior management group in that department. Eddie Romero, Brian O’Halloran, Raquel Ferreria, Zack Scott, they’re working closely with him and ultimately John and Tom during this transition and we’ll continue to do the things that put us in position to win championships.”

Red Sox notes: David Price plans to pitch again this season

Steve Hewitt

Despite the Red Sox being all but out of the postseason picture, David Price plans to pitch again this season.

The left-hander was scratched from his start last Friday against the Yankees after experiencing tightness in his left wrist, the same one that put him on the injured list for most of August with a cyst. But he’s progressing well after throwing the last couple of days – he’s been throwing some changeups in his sessions – and Alex Cora is targeting a return for next week.

“As of right now, he’s getting ready to pitch,” the manager said Tuesday before the series opener against the Blue Jays. “He’s feeling better, little by little.”

It’s possible Price will need minor surgery in the offseason to remove the cyst, but the Red Sox don’t seem to have plans on shutting him down and avoiding risk of further injury, even with little to play for over the last three weeks of the season.

The Red Sox were eight games back of the second wild card spot heading into Tuesday’s game.

“We’ll talk about it,” Cora said. “Everybody likes to perform. I think it’s something that you look forward to. You don’t want to finish the year on the IL or shut down for the wrong reasons. So we’ll talk about it with the medical staff, obviously with (assistant general managers) Eddie (Romero), (Brian O’Halloran), Zack (Scott) and (senior vice president of major and minor league operations) Raquel (Ferreira), and make a decision.

Getting a breather

A combination of being almost out of the playoff race and playing on the Rogers Centre turf means some of the Red Sox’ core starters will be getting days off this week. Xander Bogaerts and Brock Holt were given the night off Tuesday, and Cora said Mookie Betts will likely sit Wednesday and Rafael Devers on Thursday. The Sox are off Friday before a two-game weekend series in Philadelphia.

“Little by little, we’ll take care of them,” Cora said. “I mean, you know how I feel about the turf so the timing is good, too. They’ve been going after it.”

Cora also said Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor, two relievers he’s heavily leaned on recently, will likely dial it back, too.

“Those two kids, the last month and a half, the usage has been very high and they’ve been solid,” Cora said. “You saw Darwinzon (Monday) struggling with command. The ball was cutting. He’ll be down today but it’s not like he’s ... he’s healthy but at the same time, probably a little bit tired. The whole grind of pitching every day, be ready to pitch every day, is something new to him so we’ll make sure we’ll take care of it.”

Sale to Florida

With the Sox on the road all week, Cora said Chris Sale, who is shut down the rest of the season with elbow inflammation, was planning on going to Fort Myers. The manager said an offseason plan is not yet in place for the ace.

“They do testing and all that and so far, so good,” Cora said. “I think that’s the only feedback we can get right now. But when we go on the road, we have the facility in Fort Myers, he gets treatment down there and he’s able to spend time with his kids, which is good.” ...

Jhoulys Chacin, who was originally scheduled to start Wednesday in Toronto, will now start Thursday. Bobby Poyner will instead start as an opener on Wednesday.

*** *The Providence Journal***

Blue Jays 4, Red Sox 3: Rowdy Tellez puts a bump in Boston’s road

Bill Koch

The road had generally been a welcoming place for the Red Sox this season.

There’s been nothing friendly about Fenway Park and the sub-.500 record posted there by Boston. Success had come far more frequently at visiting venues.

But there is no safe haven at the moment for these Red Sox, who have now dropped six of their last eight and seven of their last 11. The Blue Jays wiped out a pair of one-run deficits and snapped a seven-game losing streak by clipping Boston, 4-3, on a perfect night at a sparsely-populated Rogers Centre.

Red Sox killer Rowdy Tellez cracked what proved to be the deciding home run in the bottom of the fifth inning, a two-run shot to deep right against Josh Taylor. Toronto relief pitching retired 10 straight Boston batters entering the top of the ninth and Ken Giles worked around an infield single by Brock Holt and walk drawn by Mookie Betts to record his 19th save of the season. The Red Sox remain one victory from clinching what would be at least a .500 record away from home, dipping to 40-30.

“We didn’t keep the ball in the ballpark,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “When you don’t do that you pay the price at this level.”

Boston clung to a 3-2 lead after the top of the fifth. Rafael Devers grounded a one-out double to right, his 50th of what has been a historic season. Devers is the youngest Red Sox player to hit as many as 50 doubles in a year and just the ninth Boston player all-time.

J.D. Martinez followed with a double down the line in left and Andrew Benintendi snapped an 0-for-17 skid by muscling an RBI single to center. The Red Sox turned that cushion over to Nathan Eovaldi and the bullpen, and it lasted a grand total of one out.

“I felt a little inconsistent,” Eovaldi said. “It caused me to not be able to get out of some situations.”

Cavan Biggio drew a leadoff walk and Eovaldi was removed after striking out Vladimir Guerrero Jr. with a curveball down and away. On came Taylor to match up left-left and Tellez hammered a fastball to deep right, handing Toronto a one-run lead.

It was the 18th round-tripper of the season for Tellez and his sixth in just 10 games against Boston. Tellez entered Tuesday with a 1.514 OPS against the Red Sox and had already singled to center in the third. He finished 2-for-4 with two RBI and plated the winning run all by himself.

“Everything down, he’s getting to it,” Cora said. “We’ve been trying to go to other places. We’ve gotten him out a few times. At that particular time, 1-and-1, we thought to go in and it wasn’t in enough.”

Eovaldi was undone by a rising pitch count and a pair of solo home runs. Biggio slammed a drive into the Boston bullpen with one out in the third, erasing a 1-0 deficit. Reese McGuire gave Toronto a 2-1 advantage in the fourth when he drilled a solo shot of his own to the bleachers in right.

Eovaldi required 93 pitches to record 13 outs, the most he's thrown since an April 17 start at the Yankees. The right-hander went on the injured list with right elbow troubles the following day. The Red Sox are hoping to shepherd Eovaldi to the finish line in what has been an injury-riddled season and have him healthy for another try in 2020.

"It's been inconsistent," Eovaldi said. "Right now I feel really good. Just focus on the next start and go out there and compete."

Boston enjoyed a 1-0 lead after just one pitch when Betts lined a leadoff homer down the line in left. It was the 20th of his career, a total that matches the collective efforts of eight other Red Sox leadoff men from 2007-19. Jacoby Ellsbury did half the group's damage, cracking 10.

"I've put in a lot of work and finally found a little something I can maintain," Betts said. "I'm just trying to ride it."

Red Sox pitcher David Price (left wrist) ruled out through the weekend

Bill Koch

David Price will not pitch in this weekend's two-game series at Philadelphia.

The left-hander played catch again on flat ground Tuesday. Price has thrown some changeups during his recent sessions but still is not ready to take the mound for what would be just the second time since early August. He's suffering from tightness in his left wrist.

"I honestly feel like he knows what he has to do," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "It just happened that we had this situation and he grinded it out. He tried."

The Red Sox staged back-to-back bullpen days to open a four-game series against the Yankees after Price was scratched from a possible Friday start. The scheduled off days Friday and Monday should give Cora more wiggle room with his thin rotation.

Heath Hembree (right elbow) is scheduled to throw a bullpen session on Wednesday. Boston hasn't ruled out his return before the end of the season. Hembree hasn't pitched since Aug. 1 and posted an even 9.00 ERA in his last 12 games.

Day off for Xander Bogaerts as Red Sox manager Alex Cora begins to acknowledge slim playoff hopes

Bill Koch

With his club heading toward mathematical elimination in the American League wild card race, Red Sox manager Alex Cora began to acknowledge reality on Tuesday.

Xander Bogaerts and Brock Holt were both give the night off for the series opener against the Blue Jays at Rogers Centre. Mookie Betts is likely to receive Wednesday off and Rafael Devers isn't expected to play in Thursday's finale.

"As everybody knows, we're going to keep playing," Cora said. "Whatever window we have, we have. But we're realistic."

Boston won just two of seven games on its recent home stand against the Twins and Yankees. The Red Sox have slipped 8 games behind the Athletics for the final playoff spot with just 18 to play. Not even a four-game sweep against the Rays in their upcoming series would halve what is now a 9½-game deficit to the first wild card berth.

“The team that we really control is almost out of the equation, which is the Rays,” Cora said. “The goal was to make that four-game series count, and right now it doesn’t look that way.”

Boston is also likely to make adjustments regarding its workload out of the bullpen. Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor have both enjoyed productive rookie seasons, pitching to earned-run averages of 3.72 and 2.91, respectively. The two left-handers have made a combined 71 appearances, and 51 of those have come since July 16.

“The two of them, they’ve been outstanding,” Cora said. “From where they were in spring training to where they are now, it’s something that makes everybody happy and proud of their progress.”

Sam Kennedy speaks on Red Sox firing of Dave Dombrowski, future of Alex Cora, more

Bill Koch

Aside from an emailed statement released Monday morning, it took roughly 36 hours for a senior member of the Red Sox front office to address the firing of Dave Dombrowski.

Boston manager Alex Cora was left to answer questions for more than 20 minutes during his regular pregame remarks on Monday. Cora served as the de facto public face of the organization until president and CEO Sam Kennedy made a Tuesday afternoon radio appearance on WEEL.

“There is no question Alex was in a bad spot, and we definitely regret that,” Kennedy said. “I said that at the outset.”

Kennedy said a formal press conference would have been “a wholly unsatisfactory experience” and does not anticipate one being given by principal owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner. Dombrowski was relieved of his duties as president of baseball operations following Sunday’s 10-5 loss to the Yankees. He had served in that capacity since August 2015, capturing three American League East titles and last year’s World Series.

“You don’t make a change unless you’re ready for new leadership in that specific department,” Kennedy said. “We’re moving forward. We’re going to have new leadership.”

Assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O’Halloran and Zack Scott and senior vice president for major and minor league operations Raquel Ferreira are running the team in the interim. Kennedy said Henry and Werner met with the players on Monday and had conducted internal discussions over the previous 48 hours. Kennedy also said publicly for the first time Cora would be retained to manage the team in 2020 regardless of the identity of his new boss.

“He has been everything you ever want in a manager,” Kennedy said. “I can’t speak more highly of Alex and the job that he has done and the job that he will do as we move forward.”

Thomas Pannone has a front-row seat as Blue Jays look to take flight

Bill Koch

Thomas Pannone took some time Tuesday to reflect on what has essentially been his first full season in the big leagues.

The Blue Jays left-hander and Cranston native broke spring training on the 25-man roster and has made 31 appearances, including six starts. Pannone has been optioned and recalled on six different occasions between Toronto and Triple-A Buffalo, and he was at Rogers Centre to begin this three-game series against the Red Sox.

“I think it all comes down to learning from those bad outings that you had,” Pannone said. “You come back into the locker room, get in that video room, see what you did wrong and take it from there.”

The 25-year-old former Bishop Hendricken star made his debut last season and totaled 12 appearances, working to a 4.19 earned-run average. A couple of tough relief appearances have swelled Pannone’s ERA to 6.35 this season, but his strikeout rate is considerably improved. Pannone has fanned 63 in 66 2/3 innings as opposed to just 29 in 43 innings last year.

“I’ve learned you’ve got to have a forgetful mind,” Pannone said. “Forget even the good ones, and forget the bad ones. Just move on and stay positive.”

Pannone was acquired by the Blue Jays at the July 2017 trade deadline, sent from the Indians to Toronto along with infielder Samad Taylor for right-handed reliever Joe Smith. That deal allowed Pannone to join what is something of a golden generation of Blue Jays prospects. Tuesday found 16 players on the club’s active roster born in 1993 or later.

“There was too much talent in Triple-A and Double-A last year and the year before that not to see it coming,” Pannone said. “It’s coming like a wave. I was just blessed that I got traded over here to be a part of it.”

Some famous surnames dot the spaces above the lockers in the Blue Jays clubhouse. Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Cavan Biggio are both sons of Hall of Famers while Bo Bichette’s father, Dante, hit 12 of his 274 career home runs with Boston during his final season in 2001. Vladimir Guerrero, Craig Biggio and the elder Bichette have been frequent guests both in the stands and in the locker room while watching their sons start on the path they once traveled.

“Growing up I loved watching Vlad’s dad,” Pannone said. “He had one of my favorite swings to watch. To be able to play with him and be able to walk up to him and say hi every day, it’s pretty cool. To see him play, it’s sick.”

The younger Guerrero leads that trio with 15 home runs – Lourdes Gurriel Jr. has been the most potent of the baby Blue Jays with his 19. Toronto is on a season-high seven-game losing streak and could use some pitching help from Pannone and his mates. Certain spots in the lineup appear to be set for years to come.

“This is an organization that you see what they’re doing,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Although they have struggled lately with wins and losses, they’re growing together. They did it in the minor leagues and now you see them around.”

*** *MassLive.com***

David Ortiz appearance wasn’t intended as Dave Dombrowski distraction, Boston Red Sox president Sam Kennedy says

Chris Cotillo

Appearing Tuesday on WEEI’s “Ordway, Merloni & Fauria,” Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy denied the idea that David Ortiz’s appearance at Fenway Park on Monday night was meant to distract fans from the news that president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski had been fired.

Ortiz made his first appearance at the ballpark since being shot in June. Less than 24 hours after Dombrowski's firing, Ortiz threw out the ceremonial first pitch before the Sox faced the Yankees.

"I understand the appearance or the suggestion that it may have been a distraction or intentional act to try to distract people," Kennedy said. "I can assure you that was not the case. The reason it happened last night was because David Ortiz wanted it to happen last night. David, we had a standing invitation for him to come and throw out a first pitch. He had made the decision a few days ago that last night would be the night."

Ortiz's appearance was not made public until an hour before first pitch, when Dan Shaughnessy of the Boston Globe tweeted that it was happening. The Red Sox confirmed it minutes later and Ortiz took the field shortly before first pitch.

The surprise appearance-- a monumental occasion considering Ortiz almost lost his life in the June shooting incident-- was thought by some to be a smokescreen in the wake of Dombrowski's departure. But Kennedy said the team was never planning on announcing it beforehand.

"We all wanted it to be a surprise. He did. We did," Kennedy said. "We weren't sure when exactly he was going to come until a couple days ago. Then he said Monday night was the night. We said it would be great to surprise the fans."

Ortiz spent nearly seven weeks in the hospital before being released on July 26. He had not made a public appearance or made public comments before addressing the crowd Monday night.

Ortiz informed the Sox that Monday would be a good day for him a couple days before the appearance, according to Kennedy, who said Ortiz's return was planned well before Dombrowski was canned.

"It really was great to see him," Kennedy said. "I hope people understand there was no intention in terms of distraction or anything like that. It was great to see him and (wife) Tiffany. He's doing really, really well and improving every day."

Boston Red Sox rotation: Bobby Poyner, Jhoulys Chacin to make starts against Blue Jays

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox will start left-hander Bobby Poyner on Wednesday and righty Jhoulys Chacin on Thursday against the Blue Jays, manager Alex Cora told reporters in Toronto.

Chacin was supposed to start Wednesday but was pushed back a day after pitching out of the bullpen Sunday night. Both Poyner and Chacin will both serve as openers against the Blue Jays.

The Sox have just three traditional starters-- Eduardo Rodriguez, Rick Porcello and Nathan Eovaldi-- with both Chris Sale and David Price on the injured list. Boston has used Josh Taylor, Travis Lakins and Chacin in spot starts as openers in the last few weeks.

Chacin lasted two innings (36 pitches) in his first outing Friday and could be stretched out to three or four innings against the Jays. Poyner, who has a 10.50 ERA in five outings this season, has never made a start in the big leagues.

Porcello and Rodriguez will likely start over the weekend in Philadelphia.

Mookie Betts homers but Boston Red Sox lose, 4-3, to Blue Jays in series opener

Chris Cotillo

Blue Jays first baseman Rowdy Tellez has killed the Red Sox all season. Tuesday night was no different.

Tellez hit a two-run homer off lefty Josh Taylor in the bottom of the fifth inning to give Toronto a 4-3 win over the Red Sox in the opener of a three-game series in Toronto. It was Boston's fourth loss in a row and their sixth in eight games.

Mookie Betts led off the game with a solo homer on the first pitch he saw, good for his 28th of the year. Toronto went ahead on solo shots by Cavan Biggio and Reese McGuire in the third and fourth before the Sox took back the lead with a J.D. Martinez RBI double and Andrew Benintendi RBI single that made it 3-2 in the fifth.

Toronto chased Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi after 4 1/3 innings as manager Alex Cora brought Taylor in to face the left-handed hitting Tellez with a man on first and one out. Tellez hit his sixth homer against the Red Sox this season; he has hit 12 against everybody else.

Eovaldi departed having allowed three runs on six hits in 4 1/3 innings while walking six and striking out two Jays. Toronto's bullpen retired 11 straight Sox from the sixth to the ninth before Brock Holt hit a one-out single off closer Ken Giles.

Pinch-runner Gorkys Hernandez stole second to put the tying run in scoring position but Giles struck out Marco Hernandez and, after walking Betts, got Rafael Devers to pop out to end the game.

The Red Sox fell to 76-69 as their elimination number in the wild-card race dropped to 10. It will fall to just nine games later in the night when the A's, who lead the Astros, 20-3, in the sixth inning, finish off their win.

Devers hits 50th double of year

Devers hit a double in the fifth inning and later scored on Martinez's double one hitter later. Devers became the youngest Red Sox player ever to hit the 50-double mark in a season and the ninth player ever to do so.

Xander Bogaerts, who was off Tuesday, is one double short of 50 on the season. If he gets it, this will be the first season in Sox history in which two players each had 50 doubles.

Alex Cora will return to Boston Red Sox in 2020; team president Sam Kennedy gives manager vote of confidence

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy confirmed Tuesday that manager Alex Cora will return for the 2020 season.

Cora was not thought to be on the hot seat despite the Sox' disappointing year but the firing of president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski opened the organization up to potential further change. Speaking on WEEI's "Ordway, Merloni and Fauria" on Tuesday, Kennedy gave Cora a vote of confidence.

"(Owners) John Henry, Tom Werner and I spent a lot of time yesterday with Alex and spent some time with the players and expressed our confidence and support for Alex and the incredible job he has done," Kennedy said. "He has been everything you would want in a manager and I can't speak more highly of Alex and the job that he's done. And the job I know he'll do as we move forward."

Cora led the Red Sox to a 108-54 record and World Series championship in his first season. Boston is likely to miss the playoffs and currently has a 76-66 record as of Tuesday.

Cora will get a new boss this winter when the Red Sox hire a baseball operations head to take Dombrowski's place. Dombrowski was the one who hired Cora in Nov. 2017.

“No doubt, it has been a difficult season for all of us,” Kennedy said. “But we’re really confident in Alex Cora.”

Dave Dombrowski firing: Boston Red Sox president Sam Kennedy explains why team didn’t hold a press conference to address news

Chris Cotillo

Speaking publicly for the first time since the Red Sox fired president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski early Monday morning, team president and CEO Sam Kennedy declined to address the specifics of Dombrowski’s ouster.

Kennedy appeared on WEEI’s “Ordway, Merloni and Fauria” on Tuesday afternoon. The hosts pressed him on why the organization declined to hold a press conference to address Dombrowski’s firing, instead only issuing a press release with short statements from Kennedy and owners John Henry and Tom Werner.

“We just knew that it would have been a wholly unsatisfactory experience given that we just weren’t going to expand upon the statements that we provided yesterday,” Kennedy said. “I understand the desire for one and the frustration related to not having one.”

News of Dombrowski’s firing broke after midnight Monday morning, shortly after the Sox dropped a 10-5 contest to the Yankees. Kennedy said the final decision was reached Sunday and that the organization focused on relaying it to Dombrowski as soon as it was done.

“There’s never a good time to do these things but in the interest of transparency and being direct, we wanted to relay that news to him,” Kennedy said. “We had planned to announce it on Monday. It obviously broke Sunday night. We regret that (manager) Alex Cora was put in a very difficult position as he has to do his pregame and postgame press conferences every game. That was unfortunate. What really was important to us was to make sure that we were direct and honest with Dave once we came to a final decision.”

Kennedy, Henry and Werner were all at Fenway Park on Thursday but did not hold a traditional press conference. Instead, Cora and select players faced questions from reporters while the ownership group was largely unavailable.

“There’s no question Alex was in a bad spot,” Kennedy said. “We definitely regret that.”

Kennedy told WEEI that he had interactions with the media throughout Monday instead of hosting a formal presser. The only time the president was spotted was on the field pregame, when David Ortiz returned to throw the ceremonial first pitch three months after being shot in the Dominican Republic.

Kennedy acknowledged that the norm is for organizations to hold press conferences when major moves are made. He said he was unsure what purpose they ultimately served other than being protocol.

“I’m not sure how great those farewell press conferences have gone because out of respect to the people that are moving on, you’re just not going to get into a lot of details,” Kennedy said. “That’s why we made the decision that we made.”

Pressed on why Dombrowski was let go, Kennedy declined to answer.

“I’m not going to engage on specifics related to Dave other than to say the guy did an incredible job here,” he said. “We won a world championship, a couple division championships. On a personal level, I enjoyed working with him. Obviously, you don’t make a change unless you’re ready for new leadership in that specific department. ”

Kennedy said he expects Henry and Werner to address the firing at some point in time but said there were no plans to hold a press conference. I know it can be unsatisfactory but that's the position we're taking. The organization has traditionally held pressers to address the comings-and-goings of managers and executives but will now decide on a case-by-case basis if they will do so in the future.

The Red Sox clearly thought holding a press conference would be a waste of everyone's time.

"There would be a lot of questions about why or how and we're just not going to get into it," Kennedy said.

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Fitting for Yankees to eliminate Red Sox in AL East race

Chris Mason

Around the Horn is a weekly column from Chris Mason, where the Eagle-Tribune beat writer offers nine thoughts from the Red Sox clubhouse. With Alex Cora's club falling out of the playoff race, this installment focuses on just how we got here.

1. A fitting AL East ending

Five. That's how many times the Red Sox beat the Yankees in their 19 games this year.

As such, Boston's bid for a fourth straight American League East title went out with a whimper on Sunday night. They were mathematically eliminated in early September.

Nobody seemed to pay it much mind as the Sox fell 18 1/2 games back with 18 to play. It'd been a foregone conclusion for weeks that reached a fitting ending.

"Since the first series, they just dominated us," Alex Cora said. "They're doing a lot of things better than last year. A lot. We're not playing at the same level."

2. Failure to launch?

Interestingly, whenever Cora has been asked about New York's improvement, the first player he's cited has been D.J. LeMahieu.

In an era of launch angle, LeMahieu is a throwback player that puts the ball in play. Cora believes that's contagious, and the Yankees are better for it.

"I do believe D.J. changed the complexion of that lineup," he said. "With two strikes, putting the ball in play. They always controlled the strike zone. A lot of swings and misses last year and in '17. I saw that first hand two years in a row. It was a lineup you were able to expand with certain pitches in certain situations. Now it's hard to do."

3. Sox keep losing against winners

The Yankees aren't the only quality opponent the Red Sox have struggled with. After dropping three of four from New York, Boston fell to 25-42 against teams with a winning record. If that's anywhere close to .500, they'd be very much in the hunt.

4. Heck of a run, E-Rod

Lost in the shuffle against the Yankees was another excellent start from Eduardo Rodriguez.

He's threw six innings of one-run ball Monday night, and has posted a 1.13 ERA in his last five outings. For the year he sits at 17-6 with a 3.73. Rodriguez has taken a leap forward.

So what is it that's led to this career season?

"I would say this year I'm healthy," Rodriguez replied. "That's what I think has been the big change for me. Work ethic with the trainers and everything has been working really well for me this year."

5. Innings leader, too

With 178 2/3 under his belt, Rodriguez is going to be the Red Sox runaway winner in innings pitched. I wonder what Las Vegas odds on that would have been back in spring training.

"This guy has been very consistent for us and you see him growing each outing," Cora said.

6. Price shutdown?

With the Red Sox out of contention, don't hold your breath on a David Price return (wrist) this season.

"He was feeling better," Cora said. "We'll see where it goes. He's not going to pitch this week. So I think obviously the calendar we're running out of time, but you always want guys to finish healthy, the season. If we find a way that he can go out there and perform, it will be good, but at the same time we've gotta be smart about it. David is a huge part of what we're trying to accomplish in the upcoming years."

If this is it for Price, it'll be the second time in three years he's given the Sox fewer than 110 innings.

7. Help wanted at 1B

A weapon off the bench in July, Sam Travis has cooled off in a big way.

Since August 20, Travis came into last night 2 for 26. It's a reminder that the first base gig is going to be wide open next season. With Steve Pearce and Mitch Moreland's contracts expiring, there should be a heck of a spring training competition between Travis, Michael Chavis, and Bobby Dalbec.

8. Strange days

It's a bizarre sight to watch the Red Sox play meaningless games in early September, but Gorkys Hernandez and Chris Owings on Cora's lineup card over Andrew Benintendi and Xander Bogaerts show that they're just that. That it's so strange is testament to how dominant the Sox have been in recent years, but also an indictment on how disappointing this season has been.

9. A Big Papi sized message

When David Ortiz returned to Fenway Park Monday night, he brought with him a reminder to cherish every day. That wasn't lost on players in the Sox clubhouse.

"Any time you go through something that's life altering, you're going to have that greater appreciation knowing that you get another chance," Jackie Bradley Jr. said. "He enjoyed life always, he's always enjoyed life. I'm sure he's going to enjoy it even more now."

As the great Warren Zevon once said, "Enjoy every sandwich."

*** *RedSox.com***

Eovaldi trying to build late-season momentum

Ian Browne

Barring a miracle, there will be no October heroics for Nathan Eovaldi this year. Instead, the flame-throwing righty is just trying to finish his disjointed season with some momentum he can take into the offseason.

Given the right elbow injury and subsequent right biceps tendinitis that kept him out for three months and then forced a temporary shift to the bullpen once he returned, it hasn't been easy.

But of late, Eovaldi has provided flashes of the pitcher the Red Sox need him to be over the final three seasons of the four-year, \$68 million deal he signed last offseason. In Boston's 4-3 loss to the Blue Jays on Tuesday night at Rogers Centre, Eovaldi allowed six hits and three runs over 4 1/3 innings, walking two and striking out six.

The reason Eovaldi didn't have a better night was simple: His splitter failed him.

Eovaldi didn't generate any swings and misses among the 13 he threw. There were no called strikes either. But there was a home run -- a solo rocket on a flat split by Reese McGuire that gave the Blue Jays a 2-1 lead in the bottom of the fourth.

"I think what got me in trouble was just not being able to navigate with my splitter," said Eovaldi. "It felt real inconsistent and ultimately it caused me not to get outs in those situations."

There's a reason Eovaldi's splitter is more vital to his success this season than in others, and assistant pitching coach Brian Bannister explained it.

"The splitter is the X-factor for him. He's not throwing the slider this year because it puts a little strain on his elbow," said Bannister. "So the splitter is his big swing-and-miss pitch. A lot of how dominant and how pitch-efficient his starts are correlated to the splitter."

The good news for Eovaldi is that he got to 93 pitches, his highest total since April 17 -- his last start before the elbow injury. The bad news is that he recorded only 13 outs in those pitches.

"I thought his direction was good," said Bannister. "He had good ride to the fastball. When the splitter is on, hitters have to respect it and it opens up the swing-and-miss on his fastball."

Eovaldi actually left the mound on a high note, striking out Vladimir Guerrero Jr. on a 2-2 curveball for the first out of the fifth inning. In fact, he departed with a 3-2 lead.

Lefty Josh Taylor lost the lead in just three pitches, serving up a two-run homer to Rowdy Tellez, who has been a Red Sox destroyer all season.

"We didn't keep the ball in the ballpark. When you don't do that, you pay the price at this level," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora after his team's fourth loss in a row.

As for Eovaldi, he induced 13 swings and misses, eight of them on fastballs. There was also a 97.5-mph heater in the dead center of the plate that Cavan Biggio walloped for a solo homer.

"Overall I felt pretty good," Eovaldi said. "I felt like tonight was one of my best nights of fastball command other than the one to Biggio."

There is still time for Eovaldi to have that dominant start that has been elusive for him this season. He will probably take three more turns in the rotation.

Finishing strong going into the winter could pay big dividends for Eovaldi going forward.

“Absolutely,” Eovaldi said. “Any time you can finish on a high note going into the offseason, it makes a little easier. We’ll get there. As of right now, I thought I did a lot of good things tonight, it’s just the splitter.”

Mookie provides early jolt

Eovaldi was at least able to pitch with an early lead when Mookie Betts hammered the first pitch of the game for a homer. It is the second time in the last week that Betts has ripped a leadoff shot in the first on the first pitch. It was the 20th leadoff homer of his career.

When Betts puts the ball in play on 0-0 counts this season, he is hitting .375 (18-for-48) with eight homers and 17 RBIs.

It is clear that Betts has regained his confidence at the plate of late, and it manifests itself when he attacks early in the count.

“Just trying to be aggressive in general, so just trying to put a good swing on a good pitch and see what happens,” said Betts. “I think I’ve put in a lot of work and I’ve finally found a little something that I can maintain, so just trying to ride it.”

Despite the early momentum from Betts, Boston’s offense mostly dried up for the rest of the night. The exception was a two-run fifth that included the 50th double of the season from Rafael Devers. The 22-year-old is the eighth player in team history to reach 50 doubles, but he is the youngest to achieve the feat.

Kennedy talks Dombrowski, confidence in Cora

Ian Browne

A day after Red Sox ownership decided not to hold a press conference regarding the decision to part ways with president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski, team president/CEO Sam Kennedy explained the reason for that in a radio interview with WEEI.

Kennedy also explained the abruptness of the announcement, which occurred after midnight ET when the Sox had just lost, 10-5, to the Yankees on Sunday Night Baseball.

“As it relates to the issue of a press conference, we just knew it would have been a wholly unsatisfactory experience given that we’re just not going to expand on the statements we provided yesterday,” said Kennedy. “I understand the desire for one and the frustration for not having one. But given that we’re not going to expand on what we said in our press statement, it just wouldn’t have been satisfactory to anyone.”

What Boston’s ownership group didn’t want to do is take public shots at Dombrowski, who has had an illustrious 40-year career in baseball front offices.

“I’ve observed press conferences with sports figures leaving organizations for a long, long time,” Kennedy said. “I’m not sure what purpose they ultimately serve other than, as you said, protocol. So we decided given that we weren’t going to expand on what we said via our press release that went out earlier on Monday, and we would instead focus on the task ahead and mainly be accountable to our employees and our people in the organization.”

And why did the club make the announcement at such an odd hour, leaving manager Alex Cora to react to it to the media only moments after he had found out himself?

Once owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner had decided not to retain Dombrowski, they thought it was only fair to let him know -- which happened in the second inning of Sunday night’s loss. The original

plan was for the team to come out with a press release on Monday morning. But the decision started to leak out, which is why Cora was put in an awkward position.

“There is no question Alex was in a bad spot, and we definitely regret that,” Kennedy said. “I said that at the outset. The nature of baseball is he’s required to do those two availabilities, pre and postgame. We regret that.”

Though Dombrowski was the one who decided to hire Cora, Kennedy made it clear that the organization is completely behind its manager.

“John Henry, Tom Werner and I spent a lot of time yesterday with Alex, spent some time with the players and expressed our confidence and support for Alex and the incredible job that he has done,” Kennedy said. “He has been everything you ever want in a manager. I can’t speak more highly of Alex and the job that he has done and the job that he will do as we move forward. It’s no doubt it’s been a difficult season for all of us, but we’re really, really confident in Alex Cora.”

Xander gets a rest; Mookie could be next

For weeks, the Red Sox were going all-out to try to get back into the pennant race. This meant asking a lot out of certain players. Shortstop Xander Bogaerts, one of the guys who has been going to his post every day, was given the night off on Tuesday. Brock Holt was also off.

While the Red Sox will keep trying to win games, Cora knows at this point it would take a miracle for his team to get to the postseason. Look for other players to get some rest in the coming days.

“Yeah, [Bogaerts] has been playing a lot,” Cora said. “Coming to the turf [at Rogers Centre], we got here late. Brock, too. They played the whole week. Their effort has been great, so we’ll stay away from them today and then they’ll play the rest of the week.”

“Raffy [Devers], probably the last day here [off] so he can get two [including a team off-day on Friday],” Cora said. “Most likely Mookie [Betts] tomorrow. Little by little, we’ll take care of them. I mean, you know how I feel about the turf, so the timing is good, too. They’ve been going after it.”

Cora will also be more cognizant of workloads in the bullpen, and he mentioned young lefties Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor as two players he’ll try not to extend.

Price might pitch next week

Lefty David Price continues to play catch in an attempt to come back from a left wrist injury that has limited him to just two innings since Aug. 4.

Though Price won’t pitch on this road trip, Cora said he might return next week.

“Most likely next week -- if everything goes well this week,” Cora said.

But what if the Red Sox are completely out of the race?

“We’ll talk about it,” Cora said. “Everybody likes to perform. I think it’s something that you look forward to. You don’t want to finish the year on the IL or shut down for the wrong reasons. So we’ll talk about it with the medical staff, obviously with Eddie [Romero], BOH [Brian O’Halloran], Zack [Scott] and Raquel [Ferreira], and make a decision. As of right now, he’s getting ready to pitch. He’s feeling better, little by little. Yesterday actually he threw a few changeups in his flat-ground session.”

*** WEEL.com**

Latest loss a reminder of challenge that lies ahead for Red Sox

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox escaped the country, but they can't escape their problems.

Dave Dombrowski is gone and the smoke is starting to clear in terms of that bit of chaos. What is left behind can be construed as an uncomfortable situation, one which was put on display in some ways at Rogers Centre Tuesday night.

Start with the starter.

Nathan Eovaldi didn't pitch terribly, allowing three runs over 4 1/3 innings in what would be a 4-3 loss to the Blue Jays. But we are now almost all the way through Year 1 of this four-year, \$68 million deal and this is not trending well. The righty still hasn't pitched as many innings as he did in half a season with the Rays in 2018, totaling just 52 2/3. There still hasn't been more than 154 1/3 innings since 2014. And the ERA for 2019 stands at 5.81.

Eovaldi has shown flashes, which is what got him this contract to begin with. But the way the Red Sox are constituted headed into 2020 they need more than flashes.

He was supposed to be a fail-safe if Chris Sale left. A legitimate top-of-the-rotation option. As it turns out the Sox need to that to be a reality more than ever. But the problem is that few know what is real.

The health of both Sale and David Price have to be questioned heading into next season. Considering those two will make up \$186 million of the Red Sox' payroll over the next three years that makes the Eovaldi uncertainty even more uncomfortable. This part of the equation will be the foundation of the new chief decision-maker's anxiety. There is no way around that.

So with the aforementioned question marks, the question is how the Red Sox can find some certainty.

Eduardo Rodriguez is a start. This has been officially a breakout season for the 26-year-old, who is sitting at 17-6 with a 3.73 ERA in 178 2/3 innings. Maybe that is where you start, getting some sort of financial headstart on Rodriguez's situation. Extend a team-friendly extension that buys out his final two offseasons of arbitration in an attempt to manage the starting rotation's financial future.

As for the one final spot Rick Porcello is likely to leave behind -- not including Sale's potential absence -- this would seem to be the opportunity to allocate whatever trade chips as the Red Sox' disposal to identify a young, cheap starter with the kind of upside that will serve as a buffer for those big contracts. We aren't talking free agency. There are intriguing names that would normally be welcome rotation-fillers (Rich Hill would be an intriguing option.) But money is money, and the Red Sox are running out of it when it comes to paying for pitching.

So, where does that arm come from? This brings us to the Mookie Betts conversation.

In case you haven't noticed, Betts is landing with another well-above-average season, having just hit his 28th homer (4 shy of last season) to go along with a .290 batting average and .916 OPS. It is 2018? Nope. But the outfielder's market certainly hasn't taken that much of a hit, whether you're talking trade or contract extension. For Dombrowski's replacement, this is a doozy, but it also shouldn't be that complicated. You offer Betts close to what you believe to be your best proposal this offseason, gauge his response and act accordingly.

Maybe the Red Sox and/or Betts wait until the Anthony Rendon market is defined. Or perhaps the landing spot is simply somewhere between Nolan/Arenado/Manny Machado/Bryce Harper Land and Mike Trout World.

If Betts is digging in on close to Trout money than the likelihood is that this is where that trade for a young, controllable starting pitcher is coming from. If Betts does join Xander Bogaerts as a potential Red Sox lifer than perhaps Jackie Bradley Jr. (who is also eligible for free agency at the end of 2020) represents the path to filling in the pitching gaps.

There is a lot to digest when it comes to figuring out how the Red Sox can reclaim their spot among the American League hierarchy, but we have to start somewhere. That was what we were reminded of Tuesday night.

Sam Kennedy attempts to explain why there was no press conference

Rob Bradford

There will be no press conference.

That was one of the messages relayed by Red Sox president Sam Kennedy when appearing on OMF with Lou Merloni, Glenn Ordway and Christian Fauria Tuesday afternoon in what was the Red Sox' first response to criticism in regards to how Dave Dombrowski's dismissal was handled.

Following the announcement that Dombrowski was being let go by the Red Sox following the Sunday night loss at Fenway Park the only formal statements from ownership came in the form of a Monday press release. It was stated at that time there would be no press conference to answer questions from the media. That, of course, opened the door for a wave of questions why the Sox chose to abandon what is considered protocol for any such dismissal.

On the timing: "I understand the frustration or dismay as you put it. First of all, I was to address the timing of everything. What's really important is out of respect to Dave and what he accomplished here we wanted to delay our final decision to part ways as soon as that decision had been made final, which was over the weekend and it happened to be on Sunday. There is never a good time to do these things but in the interest of transparency and being direct we wanted to relay that news to him. The plan to announce it on Monday and it obviously broke Sunday night, and we regret Alex Cora was put in a very difficult position as he has to do his pregame and postgame press conferences every game — so that was unfortunate. What really was important to us was to make sure we were direct and honest with Dave once we had come to a final decision which had occurred over the weekend."

On the lack of a press conference: "As it relates to the issue of a press conference. We just knew it would have been a wholly unsatisfactory experience given that we're just not going to expand on the statements we provided yesterday. I understand the desire for one and the frustration for not having one, but given that we're not going to expand on what we said in our press statement it just wouldn't have been satisfactory to anyone. Instead, we spent the day yesterday focusing entirely on internal communication. John Henry, Tom Werner, myself, spent the day meeting with the players, everybody in the clubhouse, staff, the baseball operations department and our larger front office and we go on from there. It was a difficult 48 hours but we're moving forward."

Why break from protocol: "I think it does often happen. I've observed press conferences with sports figures leaving organizations for a long, long time. I'm not sure what purpose they ultimately serve other than, as you said, protocol. So we decided given that we weren't going to expand on what we said via our press release that went out earlier on Monday we would instead focus on the task ahead and mainly be accountable to our employees and our people in the organization. But we certainly had interaction with the media all day yesterday. We were at the ballpark late Sunday night, all day Monday. We just didn't have a formal media availability or press conference."

Putting Alex Cora in a bad spot having to answer questions: "There is no question Alex was in a bad spot and we definitely regret that. I said that at the outset. The nature of baseball he's required to do those two availabilities pre and postgame. We regret that. But now I'm obviously available to speak to you guys and answer any questions you have as we go forward."

No plan for a press conference: "I think John and Tom will address it in their own way and time. But as it relates to a formal press conference, no I don't. I think we'll refer to the statement that we put out as it relates to Dave and thanking him and moving on. I know, again, that can be unsatisfactory. That's the position we're taking and we're moving forward. Look, John Henry, Tom Werner, their track record in this town is remarkable. We've been here for 18 years and these guys have been running this team with great success. We've had some down years of course. We've had some difficult moments. But as a kid who grew up in Boston as a huge Red Sox fan and now is president and CEO of the team I can tell you no one cares about winning, about winning championships. We won four and we're hungry for more. These are some of the best owners not only in baseball but in professional sports. These guys are committed and they run a great organization. It's difficult to part ways with executives and people, but John and Tom have been accountable since they got here and that won't change. They've done everything in their power to win and have done everything possible with Fenway and it's been an incredible era in Red Sox history."

Understand the frustration of the media/fans: "Oh yeah, absolutely. Of course, I can understand that and I just explained the reasoning behind not holding a press conference, because there would be a lot of questions about why or how and we're just not going to get into that."

So, no press conferences going forward?: "We'll evaluate each situation on a case by case basis as we go forward. We have had change. Theo and Tito and Ben Cherington, Larry Lucchino, Bobby Valentine, I've been there the whole time. ... Yeah, and I'm not sure how great farewell press conferences have gone. Out of respect to the people who are moving on you just aren't going to get into a lot of detail. That's why we made the decision that we made."

Why Dombrowski was let go: "I'm not going to engage on specifics related to Dave other to say the guy has done an incredible job here. We won a world championship, a couple of division championships. On a personal level, I enjoyed working with him. But obviously, you don't make a change unless you're ready for new leadership in that specific department. We're moving forward. We're going to have new leadership. Right now we have our senior management group in that department. Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Raquel Ferreria, Zack Scott, they're working closely with him and ultimately John and Tom during this transition and we'll continue to do the things that put us in position to win championships."

On Alex Cora's future: "John Henry, Tom Werner and I spent a lot of time yesterday with Alex, spent some time with the players and expressed our confidence and support for Alex and the incredible job that he has done. He has been everything you ever want in a manager. I can speak more highly of Alex and the job that he has done and the job that he will do as we move forward. It's no doubt it's been a difficult season for all of us, but we're really, really confident in Alex Cora."

The uncomfortable timing of David Ortiz's appearance: "I understand the appearance and the suggestion that it may have been a distraction or an intentional act to try and distract people. I can assure you that is not the case. The reason it happened last night is because David Ortiz wanted it to happen. David, we had a standing invitation to come and throw out a first pitch. He had made the decision a few days ago that last night would be the night. We were really glad he could be here. It was really great to see him. We understand the timing. I say this a lot, sometimes you can't make these things up. It was really great to see him. I hope people understand there were no intention in terms of distraction or anything like that. Again, it was great to see him and Tiffany. He's doing really, really well and improving every day. I think he's going to be heading back down to Miami soon. It's getting cold out so he told me he wanted to get back to where it was warm. I guess last night was the night to get the first pitch under his belt and he'll go from there."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Three deals that illustrate where Dombrowski ultimately went wrong in eyes of Red Sox ownership

John Tomase

Here's the thing about Dave Dombrowski's "worst" deals -- they almost always landed impact players.

When he overpaid for closer Craig Kimbrel, in his first major acquisition as Red Sox president of baseball operations, he still landed an All-Star. When he took the David Price bidding into the stratosphere in what became the highest contract ever given to a pitcher, he still landed the de facto 2018 postseason MVP. When he surrendered promising left-hander Jalen Beeks to the Rays, he still landed eventual playoff hero Nathan Eovaldi.

But those deals still took a toll on the long-term health of the organization, and it's worth exploring how they came to be viewed by ownership as signals that Dombrowski wasn't the right man to lead the baseball operation moving forward, which is why he was fired on Sunday night.

Start with Kimbrel. Dombrowski acquired the All-Star closer from the Padres on Nov. 13, 2015, by making what became his signature -- the offer you can't refuse. The trade created a ripple of uneasiness across a front office that had grown accustomed to the hoarding of prospects by predecessor Ben Cherington, even as it recognized the need to ease up on the reins.

At issue: the centerpieces of the trade -- outfielder Manuel Margot and infielder Javier Guerra -- represented a fair price on their own to acquire the disgruntled closer, who hadn't thrived in San Diego after five years of dominance in Atlanta. Each was a consensus top-60 prospect, with Baseball Prospectus ranking Margot 14th following the 2015 season.

Dombrowski is a man of action, however, and he wanted the deal done, so he sweetened the pot with left-hander Logan Allen, a teenager who had just posted a 1.11 ERA in his pro debut while walking only one batter in 24.1 innings.

While Kimbrel certainly produced in Boston, making three All-Star teams and saving more than 100 games, the loss of Allen proved costly this July when the Indians made him a central figure in the three-way trade that sent right-hander Trevor Bauer to Cincinnati, top prospect Taylor Trammell to the Padres, and Allen and slugger Franmil Reyes to the Tribe.

Allen debuted this season at 22 and is exactly the kind of cost-controlled piece the Red Sox could use to augment a rotation that's underperforming and overpaid.

Speaking of the rotation, Dombrowski has committed more than \$400 million to three giant question marks -- Price, Chris Sale, and Eovaldi. When the Red Sox signed Price for a record \$217 million a month after acquiring Kimbrel, they didn't just surpass the next-highest offer, they obliterated it. The runner-up Cardinals reportedly offered Price a seven-year deal in the \$175 million range. The Red Sox blew that number out of the water to overcome whatever misgivings Price may have harbored about pitching in Boston, which probably should've been a red flag. As the Globe's Alex Speier noted, they effectively bid against themselves. Now his contract looks unmovable.

Then there's Eovaldi. This was an under-the-radar moment, but many in the organization felt he could be acquired without surrendering Beeks, a hard-throwing left-hander who had impressed in an emergency start against Team USA before the 2017 World Baseball Classic, when he struck out Christian Yelich and Adam Jones in two scoreless innings.

Beeks had a number of advocates on the player development side who recognized his potential to develop into a big league starter, especially after he overhauled his arsenal to feature a 95 mph four-seam fastball and cutter.

It's easy to look at that deal and say, "Eovaldi was instrumental in winning a World Series. Who cares that you gave up Jalen Beeks?" But what if the Red Sox could've acquired Eovaldi for a lesser prospect -- and with Eovaldi coming off yet another arm surgery, his market wasn't exactly robust -- and kept Beeks?

He'd be another depth option in an organization that badly needs it. Instead, he has emerged as a key multi-inning arm in Kevin Cash's bullpen, with an 11-3 record since arriving in Tampa.

The same can be said of Giants right-hander Shaun Anderson, a 2016 third-round pick shipped to San Francisco in 2017 for Eduardo Nunez. Anderson has made 16 starts in the big leagues (albeit with a 5.22 ERA) and owns a higher ceiling than the pitchers the Red Sox were forced to throw in the 4-5 spots of the rotation this season.

Meanwhile, how much could the bullpen use someone like Ty Buttrey? The 6-foot-6 right-hander had some command issues early in his minor league career, but since going to the Angels last July for second baseman Ian Kinsler, has averaged nearly 11 strikeouts per nine innings while posting a 3.90 ERA. That's a solid setup man in exchange for a second-base rental.

In each case, there was apprehension within the organization that Dombrowski was overpaying. That's tolerable when the farm system is loaded, but it's not sustainable, which is why the Red Sox suddenly find themselves in the market for a new GM.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Task at hand is to ensure Red Sox season doesn't go from bad to worse in next few weeks

Sean McAdam

The 2019 Red Sox season can already be marked as a huge disappointment. That will happen when you go from a record-setting regular season and a championship one year, to a third-place finish despite the game's biggest payroll the next.

Some players have enjoyed fine individual seasons and others have impressed as rookies. But that doesn't take away the stink of a year in which the Sox are likely to see a reduction of more than 20 wins compared to a season ago.

Expectations were sky-high, and the Red Sox didn't come close to meeting them. That much is inarguable.

But as bad as things have been for the first five-plus months, the Sox may not have hit rock bottom yet.

On Tuesday, they began their next-to-last road trip of the season with a 4-3 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays. That served as their fourth straight loss and the seventh loss in the last 11 tries. They dropped consecutive series at home to the Minnesota Twins and New York Yankees and will need to win the final two games in Toronto to avoid a third straight series loss — this one to the rebuilding Blue Jays.

Tuesday afternoon in Toronto, Alex Cora, while not completely waving the white flag on the season, acknowledged that he was being "realistic." The math is far from encouraging: with 17 games to go, the Red Sox find themselves 8.5 games out of the last wild card spot, their tragic number now down to 11.

In other words, the jig is up. That much has been obvious for the last few weeks, but it becomes more and more unavoidable with each passing day.

As such, Cora said he would be giving some rest to some of the everyday position players. Xander Bogaerts sat Tuesday night and the plan calls for Mookie Betts to be out of the lineup Wednesday and Rafael Devers to get the night off Thursday.

That much makes sense. All three have been remarkably durable. Bogaerts had missed five games before Tuesday and Devers, by the time his day off arrives, will have missed four. Betts has appeared in all but two.

No one would quibble with their commitment or effort, and given the team has all-but-officially eliminated from a wild-card spot, some rest is in order.

But there's a danger that comes with stretches like this. The players know the standings. They know there is no realistic path to the postseason. And they watched president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski get fired over the weekend, the most obvious sign yet that ownership has already moved on from 2019.

In the last 2.5 weeks of the season, the focus will shift to the future. Who will replace Dombrowski? Which free agents will return? Which players might be traded?

And when that kind of speculation begins, it's easy to forget that there are still games to be played. These games won't determine where the Sox finish in the standings — they're already boxed into third, with second-place Tampa Bay out of reach and fourth-place Toronto sufficiently behind.

Nonetheless, the games remain.

In places like Baltimore, Detroit and Seattle, the games haven't had true consequences for months. But as young teams on the rebuild, many of the young players on those teams are attempting to establish themselves and earn positions for next year.

That's not the case with the Red Sox. With the exception of perhaps first and second base, the positions are already spoken for in 2020.

The danger for the Red Sox is that the relative unimportance attached to the final 17 games.

Already, thanks to an injury-wracked starting rotation, the games are taking on a spring training-like feel, with a half-dozen or more relievers used on a nightly basis. Thanks to the countless pitching changes made nightly, the games drag on longer than usual.

It's easy for the intensity to slip under such circumstances, especially when the Sox play teams out of contention like the Jays, or the San Francisco Giants, Texas Rangers and Orioles awaiting them at the tail end of the schedule.

It will be up to Cora to ensure that the team not lose focus the rest of the way. The respect that he's worked to earn in the clubhouse should come in handy, since his players won't want to embarrass him any further.

In a season that has already gone off the rails, the last thing these Red Sox need is one of those disastrous stretches in the final few weeks, ending the season in miserable fashion, with a dozen or so losses over the final 17 games, riding off into the offseason with a sense of indifference.

The losing streak is at four and counting. For everyone's sake, it had better not stretch on much longer.

BSJ Game Report: Blue Jays 4, Red Sox 3 – Losing streak rolls on north of the border

Sean McAdam

Eovaldi can't go deep: Nathan Eovaldi is healthy again, but one thing hasn't changed: he still can't pitch efficiently, and that results in some short outings. On Tuesday night, he threw 93 pitches, but that only got him 13 outs. Once again, the Jays fouled a lot of pitches off, which in turn drove up the pitch count and limited how long he was able to go. In nine starts this season, Eovaldi has gotten out past the sixth just once. Granted, in his first couple of starts last month, he was still building arm strength and the Sox didn't want to push him. But there are no physical restrictions placed on him anymore, but the deep counts and fall balls limit how long he can go. "The thing with him is the foul balls and they will always be there," said Alex Cora. "It's frustrating," said Eovaldi, "especially with where we are now. I've got to go out and try to go deep into ballgames and I not being able to do that is frustrating."

Devers makes history: Rafael Devers became the youngest Red Sox player to hit 50 doubles in a season when he lashed a ball down the right-field line in the fifth inning. In Red Sox history, there have only been

eight 50-double seasons and at 22, Devers is the youngest to achieve that. Devers also added to his major league-leading 83 extra-base hits, and with 29 homers, he's one homer shy of becoming the first player in 14 years to hit 30 or more homers, knock in 100 or more runs and score 100 or more runs before the age of 23. With another double from Xander Bogaerts (out of the lineup Tuesday), the Sox can become only the third team since 1947 to have two players with 50 or more doubles.

Offense shuts down: The Sox got a solo homer from Mookie Betts on the first pitch of the night, then bunched together three hits in the fifth to score two more. After that, however, the offense dried up. The Sox went in order in the sixth, seventh and eighth innings. The only hit they collected after the fifth came on an infield single to shortstop by pinch-hitter Brock Holt with one out in the ninth. Then again, the offense has been pretty stagnant of late. In the last 10 games, the Sox, who came into the night ranked fourth in runs scored, have scored more than five runs just once.

TURNING POINT

Given how the Sox' lineup was shutdown from the middle of the game onward, early chances loom larger in retrospect. In the second inning, a single and two walks loaded the bases for the Sox. But Toronto rookie starter T.J. Zeuch was able to get Devers to ground out to second, leaving the bases loaded and squandering a big chance for the Sox.

ONE UP

Mookie Betts: Betts did his job at the top of the order, homering on the first pitch of the game, then later reaching twice more on walks.

ONE DOWN

Josh Taylor: The rookie lefty is beginning to show signs of fatigue. He came on in the fifth with an inherited runner and promptly gave up the go-ahead two-run homer, earning the loss.

QUOTE OF NOTE

"We didn't keep the ball in the ballpark. When you do that, you pay the price at this level." – Alex Cora.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

The homer hit by Rowdy Tellez was his sixth this season against the Red Sox.

Mookie Betts has reached base safely in each of the last 23 games.

Betts has seven homers in the last 11 games.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Blue Jays continue their series Wednesday at 7:07 p.m. with RHP Jhoulys Chacin (3-10, 5.60) vs. RHP Trent Thornton (4-9, 5.23)

*** *The Athletic***

How to fix the Red Sox: A to-do list for the team's next GM

Chad Jennings

This offseason had the potential for volatility even before the Red Sox fired their president of baseball operations. They'll have a homegrown star entering his final year of team control, a high-cost slugger with

unusual leverage, a pitching staff in need of repair, considerable money coming off the books and considerable money owed through arbitration.

Given the wide range of factors, the Red Sox could go any number of directions. And they've just fired the guy who spent the past four years steering the ship.

Whoever is hired to replace Dave Dombrowski — whether the job title is some sort of president or the more traditional general manager — the task will be far different than the assignment Dombrowski received in the winter of 2015.

Back then, a homegrown core was beginning to solidify in Boston. It was cheap enough and talented enough that Dombrowski could withstand wasted spending and still have payroll space left over. He also had an elite farm system, which gave him a bevy of trade chips, plus a couple of high-impact prospects on the verge of playing every day.

His replacement will inherit a very different scenario. That same Red Sox core is firmly entrenched, it's no longer cheap, and it's going to get more expensive this winter. While the wasted spending of 2015 came on the positional side, where the organization had cheap replacements nearly ready, the most troublesome contracts on the current roster are in the rotation, where cheap alternatives are harder to find and not necessarily waiting in the wings.

Oh, and the next guy's going to have to at least consider trading one of the most talented and exciting homegrown players in franchise history.

Here's the to-do list. We know what happens if it doesn't work out.

1. Determine the next step with Mookie Betts

One way or another, this will be a franchise-altering decision. Betts is entering his final year of arbitration, which means his salary is going to be well above the \$20 million he made this season. As a point of reference, Nolan Arenado last year agreed to a record \$26 million deal in his final year of arbitration eligibility. FanGraphs valued him at roughly 26 WAR for his career. Betts is already above 36 WAR. His one-year salary is going to be even higher.

So far, Betts has shown little interest in an extension, routinely citing the business side of the game and the importance of elite players setting the bar higher and higher. That leaves the Red Sox with three choices: (1) Somehow get Betts signed long term. (2) Take the one-year deal and hope to sign him the following winter. (3) Take this opportunity to cash in the final year of a superstar by trading for a hefty prospect return. Each option brings its own challenges.

2. Prepare to play hardball with J.D. Martinez

Since signing a five-year, \$110-million contract in the spring of 2018, Martinez has lived up to his billing as one of the game's great offensive players. Now he has the right to opt out. He would be forgoing the final three years and \$60 million, which seems more or less the going rate for such an elite designated hitter. It's possible but not certain a team would be willing to give him more.

For both the team and the player, the Red Sox seem to be a perfect fit. But Martinez could certainly dangle that opt-out clause in search of either more years or more money. If Martinez stays, the Red Sox have the core of their lineup intact and will again look like one of the great offensive threats for the coming season. If he leaves, the Red Sox will save considerable money, but finding a bat of his caliber will be almost impossible. If he negotiates, how much should the team bend, when it's already locked into a competitive contract, and Martinez faces an uncertain open market?

3. Find a starting pitcher

For better or for worse, the Red Sox have four starters under contract. They have multi-year deals with Chris Sale, David Price and Nathan Eovaldi, and they have two more years of team control with Eduardo Rodriguez (another extension candidate, by the way).

The key will be replacing pending free agent Rick Porcello, who's had a brutal year, but at least brought reliable durability. While the Red Sox have improved pitching in their system, none of their top young starters has made more than two starts in Triple A, so it's hard to count on them being ready by Opening Day.

The Red Sox will free up close to \$60 million as contracts to Porcello, Brock Holt, Steve Pearce, Mitch Moreland and Pablo Sandoval come off the books, so that might be enough to consider the high end of the free-agent market, which will include Gerrit Cole, Zack Wheeler, Madison Bumgarner and Hyun-Jin Ryu, plus guys like Cole Hamels, Dallas Keuchel, Rich Hill and Miles Mikolas.

4. Address the bullpen

The Red Sox bullpen was not as bad as it seemed this season, and Alex Cora's no-set-closer strategy was adjusted when Cora saw the idea didn't play out as well as he'd expected. Brandon Workman and Matt Barnes looked like good late-inning options, Darwinzon Hernandez has been electric since his call-up to the pen, and both Marcus Walden and Josh Taylor pitched well enough this year to be penciled in as cheap middle-inning arms. That's not a bad place to start.

But after Dombrowski ignored the bullpen for the better part of 12 months, his replacement will inevitably need to outline his own relief strategy. The bullpen isn't in terrible shape, but another arm would be both useful to the manager and in reassuring to the fanbase.

5. Find ways to save some money

John Henry has spent lavishly. He had the game's highest payroll this year, and he boosted spending beyond expectations in pursuit of last year's championship. But he's said many times that it makes no sense to keep payroll at that level. Whoever he hires to replace Dombrowski will surely have a mandate to get spending under control.

Tendering contracts to Tyler Thornburg and Steven Wright last winter senselessly cost the team some \$3 million, Steve Pearce proved a significant mistake at \$6.25 million, and the team was still paying off the final year of Sandoval's \$18 million salary. Trim the fat and the team can save a little bit here and there.

More interesting will be whether the Red Sox end up trading either Andrew Benintendi or Jackie Bradley Jr., two arbitration-eligible outfielders due for a raise who should have enough trade value to bring back someone cheaper (or perhaps a similarly priced pitcher).

6. Make decisions within an improving farm system

Baseball American ranked the Red Sox minor league system dead last among all 30 teams entering this season, but its prospects performed well enough to move up to No. 22 in those rankings by mid-season. The system graduated Darwinzon Hernandez, Marco Hernandez, Sam Travis and Michael Chavis as helpful role players, while pitchers Tanner Houck and Bryan Mata, plus infielders Bobby Dalbec and C.J. Chatham could be in a position to do the same next year.

The past two years, Dombrowski clearly shied away from trading prospects, and the system has noticeably improved, which should open possibilities for his successor. Despite all of his wheeling and dealing, Dombrowski traded very few prospects the Red Sox truly miss, and he kept two — Devers and Benintendi — who have become mainstays. Dombrowski's replacement will need to walk that same line, considering trade possibilities while identifying untouchables.

7. The curious case of Brock Holt

Unless the Red Sox see a terrific buy-low opportunity with Porcello, none of their pending free agents seem like strong candidates to re-sign. First base, in particular, seems like a position to save money in the wake of Pearce and Moreland.

But then there's Holt, the popular utility man, coming off a career year, who could provide depth at just about every position. It's also hard to ignore Holt's role in the community. His outreach with the Jimmy Fund is legendary, and his outgoing personality gives a public voice to a clubhouse that often doesn't have one.

From a purely baseball perspective, Marco Hernandez is a cheap, in-house alternative, but he hasn't matched Holt's .807 OPS, and he doesn't bring nearly the same intangibles.

8. Win! Win! Win!

This is the bottom line with the Red Sox. Just ask Ben Cherington. Just ask John Farrell. Just ask Dombrowski. It's not simply about building a winning team that stays in contention. It's about a team that can Win! Win! Win! Win the division, win a pennant and win a ring. There's some room for patience, but not much.

With a core of talent in place, and some long-term contracts still in their early stages, the Red Sox are not looking to rebuild. Whoever is hired to make the decisions will know the expectation and what's at stake.

What does the Dave Dombrowski firing mean for the Red Sox-connected front office in Arizona?

Zach Buchanan

It was inevitable that Mike Hazen's name would come up.

That's exactly what happened in the immediate aftermath of the Red Sox suddenly firing Dave Dombrowski as president of baseball operations just after midnight Monday morning, and it makes a lot of sense that it would. Hazen, like many an executive in Arizona and Chicago these days, has Red Sox roots. He joined the Diamondbacks as general manager after the 2016 season after spending one season as the GM under Dombrowski, and he remains the most recent Red Sox expat to land a gig running a baseball team elsewhere. Moreover, he has won praise for his tightrope-walk effort to keep the Diamondbacks competitive while simultaneously rebuilding the farm system, which is the type of expertise the Red Sox are said to be seeking following Dombrowski's successful if not future-preserving turn at the helm.

But as his name continues to pop up in connection with the Boston opening, how much do Diamondbacks fans have to fear? Not once in Arizona's history have the Diamondbacks lost a general manager to a job with a different team — to this point, every GM the team has employed has at some point been dismissed, and neither of the team's two interim GMs was retained in that position permanently. But could things be different this time?

That's one of three questions that immediately arise in the wake of Dombrowski's dismissal, which The Athletic tries to answer here.

Is Mike Hazen all but Boston-bound?

The short answer is: probably not.

Because Hazen is under contract beyond this season, the Diamondbacks can deny any team permission to speak to him about an opening. And because his position in Arizona is generally equal in authority to the one in Boston — never mind his “executive vice president” title compared with Dombrowski's “president” label, as both positions represent the top baseball decision-maker in their respective organizations — the

Diamondbacks wouldn't be out of line for doing so. The Diamondbacks reportedly did that last offseason when the Giants came calling for the opening that was eventually filled by Farhan Zaidi.

But it wouldn't be surprising if an inquiry from Boston was handled differently, given that Hazen is a Massachusetts native who spent more than a decade in the Red Sox front office. It is not known if Hazen has language in his contract allowing him to explore a top baseball ops opening with the Red Sox specifically. Even if there isn't, that doesn't mean the Diamondbacks wouldn't grant him permission to do so. (Preventing him from leaving now, if he wanted, might only cement a departure in the future when his contract expires.)

Hazen could take himself out of the conversation, of course, but he couldn't be reached Tuesday for comment. A Diamondbacks official, speaking off the record, did not sound concerned about Hazen being pilfered. "Shouldn't be an issue and likely won't hear from (the Red Sox)," the official said. "He is under contract. Head of department is head of department."

What about the other Boston-connected executives in Arizona?

When Hazen came to Arizona, he brought two of his closest friends and colleagues with him from Boston to be his assistant general managers: Amiel Sawdaye and Jared Porter. Both have been mentioned as future GMs — Sawdaye was considered for such openings last year in San Francisco and with the Twins before Thad Levine was hired — and both have long Red Sox roots. Unsurprisingly, both have been connected to the Red Sox opening, and it wouldn't be a surprise to see either of them get the job.

The Diamondbacks could deny permission to speak to each — just because the Boston job would be a step up the organizational ladder does not mean Arizona must allow them to be considered — but they, like many teams, recognize that it breeds poor morale to prevent employees from exploring advancement opportunities elsewhere that are not available where they are. For that matter, Hazen has been preparing for both to get their own shot at running teams ever since he was hired.

That doesn't make the departure of either a *fait accompli*, of course. Baseball front offices are littered with former Red Sox executives, along with plenty other intriguing GM candidates with no connection to Boston at all. But if the Red Sox, or any other team that finds itself with a GM opening this winter, want to recreate the Hazen-brand of team-building — with a much bigger budget, if that team is Boston — taking a close look at Porter or Sawdaye would be a smart place to start.

If Hazen is so well-regarded, should the Diamondbacks reward him for that?

Hazen has earned plaudits for his maneuvering at several points in his tenure, whether it be the J.D. Martinez trade that helped the Diamondbacks go from terrible in 2016 to the playoffs in 2017, or the Paul Goldschmidt and Zack Greinke deals that returned exciting young players who have already helped the big-league team compete. If the Diamondbacks claim a wild-card spot a year after going 82-80 — and without Goldschmidt, A.J. Pollock, Patrick Corbin and with only a half-season of Greinke — it may be Hazen's most impressive feat yet. That all explains why he would be sought after by any team.

Just as preventing Hazen from seeking a job that interests him might only seal his eventual exit, one way to be sure to keep him around would be to give him a raise and extend his contract. Hazen is locked up beyond this season, although the Diamondbacks won't say for exactly how long. They also won't say if any adjustments have been made to his deal since he signed it in October 2016, so it's at least possible such an extension or raise has already been worked out.

Hazen took over knowing the effort to return the Diamondbacks to true contention would be a years-long one, and one that he'll be the first to admit is not nearly completed. But he's been able to advance that goal while keeping the big-league club in the playoff hunt each year. That understandably would draw the attention of the Red Sox, an organization Hazen knows deeply. For the Diamondbacks, it might be prudent to further secure his future in Arizona.

*** *The USA Today***

Opinion: Red Sox must answer some big questions after firing Dave Dombrowski

Bob Nightengale

Who's ready to have their name sullied, their reputation bloodied, and their self-esteem battered and bruised?

Oh boy, do the Boston Red Sox have a job for you.

This is a franchise that has won four World Series championships in the last 16 years, and yet, is looking for their fourth different GM in a decade.

The Red Sox make late New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner's trigger finger look like a squirt gun.

The Yankees have won only one World Series championship in 20 years, and GM Brian Cashman has been on the job 22 years and going strong.

The Red Sox's World Series drought lasted 45 weeks and one day when Dave Dombrowski found out he was fired.

The Red Sox fired the man during the second inning of their Sunday Night game against the New York Yankees. They announced it five minutes after midnight. When most of the New England media were covering the New England Patriots' NFL season-opening victory over Pittsburgh on Sunday Night Football.

Oh, and 19 hours later, trotted out David Ortiz to make his first public appearance since the assassination attempt on his life, throwing out the ceremonial first pitch and thanking the Red Sox and the fans.

Sorry, we still haven't forgotten that Dombrowski has been fired, and would be waiting for answers.

Yet, there have been no press conferences.

No response from ownership.

Not even from owner John Henry, who happens to own the Boston Globe.

The Red Sox thanked Dombrowski for the three consecutive division titles and World Series championship in the 292-word press release and congratulated him on his career in Boston, but not a single word publicly on why he was fired.

Did the Red Sox even tell Dombrowski himself why he was fired?

"I think they told me Sunday, since there had been so many rumors, that it was better to stop the speculation," Dombrowski told USA TODAY Sports on Tuesday. "The speculation created internal anxiety for some people internally.

"The reason was that they were going in a different direction. Not much more than that."

Come on. You don't fire a man with a year left on his contract for missing the postseason one time.

You don't fire a man because he dished out \$213 million in free-agent contracts to struggling and injured pitchers Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi when ownership is the ones who signed the checks.

You don't fire a man for having a depleted farm system when you brought him in to specifically win a World Series championship, which he delivered.

No, there have to be other reasons, and the Red Sox aren't talking.

There have been reports that Dombrowski didn't have a warm and cozy relationship with his co-workers, in particular Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy. Dombrowski denied the rift last month to USA TODAY Sports, but the whispers prevailed before the firing, and became stronger afterwards.

There were rumors he isolated himself from everyone but assistant Frank Wren and Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa, but curiously, Wren and La Russa remain employed, and neither have been told they aren't coming back in 2020.

There is word now from Red Sox executives that they are changing direction, plan to cut payroll, let All-Star slugger J.D. Martinez leave if he opts out of his contract, even let reigning MVP Mookie Betts walk away as a free agent (if they don't trade him first), and didn't believe Dombrowski was capable of pulling it off.

And there always is the wild innuendo, even smear campaign, that bubbles beneath the surface spread throughout baseball circles but never proven, as factors in any firing.

Whatever the true reason, the Red Sox aren't publicly talking about it now, won't the rest of the season, and likely never will.

So, in the meantime, everyone suffers.

The Red Sox, who can't keep a GM without firing him like Dombrowski, embarrassing him like Ben Cherington, or making life so miserable that he resigns like Theo Epstein, now look to have all of the stability of an out-of-town newspaper stand.

Dombrowski, the architect of two World Series championships in his career (Marlins in 1997), four pennant winners (2006 and 2012 with the Tigers) and seven division titles, now looks like someone with the people skills of Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

It could all be cleared up, nice and tidy, if the Red Sox ownership would simply talk, answer the questions the best they can without destroying a man's legacy, and be done with it once and for all.

Instead, they leave the dirty work to manager Alex Cora.

"Unfair or fair, I don't know," Cora told reporters, when asked why he should have the responsibility of speaking for the entire organization. "The team already sent a statement. They wanted to make sure we appreciated what Dave did as an organization.

"I know that for some people, it's probably not enough. For others, maybe it is. ...I don't think they have to go into details. The organization just decided it was time to move on."

With only four different skippers since 2004, who would have imagined that being manager of the Red Sox would have more job security than your boss?

"You look at [Dombrowski's] track record, and you're like, 'Wow,' " Cora said, "but ownership decided that's where we're going. And you've got to respect that."

The Red Sox now are looking for someone who can cut their \$239 million payroll, rebuild a farm system, and still compete with the Yankees in the AL East.

No matter who interviews for the Red Sox job, they'll want answers on what led to Dombrowski's firing, and inquire about their own fate if they happen to miss the playoffs, or God forbid, have a losing season.

Let's see, the Red Sox demoted Cherington because he was too conservative even though they won the 2013 World Series, and Dombrowski was too aggressive when winning the 2018 World Series.

So just what do you want?

Maybe the Red Sox don't have to tell us the real reasons they fired Dombrowski, but they sure the heck better tell his replacement.

If not – caveat emptor, buddy.

And if you don't get the answer you're looking for, feel free to give a shout-out to Dan Duquette, Epstein, Cherington and Dombrowski.

They've got their own stories, too.

*** *The Toronto Sun***

Blue Jays snap losing streak but it still won't be a September to remember

Rob Longley

It was never going to be an easy month for the Blue Jays, there never really was a shot at meaningful September baseball.

But a 100-loss season? That wasn't written anywhere on the blueprint for this tumultuous rebuild. With just 17 games remaining in what almost certainly will be the team's worst campaign in four decades, it's a possibility that still exists, however.

There was a pause in the dire numbers Tuesday at the Rogers Centre when home runs by Red Sox killer Rowdy Tellez and fellow rookies Cavan Biggio and Reese McGuire helped the Jays to a 4-3 win over the World Series champs.

While the rare victory ended a season-high seven-game losing streak, the team still must go 7-10 down what barely resembles a stretch to avoid triple-digit losses.

On one level, the season can't end soon enough. On another, there are opportunities like Tuesday where the learning experience can be coupled with a win against a division rival.

"We just got off to a slow start offensively and then we had all the pitching injuries," general manager Ross Atkins said on Tuesday. "I did not expect both of those things to happen.

"We expected that we could overcome some injuries. To all have the setbacks they all had. Unless you have a farm system ready (it's tough.)"

Tough enough that barring a massive rally over the remainder of the schedule, the Jays will finish the farthest from the .500 mark and the farthest from the AL East lead since the 1979 season, just the third in franchise history.

You can debate the relevance of the final numbers, but what would be just a fourth 100-plus loss season certainly piles some pressure on to next year. Attendance is down as it is, as are television ratings and the bean counters that have savaged the Sportsnet hockey budget could well have the knives sharpened.

As you would expect, Atkins isn't looking at a doom scenario, focusing rather on what he believes are significant organizational improvements. While there have been predictable highs and lows from such a young roster, the kids have played and played often.

"What we focus on is things we can control," Atkins said of the diminishing remainder of 2019. "We'll go out and try to win tonight and we try to win tomorrow. We'll continue to try to make the organization better and think about what it means for our future.

"The positive is what we're focused on. The development of the young players that are here, the development of the young players that are coming."

With that in mind, Atkins pointed to a couple of rookies beyond the universal love-in for Vlad Guerrero Jr. and Bo Bichette. Even before Tellez and McGuire had big home runs on Tuesday, their GM was lauding them for making a strong late-season impact.

Despite winning just four of their past 20 games, Atkins hasn't detected a lull in enthusiasm from his young team. A rough run of games, which included series against the Dodgers, Astros and Braves, was a difficult assignment, Atkins reasoned.

"The guys have been great," Atkins said. "They've played some really good teams and as a young core transitioning, that's a great challenge. They've embraced it well as we expect them to continue to do.

"I don't feel as if they are hitting a wall. I see good energy. I see guys who are battling whether it be offensively or defensively. Our pitching has really turned the corner and we've been in every game, for the most part.

"Our guys are getting better. They're cohesive. They're upbeat and in the ninth inning of every game, they're expecting to win."

ROWDY TIME

While the final record won't mean much, September is definitely a big month for Tellez, a point Montoyo often repeats.

His two-run blast on Tuesday was not only the biggest hit of the game, it was his sixth in 10 games vs. the Sox and his 18th of the season.

"I'm just trying to put a good swing on balls and hit balls hard," Tellez said. "I'm just getting to pitches I need to get to and not trying to do too much. Sometimes when I was younger I tried to hit the ball a country mile."

Including his September cameo last year, Tellez now has 25 big-league homers, just the fourth player in Jays history to have that many in his first 120 games.

"That's the Rowdy we're hoping to get," Montoyo said.

GAME ON

Though he didn't factor in the decision, it was an uneven outing for Jays rookie T.J. Zeuch, who was making the first true start of his career and his first Rogers Centre appearance.

The former first-round pick lasted 4.1 innings allowing three runs on six hits and three walks. It was also a rather rude introduction to the Rogers Centre for the 24-year-old as Red Sox first baseman Mookie Betts clobbered the first pitch of the game off the foul pole in left.

Zeuch was the lead man in a parade of seven pitchers employed on the night by Jays manager Charlie Montoyo.

– Biggio got the Jays on the board with his 13th of the season in the third inning and McGuire hit his fifth out in the fourth.

– Among the positives, Atkins and his staff would have taken out of Tuesday's game were a couple of individual outs in the fourth and fifth innings. First, there was a diving Biggio stab to rob Marco Hernandez of a hit to end the fourth. And to lead off the fifth, Guerrero made an incredible grab and throw from his knees to gun down speedy Betts at first.

– Closer Ken Giles needed 29 pitches to get it done, but close he did in the ninth to earn his 19th save of the season.

*** *The Toronto Star***

Blue Jays say hello to doctor long ball and goodbye to seven-game losing streak

Gregor Chisolm

The Blue Jays put an end to their season-high seven-game losing streak on Tuesday night, and to the surprise of almost no one they did it with the long ball.

Cavan Biggio, Reese McGuire and Rowdy Tellez all homered in a 4-3 victory over the Red Sox at the Rogers Centre. The win was their first this month and improved the club's record to 56-89. The Jays need to win seven of the final 17 games to avoid their first 100-loss season since 1979.

All of Toronto's runs in the series opener came via the home run, which has been par for the course this season. The Jays have scored 340 of their 631 runs on homers, which at 53.9 per cent is on pace to be the highest rate in major-league history. Toronto owns the previous record of 53.1 per cent, which was set in 2010.

"I think this lineup is capable of great things," Jays starter T.J. Zeuch said. "You guys got a little taste of it tonight with the power. Names like Biggio, Bichette, Tellez, Vladdy, I think the lineup has a ceilingless potential."

Boston opened the scoring in the top of the first inning when Mookie Betts homered on the first pitch of the game. From there, Toronto's bats did most of the damage with Biggio connecting on a solo shot in the third, McGuire adding a solo shot in the fourth and Tellez putting his team in front for good with a two-run homer in the fifth.

For Tellez it was home run No. 18 on the season and six of those have come in 10 games against the Red Sox. He also became the fourth player in club history to pick up at least 25 homers over his first 120 big-league games.

"I'm just getting the pitches I need to get to, and I'm not trying to do too much in situations where, sometimes when I was younger, I would try hit the ball a country mile when all you have to do is hit it right over the wall," Tellez said.

Zeuch got the start for Toronto and had a solid outing but did not factor into the decision. Zeuch allowed three runs on six hits over 4 1/3 innings. The 24-year-old could use some improvement with his 46-36 strike-to-ball ratio and he finished with just one strikeout, but overall the Jays have to be pleased with what they have seen from the September call-up.

Boston starter Nathan Eovaldi also came away with the no-decision after he allowed three runs over 4 1/3 innings. The loss went to lefty Josh Taylor, who surrendered the go-ahead homer to Tellez. The win allowed the Jays to avoid their longest losing streak since 2009, when it reached nine games. Instead, the club's seven-game losing streak matched its worst from 2017.

Elvis (almost) in the house: Rule 5 pick Elvis Luciano is nearing a return from the injured list. The 19-year-old pitcher has been out since June 12 with a right elbow injury. Luciano threw a simulated game prior to Tuesday night's series opener vs. Boston and is expected to be added to the roster either Wednesday or Thursday. Luciano needs to be activated before the end of the Red Sox series in order to finish with at least 90 days of service, which is the minimum amount of time a Rule 5 pick is required to be on the active roster. If Luciano does not reach 90 days, he must be offered back to the Royals.

Gurriel update: Injured Blue Jays outfielder Lourdes Gurriel Jr., on the injured list since Aug. 9 with a left quad strain, is going to take a little bit longer. "Gurriel's not there yet," Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo said. "He just ran but still feels something. Still got to run the bases. Got a good chance maybe at the end of the week, we'll see."

Up next: Right-hander Trent Thornton (4-9, 5.23) will take the mound when the Jays continue their three-game series against the Red Sox on Wednesday night with first pitch scheduled for 7:07 p.m. Boston is set to counter with righty Jhoulys Chacin (3-10, 5.66).

*** *Associated Press***

Tellez homers, Toronto beats Boston to end 7-game skid

Rowdy Tellez snapped the Toronto Blue Jays out of their longest losing streak of the season with another big home run against Boston.

Tellez hit a two-run homer, Cavan Biggio and Reese McGuire added solo shots and the Blue Jays snapped a seven-game slide with a 4-3 win over the Red Sox on Tuesday night.

Biggio walked twice and scored twice, and McGuire had two hits.

Mookie Betts homered for the Red Sox, who have lost four straight. Boston's three-year run atop the AL East ended with Monday's 5-0 home loss to the Yankees.

Tellez's fifth inning drive left his bat at 111 mph, the hardest-hit ball of the game, and traveled an estimated 429 feet.

"He's got a chance to hit a ball like that almost every at-bat," manager Charlie Montoyo said.

Tellez, who has homered three times in September, says a simple approach is helping him succeed.

"Sometimes in situations when I was younger I was trying to hit balls a country mile when all you need to do is hit it right over the wall," he said.

Tellez is 15 for 35 (.429) with six home runs and 13 RBI in 10 games against the Red Sox this season.

"Everything down, he's getting to it," Boston manager Alex Cora said.

Tellez hasn't fared so well against other opponents -- he's hitting just .198 against the rest of the majors.

Justin Shafer (2-1) pitched 1 1/3 innings as Toronto won for the first time since Aug. 31. After Houston's Justin Verlander no-hit the Blue Jays on September 1, Toronto lost twice at Atlanta and was swept in a four-game series at Tampa Bay.

Derek Law pitched one inning, Tim Mayza got two outs in the eighth and Jordan Romano got the third, and Ken Giles finished in the ninth for his 19th save in 20 opportunities.

Blue Jays rookie right-hander T.J. Zeuch followed opener Wilmer Font in his debut outing at Atlanta last week. This time, the right-hander gave up a solo home run to Betts on his first pitch of the game. The Red Sox slugger lined one off the foul screen in left for his 28th homer. It was Betts' 20th career leadoff homer.

"I've finally found a little something I can maintain, so I'm just trying to ride it," Betts said.

Toronto tied it on Biggio's homer in the third, his 13th, and took the lead on McGuire's blast in the fourth, his fifth.

"We didn't keep the ball in the ballpark," Cora said. "When you don't do that, you pay the price at this level."

J.D. Martinez chased Zeuch with an RBI double in the fifth and Andrew Benitendi made it 3-2 with a two-out RBI single off Buddy Boshers, but Toronto answered in the bottom half when Tellez greeted reliever Josh Taylor (1-2) with 18th homer.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: Manager Alex Cora said LHP David Price (cyst, left wrist) continues to throw but is unlikely to return to the mound during the current road trip. Price pitched two innings against the Angels on Sept. 1, his first action since Aug. 4, but was scratched from Friday's start against the Yankees. Cora said Price could pitch again when the Red Sox return home next week. ... SS Xander Boagerts (rest) got the day off. Cora said other regulars are likely to sit periodically as the season winds down.

50 DOUBLES

Boston's Rafael Devers hit his 50th double in the fifth, becoming the youngest Red Sox player to reach the mark. It's the ninth 50-double season in Red Sox history.

"He's been amazing for us," Cora said.

PITCHING IN

Zeuch is the 20th pitcher to start a game for the Blue Jays this season, tied for the second-most in baseball history. The Philadelphia Athletics used 24 starters in 1915, according to STATS.

ROSTER REPORT

Blue Jays: Oakland claimed C Beau Taylor on waivers. Toronto claimed Taylor from the Athletics on Aug. 16. Taylor was designated for assignment Saturday when Toronto selected LHP Anthony Kay from Triple-A.

IN MEMORIAM

The Blue Jays observed a moment of silence before the game in honor of Chris Duncan. The brother of former Toronto coach and current front office executive Shelley Duncan died of brain cancer last week. Chris Duncan was 38.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: RHP Jhoulys Chacin (3-10, 5.66) made his Boston debut as an opener against the Yankees on Sept. 6, striking out four in two scoreless innings.

Blue Jays: RHP Trent Thornton (4-9, 5.23) is 0-2 with a 12.93 ERA in three starts against Boston. The rookie is winless in six outings since winning at Baltimore on Aug. 1.