

The Boston Red Sox Saturday, September 14, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Red Sox can cross off Mike Hazen as Dave Dombrowski's replacement

Alex Speier

According to multiple reports, the Diamondbacks extended the contract of general manager Mike Hazen, who had two years remaining on the original contract he signed when he left the position of Red Sox GM (in which he worked under president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski) to helm Arizona's baseball operations department after the 2016 season.

Hazen was viewed throughout the industry as an obvious target for the Red Sox in their search for Dombrowski's replacement given his familiarity with the Sox and his track record in Arizona, where he's overseen three straight years of contention while turning an inflexible payroll into a flexible one.

But according to a major league source, the Red Sox — who are still in the early stages of forming their candidate list — never requested permission to talk to Hazen about his potential interest in returning to Boston. The extension effectively preempted any potential request.

Who says Red Sox do not have a deep bullpen?

Julian McWilliams

A sea of Red Sox relievers occupied the bullpen beyond the right-center field wall at Fenway Park during last week's homestand. A few minutes prior, they had walked in unison to the place that would test their collective mettle for nine innings. Cramped knees, and stiff necks and legs, are never ideal.

"There's a lot of bodies out there," closer Brandon Workman said.

Seventeen, waiting for that phone to ring.

"This is definitely the most," said bullpen catcher Mike Brenly, who's in charge of getting all the arms ready. "It's definitely been a challenge trying to maneuver around and get guys warm. It keeps it fun. You never know when you're name is going to be called. Crazy busy, but fun."

The Sox' way of being creative in September revolves around their bullpen arms. Their original five-man rotation is virtually down to just Eduardo Rodriguez and Rick Porcello. The team was — and still is — building Nathan Eovaldi back up to be a starter, and both David Price and Chris Sale hit the injured list in August. Price returned, but soon after was shut down again.

That sent the Sox searching for their last hope: Arms and more arms.

Creating what looks like a public school at its maximum level of occupants.

"In college, we probably had seven or eight guys," Travis Lakins said. "When I moved to the bullpen in pro ball, it was always seven or eight. It's awesome to be down there with all those guys."

Usually, Sox players have to bring out an extra set of chairs. Roughly six, according to Colten Brewer. Certainly, there's seniority. Veterans Workman, Matt Barnes, Ryan Brasier and Heath Hembree have permanent spots on the bench; Hembree, still on the IL, sits in the dugout for now to avoid the hassle. The chairs are usually for the rookies, who sit outside the bullpen dugout.

“You kind of have a small area,” Josh Smith said. “So, it’s like, I don’t want to cram in with everybody. So then I sat on one chair, ‘This one is too low. Let me try this other chair.’”

However, it’s not just the chairs that can cause some confusion. The bullpen itself can, too. With Fenway Park’s nostalgia comes an interesting, and not-so-ideal, work environment that surely isn’t built for 17. Most relievers warm on the mound closest to the field, but there have been multiple times where manager Alex Cora has had two people going at the same time.

And if there’s a lefty going on the mound closest to the bullpen bench?

“Zippppp,” explained Trevor Kelley, making the sound of the baseball zipping past. “You have to watch your lips.”

Kelley said you have to be alert for other reasons, too. The bullpens are back-to-back and, in the recent series against the Yankees, both teams accidentally airmailed a few into each other’s respective pens.

“It gets a little sketchy, but you have to roll with it,” Kelley said. “The first time I was out there, I couldn’t feel my arm. It felt like I was lobbing it in there and it would shoot right out.”

Kelley carries the rookie bookbag for the bullpen, which has an assortment of Red Bull, candy, sunflower seeds, anything to keep his vets happy. Lakins had it before Kelley, but now there are more mouths to feed.

“I went around a few days ago and asked everyone if there’s anything that they want in there,” Kelley said.

The crowded space isn’t that much of an adjustment for a couple of players. Darwinzon Hernandez said he was alongside as many as 15 relievers and 12 starters when he played in the Arizona Fall League back in 2018. Brasier said despite the amount of bodies in the bullpen, it still felt normal.

And for every bullpen guy who was a September call-up, the overcrowdedness is something that they make more light of than anything, because they are getting an opportunity to make an impression.

“I’m just trying to go out there and prove that I can compete at this level,” Ryan Weber said.

Said Lakins: “I’m really telling myself to be me. I can get worked up sometimes.”

Kelley felt this is a huge stepping stone.

“For me to have somewhat of a role here in September is huge for me,” he said. “Just getting my feet wet in the big leagues gives me a lot of confidence.”

The Sox will go with Rodriguez on Saturday, followed by Porcello on Sunday. It won’t be the bullpen game Sox fans have grown accustomed to, but if there’s any trouble, you can bet Cora — who said they aren’t punting any games away despite the standings — will summon a fresh arm.

“We’re very comfortable with all of them and know what they can do,” Cora said. “As everybody knows, we’re going to keep playing, but we’re realistic. As far as them and the future, as I said in spring training, it takes more than the guys that we take on the Opening Day roster.”

Hembree, who could throw a simulated game Saturday, would make it 18 bullpen arms. And he has already intimidated something to the rookies.

“I got my seat,” Hembree said. “I already told them I’m going to get my seat back.”

Raquel Ferreira is a natural fit to help Red Sox in transition

Alex Speier

At the conclusion of the press release announcing the firing of Dave Dombrowski, the news was tucked into the penultimate paragraph as almost an afterthought: The Red Sox baseball operations department would be overseen by its three assistant general managers, Brian O'Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott.

"In addition," the press release read, "Senior Vice President of Major and Minor League Operations Raquel Ferreira will take on an expanded role within the transition team."

That sentence represented a landmark in sports. Already, Ferreira was just the third female senior vice-president of baseball operations in MLB history. Five years earlier, when she'd been elevated to VP status, Yankees assistant GM Jean Afterman reached out with an e-mail to celebrate the moment. The message: "Welcome to the brotherhood."

For "the brotherhood" and for the sport, Ferreira's elevated status within the transition team – membership in the Red Sox "Gang of Four," Afterman joked, with a nod to the leaders of China's Cultural Revolution — marks an enormous development.

"Somebody actually asked me, 'Does this mean she's going to be involved in baseball operations?' I was like, 'What the [expletive]? She is baseball operations,'" said Afterman. "The more visible women are in baseball operations, the more it alters a landscape. My hat's off to the Red Sox. The way they announced it . . . it says in black and white that here's this woman, an SVP, who's in charge of major league and minor league operations. It's a meaty job. I think that for her to be sitting at the table, for the Red Sox to trust her to sit at that table, is really important."

Her position at the table has few parallels in front office circles.

New world of opportunity

Ferreira's grandmother, Constance Silva, came to the United States from Cape Verde in hopes of building a better life for her family, with plans for her husband and eight children to follow. Silva was soon joined in New Bedford by two of her children — including Ferreira's mother, Lotty. The three of them worked in a factory, saving and sending their money back to Cape Verde until the rest of the family could afford to move to the States.

Her father, Gamaliel Ferreira ("Gammy"), likewise immigrated at a young age. After he and Lotty married and then built their own family in Rhode Island (Pawtucket and then Cumberland), he took a number of jobs to support it.

To his children, including Raquel, Gammy shared a Portuguese pearl of wisdom about the value of professional commitment and why he did not shy from a job cleaning toilets or working in a factory (one where he was eventually elevated to supervisor): There's no shame in any work that you do, but it's a shame not to work.

Gammy and Lotty Ferreira encouraged their children to pursue their passions, to work in the professions where they wanted a job with a belief that talent and hard work could allow them to grow. Those beliefs accompanied Raquel Ferreira when she started as an administrative assistant for the Red Sox in 1999, as did another.

"Dress for the job you want, not the job you have," Ferreira — who declined to be interviewed out of respect for the sensitivity of the organization's transition — relayed last month at the SaberSeminar at Boston University. "My dad would cut the lawn in a tie and shirt because he did a job. I didn't see my dad wear shorts until I was probably in my late 20s. My parents took pride in everything they did, from the way they walked out of the house to the way they dressed.

“Always keep that mind-set of being a professional at all times — especially if you’re a woman, because unfortunately you’re judged harshly. You’re judged unfairly. It’s not right,” she added. “But because you’re a woman operating in a man’s world, people look at you differently . . . We live in a world where you’re labeled all the time — on the field, off the field . . . I wanted to always make sure that my label was something I was always proud of.”

Rising in the ranks

The impression Ferreira made was a powerful one. The combination of talent, precision, authenticity, accountability, and directness stood out.

“She tells it like it is,” said Red Sox president and CEO Sam Kennedy. “No B.S.”

When Theo Epstein was hired as GM and Ben Cherington installed as director of player development, Ferreira moved up to director of minor league administration — a role that included managing the operations of Sox minor league affiliates, handling transactions, overseeing payroll for minor leaguers, as well as immigration and visa issues, among many others.

In that capacity, Cherington once said, Ferreira never made a mistake — extraordinary given the volume of tasks. Yet she also recognized more significant ways to make an impact.

Through the experiences of her parents, Ferreira could relate to young players about the challenges they faced in being away from and trying to support their families, often while living outside the country of their upbringings. And so, she assumed an ill-defined yet enormously significant role of ensuring that the organization would treat its minor leaguers like adopted sons, offering as much off-field support as possible to permit players the greatest chance of on-field success.

“Raquel embodies the culture of our organization,” said Kennedy. “She cares passionately about the organization and its people.”

As her family had counseled, the quality of Ferreira’s work permitted her to advance through numerous promotions in the team’s minor league operations before the elevation to VP of baseball administration in late 2014, and entry into the “brotherhood” with Afterman and Kim Ng, a former Yankees assistant GM who had moved into Major League Baseball’s front office by that time.

Ferreira was elevated to the position of SVP of major and minor league operations after the 2018 season, a role in which she oversees the team’s baseball operations budget and day-to-day, off-field activities. In that position, she already made a considerable impact at the start of 2019.

“I’ll tell you flat-out: [The Xander Bogaerts] deal would not have gotten done without Raquel, her leadership, her relationship with Xander, the trust and candor that they had with each other,” said Kennedy.

The same trust that allowed Ferreira to help convince Bogaerts to remain in Boston as part of the Red Sox’ future extends to homegrown players such as Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Matt Barnes, and Christian Vazquez, who have known Ferreira since their first days in pro ball. Those relationships are precisely why she’s been asked to help stabilize the organization — along with longtime colleagues O’Halloran, Scott, and Romero — during a time of change.

“It was a natural fit,” said Kennedy.

“We wanted to make sure that during the transition, the leadership of the department was handling all baseball operations matters and nothing fell through the cracks. We tried as much as possible to be conducting business as usual. Raquel has been here the longest. She has the deepest relationships throughout the entire organization of anyone.

“She, simply put, is a leader. People look to her for input and direction and guidance. It was a complete and total no-brainer.”

Beyond the Red Sox

Ferreira has been an organizational anchor for more than two decades, her tenure predating that of the current Red Sox owners. Still, most of her work has been behind the scenes — an enormous presence inside the organization, little known outside of it.

With her explicitly stated role as a key figure in the transition, that has changed, in a way that is significant beyond Fenway Park.

“She has been a backbone of that club for over 20 years,” said MLB deputy commissioner Dan Halem. “She hasn’t received a lot of public attention . . . But it is good that her profile publicly, outwardly is being raised by Boston’s decision to put her in the leadership group during the transition period.”

MLB has been engaged for some time in a number of diversity initiatives, including efforts to get women into growth positions both in front offices and on the field. With undertakings such as the MLB Diversity Fellowship Program, the league has been trying to broaden the demographics of front offices from the ground up. Ferreira now stands as an example of what is possible – joining a prominent baseball organization in an entry level position and to rise within it.

“From MLB’s perspective, having a female in a high-profile, leadership role, particularly on the baseball ops side of clubs, is extremely important for us,” said Halem.

“There are no barriers in this day and age to you becoming a general manager and a president of baseball operations. I am 100 percent optimistic that in five years, seven years, ten years, when we’re having this conversation again, the numbers [of women in senior leadership positions] will look different.”

Such a development is likewise important to Ferreira, who has an 11-year-old daughter, Gabriella.

“I constantly tell her, ‘Don’t ever let someone tell you you can’t do something because you’re a girl,’” Ferreira said at the SaberSeminar.

“I have to be more conscious of putting myself [in a visible position] – not for self-promotion – but for showing other people, especially somebody my daughter’s age, or girls in her classroom, that you can do this.

“It’s hard. You work hard at it. But you can do it if you put your mind to it.”

Ferreira serves as a testament to those notions, a fact that raises the possibility of growth in the “brotherhood.”

“Nobody did her any favors. She didn’t get there out of nepotism. She was hired and promoted just by virtue of her own talent alone. In baseball, that’s kind of a remarkable thing – male or female. It’s amazing and a really great thing for the baseball industry and women in sports – and unfortunately,” Afterman, the Yankees assistant GM, said with a laugh, “for the Red Sox.”

Red Sox play the spoiler role against Phillies

Julian McWilliams

The Red Sox won’t take off this upcoming series against the Philadelphia Phillies even though the standings indicate they can start gearing up for a vacation in October.

“Oh yeah,” manager Alex Cora said when asked if his starters would play. “We’re playing. We’ll be ready.”

The Sox might not be playing for something, but the Phillies are in a tough battle for a National League wild-card spot. Entering Friday, the Phillies and Mets were both two games out of the second wild card, which featured a battle between the Cubs and Brewers. The Nationals held a 3½-game lead over Chicago and Milwaukee for the first wild card.

If the Sox can’t make the postseason, they can certainly hurt the chances of others, too, starting with the Phillies and including the Rays next week.

Eduardo Rodriguez will get the start at Citizens Bank Park on Saturday, followed by Rick Porcello on Sunday.

It’s become somewhat redundant to point out, but Rodriguez is having a breakout season and has been the Sox’ best starter all year. He is 17-6 and has a 3.73 ERA in 178⅔ innings.

He has three more starts this season, so there’s a chance he can reach 20 wins. He would be the first Sox starter to get there since Porcello racked up 22 in 2016, when he won the AL Cy Young award.

“It should be a great atmosphere over there,” Cora said. “They’re fighting for the wild card. So let’s go over there and play some good baseball.”

Short and sweet

Xander Bogaerts should be in the AL MVP conversation and very well might be the best shortstop in all of baseball this season.

After recording his 1,000th career hit last week against the Yankees, Bogaerts hit his 50th double of the year Thursday in Toronto. He is just the second shortstop in history to achieve the feat, after Alex Rodriguez did it in 1996 as a member of the Mariners.

Bogaerts used to just shoot the ball the other way, like his favorite player growing up, Derek Jeter. But once Cora became manager, he explained to Bogaerts that he had more power in his bat, that he could hit for average and power. This season, Bogaerts bought in.

“For him to buy into the concept of him driving the ball, it’s been great,” said Cora. “Also, he’s hitting over .300.”

And Cora thinks Bogaerts will get better.

“Wow,” Bogaerts said when he was made aware of Cora’s thoughts. “The other day, he was like ‘I’ll turn you into 40 homers,’ and I was like ‘Hey, this is good.’ Obviously more homers are better, you can help your team out a lot more.

“I know this season hasn’t been nice for us in general. But whenever I have time to myself or family, that will definitely be stuff that we’ll be talking about.”

Hazen re-signs

According to multiple reports, the Diamondbacks extended the contract of general manager Mike Hazen, who had two years remaining on the original contract he signed when he left the position of Red Sox GM (in which he worked under president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski) to helm Arizona’s baseball operations department after the 2016 season.

Hazen was viewed throughout the industry as an obvious target for the Red Sox in their search for Dombrowski's replacement given his familiarity with the Sox and his track record in Arizona, where he's overseen three straight years of contention while turning an inflexible payroll into a flexible one.

But according to a major league source, the Red Sox — who are still in the early stages of forming their candidate list — never requested permission to talk to Hazen about his potential interest in returning to Boston. The extension effectively preempted any potential request.

Picking it up

It was a couple of weeks ago that Betts's uncle, former big-leaguer Terry Shumpert, insisted that his nephew wasn't having a down season. People were just making an unfair comparison to his MVP year in 2018, said Shumpert. After a 3-for-5 game Thursday, Betts is hitting .293 with a .918 OPS. But that's just the surface. Betts's 131 runs lead the league and are the most by a Red Sox player since Dom DiMaggio in 1950. To peel back another layer, Betts swiped his 15th bag of the season Thursday and has 28 homers. There are 15 games left this year. If Betts gets to 30 homers and 20 stolen bases, he'll be just the second player in Red Sox history to reach 130 runs, 30 homers, and 20 stolen bases in the same season. The first to do it? 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts. Uncle Terry might have been on to something.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox reliever Ryan Brasier trying to finish strong after up and down year

Steve Hewitt

When Ryan Brasier returned to Boston in mid-August after a month-long stint in Triple-A with Pawtucket, the reliever was full of confidence after he felt he had figured out the struggles that plagued him through the season's first half.

At first, it carried over. Brasier gave up only one run in his first seven innings upon rejoining the Red Sox. But in what's been indicative of his inconsistent 2019, the right-hander fell back to earth with his worst outing of the year. He was charged with six runs and a blown save in an Aug. 31 road loss against the Angels, which started a frustrating stretch during which he yielded nine earned runs on nine hits in just 1½ innings.

"It's been a tough season," Brasier admitted.

Brasier came out of nowhere in 2018 to become a valuable piece of Alex Cora's bullpen on their way to a World Series title, and coming into this season the 32-year-old righty was expected to again be a major contributor. But inconsistency, particularly with command of his fastball, has forced him to take a step back this season.

"A lot of ups and downs," Brasier said. "I started out good, then had a rough patch, it's just been kind of back and forth. I really want to come in next year and be more consistent."

Brasier dismissed that it was humbling to be sent down to Pawtucket, but it certainly was needed. He had posted a 10.50 ERA in six appearances in July before he was optioned, and the month down seemed to do him some good. In 10 appearances, he sported a 0.96 ERA.

It's been a mixed bag in the month since his return, but Brasier has felt like he made progress, specifically with his fastball location. He was hoping a positive outing in Tuesday's loss to the Blue Jays, in which he worked out of a bases-loaded situation, could help him get back on track.

“There’s been certain times where I’m trying to not get beat by certain hitters and so I’m not trying to miss it,” Brasier said. “There’s purposeful pitches and walks happen sometimes, but as far as working on stuff, I feel like when I went down, I had some stuff that I wanted to work on and I accomplished it.

“Most of my last few outings I felt really good, but it’s always good to finally get a good, solid outing after a couple of bad ones.”

Cora never has lost faith in Brasier, but he’s hoping to see more consistent results over these last few weeks of the season.

“We need him to do it on a consistent basis,” the manager said. “It’s been an up-and-down year with him. It’s not about his stuff. We talk about it, it’s about where to go with the stuff. Keeping the ball in the ballpark is important. That’s something we need to improve. And also, for him, being able to get lefties and righties out. You never know. We don’t mix and match that much but at the same time you don’t want to take him out right away. It seems like right now he’s having trouble with righties. Earlier in the season, it was lefties.

“Just consistency, keep working on it, keep getting better. Use the information that is provided the right way and we trust the guy. We know he’s good.”

Though it’s been a trying year for Brasier, it’s not over yet. Pitching well over the final two weeks is important to him in order to gain some momentum going into the offseason and spring training, where he should be in a position to find a role in the bullpen next season.

“You want to go into the end of the season and into the offseason finishing strong, and hopefully it will be a little bit of a building block to work on some stuff in the offseason,” Brasier said. “Hopefully I can end the year on a good note.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Mike Hazen not a Boston Red Sox GM candidate as he signs extension with Diamondbacks

Christopher Smith

Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen, who worked in the Red Sox organization for 11 years, is not a candidate to take over for Dave Dombrowski who Boston ownership fired this past Sunday.

Hazen instead has agreed to a contract extension with Arizona, MLB.com’s Steve Gilbert and others reported Friday.

Hazen, who served as Red Sox GM under Dombrowski in 2016 and grew up in Abington, Mass., left Boston for Arizona in October 2016.

He also served as Boston’s co-assistant GM with Brian O’Halloran under former general manager Ben Cherington. Before that, he was the Red Sox’s vice president of player development and amateur scouting.

Hazen, a former Princeton University baseball player, held multiple management roles both in scouting and player development for the Cleveland Indians organization before arriving in Boston.

*** *RedSox.com***

Find out what food Sox reliever Barnes won't eat

Jessica Camerato

Red Sox reliever Matt Barnes is in a tough situation. He grew up in Connecticut and plays in Boston, yet there's one kind of food local to New England that he just won't eat. Find out what Barnes is keeping off his plate and in which movie he would most like to guest star.

When you were a kid and you said, "When I grow up, I want to be a ..." what did you think you were going to be?

This, because I loved baseball and it's what I wanted to do. My family had one hundred percent faith in me from when I was young. Anybody that tells you that you can't do something that you want to do doesn't have big enough dreams.

Believe it or not, I've never eaten ___

I've tried this, but I'll never eat it -- seafood. Don't eat it. Nope. I've tried a bunch of it, don't like any of this. I hate it. I hate seafood. I hate the smell of it. I hate the taste of it. I hate the texture. All of them -- lobster, salmon, swordfish, shrimp. I didn't like the first one I had, but decided to continue to try it to see if it was just that one. And no, it was all of it. I eat a lot of steak and a lot of burgers and a lot of chicken. Beef and chicken.

What's been the coolest gift you've been able to give somebody now that you're in the position you're in?

I was able to help buy my dad a pair of stereo speakers he's wanted for the longest time. A few years ago -- four, five years ago -- I was able to help get that done, so that was pretty awesome. I got the Father's Day jersey that I wore and had it signed by all the guys on the team to give to my wife's father when he was battling cancer before he passed away. That one means a lot to us.

You've played in Europe and in Asia. Which international experience stands out to you?

Playing in Asia was interesting. You get to see a totally different culture. Playing for Team USA, there's something about having USA across your chest that just represents something a lot bigger than you. ... When we were in Taiwan, they dried their field. They literally had a bin with a fire at every base. They would take a flat shovel, take the wet dirt, hold it over the fire until it dried and then they threw it back down. That's how they dried the field.

If you could guest star in any movie, which film would you want to be on?

I would be in *The Fast and the Furious*. I just love cars and I love those movies. [My character] would probably be in the crew with Vin Diesel and Paul Walker. The first one is my favorite because it's the original, it's the best.

What is your favorite memory as a Major League baseball player?

The two best moments: the World Series and when you make your debut. Making your debut and getting here is the first step in the journey which you hope is going to be 10, 12, 15 years. It's everything that you've worked for finally coming to fruition. When you win the World Series, it's getting to the top of the mountain. It's like getting to the bottom of [Mount] Everest -- OK, we're here -- and then you get to the top of Everest -- OK, we did it. They're just different [moments], but both equally awesome.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

We'll hear lots of names in Red Sox GM search, but I keep coming back to one -- Theo Epstein

John Tomase

He looms over the Red Sox general manager search like a mothership, his shadow creeping towards Fenway Park.

He made his name here as the original boy wonder general manager nearly 20 years ago, and until the Red Sox hire someone else, we'll be left to wonder -- could Theo Epstein come home?

Eight years into a Chicago Cubs tenure that has yielded one World Series and what's looking like a fifth straight postseason appearance amidst unease over the franchise's future, Epstein faces unfinished business. The Cubs are approaching a reckoning in two years, when stalwarts such as Kris Bryant, Anthony Rizzo, Jon Lester, Javier Baez, and Kyle Schwarber reach free agency.

At that point, Epstein will have been on the job for 10 seasons, or one more than he completed in Boston. He has always viewed such projects as roughly decade-long commitments, which means he could be seeking a new challenge in a couple of years.

Life doesn't always follow a rigid schedule, however, and the Red Sox have an opening right now. And if I were them, before casting their net far and wide to find Dave Dombrowski's successor, I'd make every effort to see if Epstein can be lured back to Boston.

It'll take more than a title such as President of Baseball Operations. It'll take a piece of ownership, and that's no small thing. Forbes recently valued the Red Sox at \$3.2 billion, making a 1 percent stake in the franchise worth more than \$30 million.

Epstein is worth it. He has turned two supposedly cursed franchises into World Series winners since 2004, and his imprints remain all over a Red Sox organization that seeks a return to the long view after Dombrowski delivered on his mandate and sacrificed the future in service of three straight postseason appearances, culminating in the 2018 juggernaut that romped to 108 wins and a World Series title.

The next GM is going to need time, because the Red Sox are not ideally positioned for the future, not with more than \$400 million tied up in three pitchers -- Chris Sale, David Price, and Nathan Eovaldi -- who aren't exactly portraits in reliability. The new guy's first order of business may very well be to trade defending MVP Mookie Betts and drop the team below the \$208 million luxury tax threshold, which means he'll deserve a longer leash than those afforded either Dombrowski or predecessor Ben Cherington.

Wooing Epstein might be a fool's errand -- he has given no indication he's focused on anything other than navigating the Cubs through their own approaching minefield -- but that's why John Henry, Sam Kennedy and Co. should place that call first.

The win-now culture of Boston can make working for the Red Sox a somewhat grim pursuit even when times are going well, because there's always worry about what comes next. Epstein not only recognizes this dynamic, he'd have a chance to impact it at an ownership level.

He'd also represent a do-over for Henry, who regrets not only the way Epstein's exit unfolded, but that he wasn't able to better mediate the personality clash between Epstein and former CEO Larry Lucchino that factionalized the front office.

In considering possibilities for the new GM role earlier in the week, I suggested that Henry start with the Epstein tree, whether it's Cubs GM Jed Hoyer, Arizona's Mike Hazen, or various assistants across the game like Amiel Sawdaye, Jared Porter, or Jared Banner, because they could seamlessly lead a baseball operations department filled with their peers and restore a measure of continuity.

Two issues with this theory. One, there's no guarantee Henry really knows who they are. Owners don't generally familiarize themselves with every assistant in baseball ops. Two, those candidates have eyes. They see how things ended for Dombrowski and Cherington despite freshly minted championship banners, and rightfully wonder what kind of job security they could reasonably expect.

Neither would be an issue for Epstein, who worked closely with Henry for nearly a decade and whose presence atop the baseball side would encourage stability. Lucchino may have eventually been pushed out, but you can't fire an owner.

So instead of the branches on the Epstein tree, perhaps the Red Sox should target the trunk. After all, they've reached a crossroads and the Cubs are nearing one. The intersection may not be perfect, but it has left an opening for Theo Epstein to come home, and this time maybe even for good.

*** *The Athletic***

Boston who? With a contract extension, the Diamondbacks ensure Mike Hazen isn't going anywhere

Zach Buchanan

It's hard to keep radio silence when you're required to do a weekly radio spot.

Mike Hazen had tried to avoid saying anything, but he knew he couldn't avoid the question entirely. Late Monday night, the Red Sox had fired top baseball executive Dave Dombrowski. For more than 24 hours, Hazen's name had swirled around the baseball world as a possible and even likely replacement. It was still hanging in the air when Hazen appeared on Arizona Sports 98.7 FM for his regular Tuesday call-in, and Hazen's answer didn't exactly calm the waters.

"I am an Arizona Diamondback and I want to talk about the Arizona Diamondbacks," he said when asked if he had interest in the Boston opening. "That's really where my focus is. It's where 100 percent of my focus has been and will continue to be. That's all I'm really going to have to offer on that." Despite several chances to do so, he declined to say outright that he was not at all interested in the Red Sox gig.

Hazen now says he didn't intend for that to be a smokescreen, but that's what it ended up being. His non-answer on the radio was meant to be devoid of any revealing information, but it wasn't a desired departure he was trying to conceal — on Friday, he and the Diamondbacks agreed on a contract extension that officially should remove his name from the Boston rumor mill. And while that may seem like a quick reaction by the Diamondbacks to stymie the poaching of their top baseball mind, Hazen said those discussions began before Dombrowski was ever let go.

And if his radio appearance made the speculation of an exit only worse for Diamondbacks fans — though no answer at all hardly would have been more reassuring — he hopes they now understand his evasiveness.

"We were in the process of doing something and I just didn't want to make any comment in either direction. For whatever reason, I just felt like it was the safest thing to do," Hazen said Friday. "It may not have been, in hindsight, the right thing to do, but that's just kind of where I felt it was the right thing to do."

The extension — the terms of which were not revealed — signals that Hazen and the Diamondbacks are committed to seeing through his vision for the franchise. There was nothing that forced them to come to this point. Hazen was already under contract at least through next season, which would have allowed the Diamondbacks to deny the Red Sox permission to speak to him about their opening. When team president and CEO Derrick Hall approached Hazen about an extension about 10 days ago, it was hardly the organization's only recourse for keeping Hazen around.

Neither was Hazen forced to consider a contract extension or nothing. When the Dombrowski firing raised Hazen's profile, the GM approached Hall to address the elephant in the room. As far as he knows, the Red Sox never formally expressed interest in speaking to him, although he feels he wouldn't have been prevented from exploring that opportunity if they had. "I believe that if something had come up and it was something I wanted to pursue, they would have allowed me to do that, which I appreciated quite a bit," he said. He certainly could have paused extension talks to see what direction Boston went, but he "we were already moving down a line anyway and one that I was hopeful would come to fruition."

He wanted to stay in Arizona – before there was an opening in Boston and afterward – because he feels he hasn't yet done what he set out to do here.

“I feel like we have a lot of unfinished business here together,” Hazen said, “something that we started, something that we as a group are extremely passionate about – making this organization as successful as it can be.”

Even that unfinished business has been met with praise. As Hazen's name popped up on list after list of possible Dombrowski successors, it was accompanied by glowing reviews of his efforts with the Diamondbacks. He seemed to be the perfect fit for Boston, a franchise that after the no-tomorrow ways of Dombrowski – a philosophy that admittedly brought the Red Sox a World Series title last year – is said to want someone running baseball ops who can win at the big-league level while also keeping the farm system stocked. That perfectly describes Hazen's modus operandi.

Hazen inherited a club that performed dismally in 2016 but largely kept it intact, adding important players who allowed the Diamondbacks to reach the National League Division Series a year later. Even as the team's big-league fortunes have dimmed the past two years, Hazen has steadfastly refused to let them be extinguished entirely. He has steered away from a full rebuild both last offseason and at this year's trade deadline, while still making future-focused moves such as trading Paul Goldschmidt and Zack Greinke. Those deals, along with strong drafts and international signings, have improved Arizona's collection of young talent significantly.

That approach has impressed rival executives and scouts. But, in a sport that often is more enamored of process over actual results, Hazen gives his stewardship a grade of incomplete. Last year's team remained in first place for five months, but it embarrassingly collapsed in the sixth. This year's club has overperformed the expectations of many outside the organization, but the Diamondbacks entered Friday with just a two-percent shot at making the playoffs, according to FanGraphs. At no point have they looked like a serious contender this season, much less capable of dethroning the Dodgers in the NL West.

“I'm not going to sit here and talk about farm system rankings and things like that,” Hazen said. “That's not a marker in my mind for success. Success is winning major league baseball games year in and year out. As evidenced by our record, we're not where we need to be.”

Hazen's extension does not necessarily mean the Diamondbacks can lower their guard when it comes to a brain drain. His two assistant GMs, Amiel Sawdaye and Jared Porter, have Boston roots nearly as long as his and are regarded as not only future GMs but near-future ones. Hazen wouldn't be at all surprised to lose one or both this winter to GM jobs, in Boston or anywhere else. “They're fantastic and they're a big piece of what we do here,” he said, “and deserve the credit and attention that they'll probably receive.”

But while it would be hardly shocking to see either interviewed for the Boston opening, there is a sense throughout the game that the Red Sox job isn't as enticing as it appears to be. Though they have not discussed them in relation to the current opening, Hazen and both of his lieutenants were there to witness the rocky exit of Theo Epstein and the short leash afforded Epstein's successor, Ben Cherington. From afar, they've seen Dombrowski dismissed less than a full season after winning the World Series. Seats there seem to get hot quickly.

Of course, the same could have been said about the Diamondbacks before Hazen's arrival. His hiring represented the third regime change the organization had made in two years. But Hazen's approach to team-building required patience. Diamondbacks ownership has afforded it to him, largely giving him free rein to construct the team the way he wants. He has completely ignored one hefty contract (Yasmany Tomás), traded away another (Greinke) and shipped out the best homegrown player in franchise history (Goldschmidt). Ownership, Hazen said, has “given us every ounce of support since we've been here.”

When you get that kind of backing, you don't worry so much about greener pastures. And when you get a GM whose process you trust – even if it's just half-completed at this point – you want to keep him.

“Mike and his staff have done a masterful job and they have short- and long-term plans here that are working towards building a sustainable winner,” Diamondbacks president and CEO Derrick Hall said in a team statement. “He is one of the brightest and most innovative baseball minds in the game, and I am thrilled that he has chosen to remain a D-back regardless of outside opportunities.”