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'I would wake up . . . feeling like I'm going to die': David Ortiz speaks after shooting

Bob Hohler

It was painless at first, the bullet that ripped through David Ortiz's torso and lodged in his friend's leg.

"I felt a burning sensation," Ortiz told the Globe in his first public comments to an English language publication since he was shot June 9 in his native Dominican Republic. "I felt weird, like not myself, as I went down."

The former Red Sox great had been sipping Scotch with seven or eight friends at a familiar hangout, the trendy Dial Bar and Lounge in Santo Domingo, and was chatting with a singer known as Secreto when a gunman rushed his front row table at the bar's outdoor patio and fired a single bullet from close range into his back.

It was a moment, Ortiz said, that has forever changed his life.

In a wide-ranging interview at Fenway Park, Ortiz reflected on the crime and investigation, the lifesaving Samaritan who rushed him to the hospital, his three surgeries and potentially deadly infection, and how differently he views the world now.

"People need to understand, this isn't a movie where you get shot in the street and you're back two minutes later," Ortiz said. "No, I got shot and almost died. I only have one life to live. I can't just go to the pharmacy and buy another one."

As a grainy videotape of the shooting shows, Ortiz slumped to the bar's wooden floor within seconds of the gunshot. It was about 9:20 p.m., more than two hours after he had arrived there to meet Jhoel Lopez, a Dominican television host, and a longtime friend, Sixto David Fernandez, who operates a car paint shop.

At the sound of the shot, patrons scattered, including Ortiz's companions — even the wounded Lopez. Ortiz was left alone, writhing on the floor, critically injured.

"Then this angel comes out of nowhere," he recalled.

The angel, a Dial Bar patron named Eliezer Salvador, helped Ortiz into the back seat of his Rolls-Royce SUV. The vehicle was boxed in by other parked cars, so Salvador rammed his way out of the space, sending Ortiz rocking back and forth in his seat.

They sped toward a public hospital, only to change course when Ortiz asked to be taken to a private clinic he had frequented. He remained upright and conscious as Salvador, who once had been shot in the stomach himself, weaved at a harrowing pace through traffic.

"He knew how to react," Ortiz said. "He kept talking to me to make sure I stayed awake."

The 43-year-old retired slugger remembers being alert enough to know he had been shot, but he understood little else about his wound or condition.

"I didn't want to look at it, to be honest," he said. "I don't even remember how much I bled."

He does recall, however, when the pain set in: in the half hour it took the clinic staff to evaluate and prepare him for the operating room, and then wait for the surgeons to arrive.

As he was rolled into surgery, Ortiz said, he told the staff, “Please don’t let me die. I have four children. I want to be with them.”

Doctors operated on his badly damaged intestines and liver, and removed his gallbladder. By morning, the Red Sox had arranged to transport him to Massachusetts General Hospital.

Before he left, Dominican Attorney General Jean Alain Rodriguez questioned him at his bedside about the shooting. This would be his only interview with a law enforcement official about the ambush, according to Ortiz spokesman, Joe Baerlein.

“Everything happened so fast that it felt like it didn’t happen,” Ortiz said of the interview. “But it really did.”

While Ortiz remembers speaking with Rodriguez, he recalls little else about the day after the shooting except asking his father, Leo, who accompanied him on the flight to Boston, to cover his feet when they grew cold.

“The next thing I knew I was being wheeled into surgery again” at Mass. General, he said.

Dr. David King, a renowned trauma surgeon, told Ortiz he needed to operate to assess the damage and the quality of the first surgery.

“They did a hell of a job, all good,” Ortiz quoted King as saying afterward about the Dominican surgical team.

But his recovery was arduously slow. Then, three weeks after the second surgery, Ortiz encountered another life-threatening crisis: an acute bacterial infection that gravely compromised his digestive system. His fever ran so high that he shook with chills, as he had as a child when he suffered hypothermia.

The doctors and nurses, for all their reassurances, did not mask the severity of his condition.

“It was very dangerous,” Ortiz said. “I got to the point that I started losing hope.”

Ortiz grew more despondent when he learned he urgently needed another surgery. He remembered seeing fear on the faces of his loved ones.

“Everybody was like, ‘Oh [expletive],’ ” he said.

In his bleakest days after the surgery, Ortiz fought desperation, even in his sleep. Over seven weeks, he could swallow nothing but melted ice chips — except for a small cup of Jell-O and some fruit that he threw up.

Ortiz drew his only nourishment through tubes and intravenous lines. His mouth was so parched that it ached.

“I had nightmares all the time about being in the desert, looking for water,” he said. “I would wake up with my mouth dry and feeling like I’m going to die.”

Ortiz drew a measure of hope when the medical team would tell him he would survive. But he began to prepare for the possibility that he would be permanently debilitated, that he would never again be Big Papi, the robust and charismatic personality whose spirit had long lifted those around him.

“I felt that if I didn’t die, then I would never be the same again,” he said. “I went through hell with that.”

One day, Ortiz awoke from a nightmare and saw his sister, Albania, seated by his bed, her Bible open on her lap. He had tubes in his nose and arm. He had lost 40 pounds.

“She was arguing with God, asking for help,” he said. “It was upsetting. It hit me hard.”

Looking back, however, Ortiz sees that moment as his turning point. It would take several more days for him to eat and drink again, and to speak without struggling to his wife, Tiffany, and family.

“But after that day, everything was different,” Ortiz said. “I started getting better.”

On July 22, nearly seven weeks after he was gunned down, he held down food for the first time: a cup of soup. The fever was gone. The feeding tube had been removed.

“That was a big, big deal,” he said.

Ortiz was no stranger to Mass. General. Through his charity, the David Ortiz Children’s Fund, he has given millions to Mass. General and other medical facilities in the United States and the Dominican Republic to help critically ill children.

His stay at the hospital was long and grueling but also heartening. “They made me feel special there,” he said, “but when I noticed that they treated everybody like they treated me, that made me even happier.”

Nearly a month after his third surgery, Ortiz returned to his home outside Boston, beginning the next phase of his recovery. Walking, eating, sleeping in his own bed, spending time with friends: It all felt renewing.

The Yankees came to visit: CC Sabathia, Edwin Encarnacion, Luis Severino, Gary Sanchez. The Phillies, too: Jean Segura, Maikel Franco. Also, the Red Sox, past and current, if not in person then by phone.

But nothing has fully distracted him from the mystery of why that stranger emerged from the shadows in Santo Domingo that night with malice and a firearm. To date, nothing about the conflicting findings of Dominican law enforcement has made sense to him, Ortiz said.

First, the authorities announced that an unspecified person with an undisclosed motive had placed a \$7,800 bounty on Ortiz’s head. Six suspects were arrested, and Ortiz said he knew none of them or why anyone would want to harm him.

“I don’t know why I was involved in something like this because I’m not the type of person who looks for trouble or causes trouble. All I worry about is trying to help people, about trying to do the right thing,” Ortiz said.

What’s more, he joked: “You gotta pay a lot more than that to get me killed. I ain’t that cheap.”

Nearly three weeks later came another announcement. Eight more suspects had been arrested — Ortiz said he knew none of those, either — and police concluded that the actual intended target had been his friend, Fernandez, who sat near him that night.

The bounty on Fernandez was closer to \$30,000, authorities said, and his cousin, an alleged drug dealer, had wanted him killed because he allegedly had spoken to police about him more than eight years earlier.

This also made no sense to Ortiz. Now, there are questions about whether Cesar Peralta, a Dominican drug kingpin known as “The Abuser,” or his cartel may have been involved in the shooting, which to Ortiz also defies logic.

Ortiz also dismissed tabloid rumors that have emanated from social media in the Dominican Republic. One suggested a car he was driving had been chased and forced off the road by someone trying to harm him before the shooting.

“If that ever happened to me, the first person I would call would be the president of the Dominican Republic,” Ortiz said. “I know he would do something about it. That’s how close we are.”

Last month, Ortiz hired former Boston police commissioner Ed Davis to investigate the shooting. Baerlein said Davis has yet to uncover any significant new evidence.

“I want to find out who did this,” Ortiz said. “I’m not going to sit around and chill if there’s somebody out there who wants to kill me.”

Ortiz now looks much like his old larger-than-life self, if a little more svelte. He has gained some weight back and seems to move freely, saying he recently logged a 5-mile walk. But the shooting has made Ortiz adjust his lifestyle; sadly, he said, he finds himself withdrawing a bit.

“I like to embrace people, make them feel comfortable around me,” Ortiz said. “I was always very accessible, but I think I’m going to cut down on that a little now.

“One lesson I’ve learned is that you can’t be naive,” he said. “There are a lot of things going on now that you have to be aware of. I need to pay attention and be more careful.”

Ortiz expressed thanks to Red Sox Nation and other supporters, and said through his spokesman that he was touched by how generous and kind people have been to him and his family. He is also particularly grateful to John W. Henry and his wife, Linda Pizzuti Henry, who facilitated his emergency medical flight to Boston. Henry is the principal owner of the Sox and the owner and publisher of the Globe. Pizzuti Henry is the Globe’s managing director.

The Henrys recently flew David and Tiffany Ortiz to southern France, where they vacationed on the couple’s yacht, toured a vineyard, and sampled a bottle of wine so extravagant that Ortiz jokingly speculated it was drawn from “the fountain of youth.”

When they returned, Ortiz made his first big public appearance, tossing a ceremonial first pitch at Fenway Park and soaking in the affection.

He plans to leave soon for Los Angeles to resume his role as a Fox Sports analyst for the major league baseball playoffs in October. Then comes a November trip to Florida for his annual charity golf tournament. One day, he said, he will return to the Dominican Republic, likely with security.

By Thanksgiving, Ortiz said, he expects to be fully recovered, at least physically. He knows other scars will linger.

For Alex Cora, 2019 has been a reversal of fortune

Peter Abraham

As Houston’s bench coach in 2017, Alex Cora spent September working with manager A.J. Hinch to keep the players sharp going into the playoffs.

He did the same as manager of the Red Sox last season, setting up the pitching staff to have the starters lined up and the relievers with just the right amount of rest for the Division Series.

The days leading up the playoffs always have a happy buzz about them. The players are busy arranging tickets for their families and friends, and the ballpark gets spruced up. It’s fun to debate who should get the

final few spots on the roster, and the slightly colder weather is a reminder of the exciting games to come in October that everybody will be watching.

Now Cora is maneuvering through a much different world.

“It’s not cool to be honest with you,” he said Saturday before the Sox beat the Philadelphia Phillies, 2-1. “Sometimes I joke around with the guys. What do I do?”

Cora had just explained to a small group of reporters that Mookie Betts and Brock Holt were out of the starting lineup with minor issues that otherwise would have been pushed aside if the game meant something.

Betts sat out and probably will Sunday because of a sore left foot. Holt drew a walk in the ninth inning that helped lead to the winning run.

At 78-70, the Sox are likely a few days away from being officially eliminated. It’s not what anybody expected but they’re trying to handle it the right way.

“There’s a few things that I’m watching and looking ahead,” Cora said.

The goals are small ones. David Price, who has pitched once since Aug. 4 because of a sore wrist, could get in a game before the season ends. The same is true for Heath Hembree, out since Aug. 1 with a sore elbow.

There’s no proof that ending the season on a positive note actually means anything. But it’s worth a shot.

The Sox also plan to cut down how often relievers Matt Barnes, Darwinzon Hernandez, Josh Taylor, Marcus Walden and Brandon Workman will pitch. All five carried a heavy load when the team was chasing a playoff spot in July and August.

Walden, as an example, has appeared in 65 games this season counting the minors. He had 28 appearances last season. Taylor made a jump from 48 to 68. That takes a toll.

“We’ll slow them down,” Cora said.

Catcher Christian Vazquez, who was 2 for 3 with a walk, has 124 more plate appearances than any previous season. He will likely get one game off in every series from now on. He’s a big part of the future.

“We come here to win every game. That’s our goal,” Cora said. “They’re part of it. But at the same time you have to be smart about it.”

There are players who can benefit from the situation. Marco Hernandez has played 49 games this season after missing two full years recovering from shoulder surgery. The Sox want to see more of him this month to better gauge where he fits on next season’s team.

With Holt entering free agency, Hernandez could become a more prominent player next season.

“I’m trying to show them what I can do,” said Hernandez, who was 0 for 5 from the leadoff spot Saturday. “These games are big for me. I’m excited. But it would be better if we could get in the playoffs.”

As Cora sets up the final days of the season with an eye on 2020, he’s also working without a boss. It’s been a week since Dave Dombrowski was fired and Cora is now checking in with Raquel Ferreira, Brian O’Halloran, Eddie Romero, and Zack Scott.

Romero is with the team this weekend.

The group has worked well together but Cora acknowledged it's strange not to be talking with Dombrowski every day.

"I appreciate what they're doing and I know they're working hard to get this right. But at the same time, you're with a guy for two years and just having those conversations, you miss that," he said. "It is what it is, but it's different."

Cora never had to worry about all of this a year ago. But now he's left reminding his players to go through the final two weeks of the season professionally.

"They know it," Cora said. "They have their goals. They're showing up every day and the meetings are going the same way and their preparation is going the same way.

"They're honest with me as far as playing. Obviously now you have to be more careful. But they're ready."

The Phillies, who are still fighting for a playoff spot, had a big crowd at Citizens Bank Park. The defending World Series champions were a good draw even if all they're doing at this point is crossing dates off the calendar.

Red Sox have just enough to edge Phillies

Julian McWilliams

There's a distinct difference between the current versions of the Red Sox and Phillies.

The Phillies are still trying to punch a ticket to October. The Red Sox, on the other hand, are already thinking toward next season, getting a look at some of the players who might be able to help them down the road. They are not pushing their stars who are hampered by aches and pains.

Still, manager Alex Cora wanted to make it known that his team is still going to compete.

In the Red Sox' 2-1 win over the Phillies on Saturday night at Citizens Bank Park, competition had its mark all over it.

Andrew Benintendi's bases-loaded sacrifice fly broke the tie in the ninth inning before Brandon Workman came on to close it in the bottom half, striking out Logan Morrison to register the save.

But it was Eduardo Rodriguez's 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings that set that tone.

In Rodriguez's previous five starts, he registered a 4-1 record with a 1.11 ERA in 32 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings. He sat on 17 wins for the season, and more importantly, the team was 22-8 when he takes the ball. He's durable, having thrown five-plus innings in each of his 24 outings since the start of May.

Saturday night's outing was much of the same for the lefthander. He tied a season-high in strikeouts (12). From the first inning through the sixth, he retired 18 of the 20 batters he faced. Rodriguez drew 16 swinging strikes on his changeup.

"I was feeling really good with everything," Rodriguez said. "[I'm locating] and know what I want to do with my pitches."

He allowed just two hits in that six-inning span. One was an infield single in the second. The other probably should have been caught but fell in between Jackie Bradley Jr. and J.D. Martinez for a ground-rule double in the fourth. That didn't take Rodriguez off his game, however. He struck out the next hitter, Scott Kingery, to end the inning.

“Excellent again,” Cora said regarding Rodriguez. “He threw a lot of breaking balls early in the game. His changeup was great. The fastball. He’s throwing like an ace and we’re very happy with the progress.”

Yet for as good as Rodriguez was, the Phillies had Aaron Nola on the mound who was just as good. Nola had the Red Sox’ number during his August outing at Fenway. He yielded just two runs and struck out seven over seven innings in a 3-2 Phillies’ win.

The Sox didn’t get their first hit off him until the fourth inning, a Xander Bogaerts liner to right field. That was erased shortly after when Bogaerts attempted to steal second but was thrown out by J.T. Realmuto.

The Red Sox’ next hit didn’t come until the sixth inning when Gorkys Hernandez shot a grounder through the right side. Rodriguez put down a sacrifice bunt, moving Hernandez to second, but Marco Hernandez lined out and Bogaerts struck out to end the threat.

“He’s a good pitcher,” Cora said of Nola. “With all due respect to all the pitchers we have faced, he’s been the best one. I love the way he competes. He doesn’t panic. With the offense that we have, he still dominates us.”

The Sox finally got to Nola in the seventh inning. He walked Rafael Devers and Martinez singled up the middle. Christian Vazquez doubled off the left-center field wall, bringing around Devers to give the Red Sox a 1-0 lead.

However, Rodriguez’s hiccup occurred in the seventh, too. Bryce Harper singled to open the bottom half of the frame. Rodriguez then recorded back-to-back strikeouts against Rhys Hoskins and Kingery. But Rodriguez hit Adam Haseley to load the bases and walked Maikel Franco to bring home the tying run.

“It was supposed to be a changeup down and in [to Haseley],” Rodriguez said. “The last pitch to [Franco] I wanted to throw that changeup down the middle and see what happens. I feel like as a pitcher, that’s the worst way to give up a run.”

But the Sox relievers held the score there for the remainder of the game and capitalized in the ninth on Benintendi’s sacrifice fly.

Rodriguez’s ERA is now 3.64. He’s still at 17 wins and will have three more starts to try and get to 20 on the season. But that’s not his concern. After being plagued by injuries, this is the first year he’s been fully healthy. He’s at 185½ innings and has another goal in mind.

“I’m thinking of 200 innings, and if 20 wins happens, it happens,” Rodriguez said.

Jackie Bradley Jr. is learning Spanish with some help from his teammates

Julian McWilliams

Two voices rang out from the clubhouse steps that lead to the field at Citizens Bank Park.

Marco Hernandez stood with his bat in his hand and was in the midst of correcting Jackie Bradley Jr. on his Spanish pronunciation prior to the Red Sox’ game Saturday night against the Phillies. Bradley, to the right of Hernandez, was adamant about getting it right.

“He’s getting there,” Hernandez said. “He talks to me a lot [in Spanish].”

Is Bradley’s Spanish good, though? Hernandez wouldn’t go that far.

“He needs to work on it,” Hernandez admitted before making his way back to the clubhouse.

Working on it is something that Bradley's been doing since July through an online Berlitz course. He always wanted to improve his Spanish even though he was more proficient after high school.

"I exempted out of it in college. I never retained enough of it," Bradley admitted. "If you don't use it, for the most part, you lose it. I had an OK base coming back into it, but it's something I always said I wanted to do."

Bradley has an online teacher through the program. The two connect via Skype and Bradley makes his own schedule. The majority of his sessions are in the morning, however, since he has to get to the ballpark most days by early afternoon. Bradley then comes to the ballpark and practices his language skills with teammates, mainly Hernandez and Christian Vazquez. Rafael Devers will even chime in sometimes, Bradley said. Bradley sees this as a way he can communicate with his teammates better. With that, though, he's found some distinct differences.

"Obviously, Spanish is Spanish," Bradley said. "But it's just picking up different words or nuances that Venezuelans might speak, Dominicans or Puerto Ricans, etc. 'Ahora' might be 'right now' to Dominicans, but to Venezuelans, 'ahora' might be 'a little bit later'. Who knows? Same words can mean different things. I'm working."

Expensive season

The third-place Red Sox are expected to pay \$13.05 million in luxury tax, according to calculations by Major League Baseball obtained by the Associated Press.

The team's payroll, as calculated for luxury-tax purposes, was \$242.8 million, up from \$239.7 million on Opening Day. The Yankees were second (\$233.9 million) and the Cubs third (\$233.8 million).

The Sox soared over the initial threshold of \$206 million, but they managed to avoid going over \$246 million, which triggers the highest rate of tax.

Because the Sox are over the limit for the second consecutive year, they will play a 30 percent tax on the first \$20 million and a 42 percent tax on the remaining \$16.8 million. But their draft status for next season will not change. The Sox dropped 10 spots this year because their 2018 payroll was more than \$40 million over the threshold.

Pitching to spots

You might be wondering if David Price is going to pitch again this season, and for valid reasons. The team is virtually out of the playoff hunt with just two weeks left in the season and Price isn't quite where the team wants him to be.

"He's feeling OK," manager Alex Cora said. "He's making strides, but not fast. Still maneuvering his pitches and the shape of it. They're OK, but not where we want it."

Price was supposed to play catch again Thursday.

Heath Hembree threw a bullpen session Saturday, but pitching coach Dana LeVangie and Cora decided it wasn't best that he throw his simulated game just yet. Instead, he will pitch a simulated game Tuesday. If he passes that hurdle, Cora said the team will most likely activate him by the end of the week.

Betts on bench

Foot soreness kept Mookie Betts out the lineup Saturday night, and he will miss Sunday's game, too. He started feeling it during the Blue Jays series when the club played on Toronto's turf. Betts alerted Cora during their last game Thursday. As a result, with the team being where it is in the standings, Cora decided not to push it.

“Mookie is going to see a doctor,” Cora said. “We don’t think it’s anything serious.”

Who should be next to run Red Sox baseball operations?

Christopher L. Gasper

It’s all AB all the time. Antonio Brown is the topic of conversation and debate in our hallowed corner of the sports world. The wayward wide receiver has tabled all other Boston sports discussions. So it is that the matter of filling one of the most important posts in New England drifted into the realm of background noise.

It was last Sunday that your Boston Red Sox deposed president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski without explanation, less than a year after he produced a franchise record-setting World Series winner. Having reached terminal velocity for irrelevance in 2019, the Sox are once again hunting for a baseball operations boss. As much as a new name for the masthead, they’re searching for the same thing they’ve been searching for since Theo Epstein departed for Chicago in 2011 — a sustainable model of contention.

At the end of the day, Dombrowski is no longer the baseball ops jockey on Jersey Street because Red Sox ownership must believe there is a better, more efficient way to consistently contend than plugging holes with dollar bills and boasting baseball’s highest payroll. Lighting luxury-tax dollars on fire with lucrative long-term contracts for veterans is simply not a sustainable method of success. That’s why Dombrowski was dumped in Year 4 despite winning three straight American League East titles and a championship in his first three full seasons since succeeding Ben Cherington in August 2015.

This year’s Sox are a monument to overspending and underachieving. Entering play on Saturday, the Sox were 25-42 against teams with records of .500 or better, a .373 winning percentage. The MLB average was 33-45 (.423).

It’s obvious that the Red Sox are no longer at the vanguard of front office ingenuity like they were when Theo and his khaki cabal inhabited Fenway. They’re not the smartest guys in the room anymore, surpassed by franchises such as the Rays, Astros, and Dodgers. Just the ones with the biggest checkbook. LA has similar resources to the Sox, but, under GM and Rays alum Andrew Friedman, has also concurrently cultivated the fertile farm system Boston lacks. Dombrowski was an old-school star chaser. The Sox need a new direction.

That’s why it’s time for them to venture outside their circle of familiarity and get a fresh perspective in the Fens. Mine the sharpest minds from around baseball and figure out how you’re getting outperformed this year by the Rays and Oakland A’s. Investigate how it is that the Cleveland Indians can compete year after year with a payroll in the bottom half of Major League Baseball. Red Sox principal owner John Henry (you know what else he owns), team chairman Tom Werner, and CEO Sam Kennedy should canvass baseball to figure out how to get a better return on investment from their front office and prevent us from measuring the exit velocity of their next GM.

As tempting as it is to usher in another Epstein disciple, that’s probably not the way to go, especially now that former Red Sox assistant general manager and current Arizona Diamondbacks GM Mike Hazen is off the market. Friday night, the Diamondbacks announced a contract extension for Hazen. Getting an Epstein disciple is a little bit like getting a Bill Belichick disciple. You’re getting the brand but not necessarily the brains.

Plus, the Sox already went this route with Cherington, an Epstein acolyte who shared Theo’s vision for building from within but lacked his boldness or decisiveness.

The 2013 World Series winner Cherington constructed with holdovers and frugal free agent additions lulled the Sox into falsely believing they could swear off high-end free agents, including their own. When

Cherington did delve into the free agent market it proved ill-advised with Pablo Sandoval and Hanley Ramirez.

Dombrowski was a departure of sorts, but he had also served as a GM for Henry with the Marlins from 1999-2001 when Henry owned that club. He was familiar. Unless you can lure Epstein home, it's time to get unfamiliar.

Dombrowski did exactly what he was hired to do — reorient the organization and build a winner. He turned Cherington's passel of prospects into a proven ace in Chris Sale and an All-Star closer in Craig Kimbrel. He also distilled the trade chips from the building blocks, holding on to Rafael Devers and Andrew Benintendi, although with Yoan Moncada's success this season with the Chicago White Sox it's a false narrative to say he never surrendered a prospect of significance. Dombrowski created a three-year championship window beginning in 2017 that the Sox cashed in on last year. But that window was never built to last.

Dombrowski is like baseball Red Bull. He'll provide any organization with a jolt of talent and excitement, but eventually the effect wears off. You're left with a bad taste in your mouth, a headache, and cleaning up to do. That's where the Sox find themselves.

It has to be galling for ownership to watch this team and its \$240 million-plus payroll sputter while the Rays and A's, both bottom-five payroll teams, spend September fighting for playoff spots. Those teams also found a way to build bullpens on a budget and add reinforcements at the trade deadline, while Dombrowski played reliever roulette and stood pat at the trade deadline.

That's what it comes back to in the front office. The Sox simply need more imaginative thinking, more creative solutions.

No team in baseball reinvents roster management quite like the Rays, owners of baseball's scarcest resources and greatest resourcefulness. They've given us the concept of the opener and stayed in the wild-card race despite two of their top starters, Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell and Tyler Glasnow, missing significant chunks of time. It would make sense to try to lure one of the Rays' dynamic duo of senior vice president of baseball operations/general manager Erik Neander or senior vice president Chaim Bloom, who, like Epstein, is a Yale graduate.

You would be damaging an AL East rival and getting someone ideally suited to finessing a soft reset of the Red Sox roster without taking a huge step back.

Call Indians president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti and see if he's interested in playing with a bigger safety net. Take another run at Mr. Moneyball himself, Billy Beane, who was Henry's object of desire before Epstein became GM in 2002. The only thing missing from the 57-year-old Beane's résumé is a World Series winner. However, it would take compensation going to Oakland and an ownership stake in the Sox for Beane, who has a small ownership stake with the A's.

If the Sox want to find the next wunderkind, maybe they can get some of the Astros' analytical magic to rub off on them. Houston assistant GM Brandon Taubman went to Cornell and used to work as a derivative valuation expert for Ernst & Young. That's right up Henry's alley.

Ultimately, the goal should be to do what Epstein did when he was here, what Brian Cashman has done in retooling the New York Yankees, and what the Dodgers are doing right now — to combine the best aspects of big-market resources and small-market sustainability.

The next great Red Sox team needs to be built to last by a team builder who will last.

Yankees have piled up the injuries — and victories

Peter Abraham

The Yankees won 100 games last season, their most since 2009, and still finished eight games behind the Red Sox. In the Bronx, that's a bad year. That the Sox then beat the Yankees in the Division Series in four games only made it worse.

"We had to get better after that," outfielder Brett Gardner said. "I think we did, too."

The Yankees are headed for 100-plus wins and their first American League East title since 2012 despite a wave of injuries that would have left most teams struggling to make the playoffs.

Slugger Giancarlo Stanton has played only nine games because of a right knee strain. Luis Severino, their ace last season, has been out all season with shoulder woes. The same has been true for All-Star reliever Dellin Betances.

Third baseman Miguel Andujar, who finished second in the American League Rookie of the Year voting in 2018, played only 12 games before undergoing season-ending shoulder surgery.

In all they've had 30 players on the injured list a total of 38 times. Both are major league records.

But general manager Brian Cashman and his staff built up enough organizational depth to overcome the injuries.

Signing second baseman DJ LeMahieu for two years and \$24 million proved to be a bargain. The Yankees also got sustained production from players such as Gio Urshela, Luke Voit, and Mike Tauchman.

The 36-year-old Gardner went into the weekend with an .805 OPS, the best of his career.

"They put the ball in play," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "LeMahieu, I've been saying all along, he changed the complexion of the lineup. Urshela, he got better. Last year, there were more strikeouts. Not this year."

The numbers bear that out. The Yankees had a .784 OPS with runners in scoring position last season. It's up to .886 this year. They also dropped their strikeouts per game from 10.01 to 8.75.

LeMahieu's OPS has hovered around .900 all season and he provides defensive versatility.

"I think we've been better situationally and I do feel like we've been a little more consistent up and down the lineup and being more of a tougher out in clutch situations, especially when facing a tough pitcher," manager Aaron Boone said. "I feel like we're better across the board."

The Yankees are headed for 300-plus home runs. But they're not dependent on their power. That should make a difference in the postseason when the pitching tends to get tougher.

"The home run is still a big part of our offense and it will be moving forward," Boone said. "For us to have success in the postseason, I'm sure it will play a big role. But there's no question we want to be as well-rounded as we can possibly be."

Added Gardner: "We can do a lot of different things. We've proven that even when we're missing certain guys that we have others who can fill in and get the job done."

As Cora was leading the Red Sox to their historic 2018 season, Boone heard it from disgruntled Yankees fans.

Cora finds that amusing considering how good they were. He knows Boone well from their time at ESPN and felt the criticism was unwarranted.

“He did an outstanding job last year. This guy, he knows the game,” Cora said. “It bothered me last year when [fans] were all over him. I’m like, why? It just happened that we won 108. He did an outstanding job. He’s a good guy; he’s a good manager.

“It just happens that we manage in two markets that every move is second-guessed or first-guessed, and we know it. We did it on TV. I’m very proud of him; I’m very happy for him. I’m obviously not happy for us. But on a personal level? He’s been great.”

The Yankees are now dealing with new injuries. Designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion (left oblique), lefthander J.A. Happ (biceps tendinitis), and catcher Gary Sanchez (groin strain) weren’t expected to play this weekend.

But Stanton and Severino are on the way back, probably on Tuesday when the Yankees return home. Betances is not far behind them.

The Yankees also hope 38-year-old CC Sabathia can give them something after making only 21 starts in his final season because of knee issues.

If the Yankees can stay healthy, they’ll be a threat to win it all.

“The last couple of years we’ve been close,” Gardner said. “It’s a matter of winning big games when it counts. October baseball is a whole different animal. The last couple of years I feel like we’ve been close and come up short. Hopefully this year is different.”

As for the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry, it’s on the cool side. The Sox honored Sabathia last week by giving him his No. 52 off the Fenway Park scoreboard. David Price made the presentation.

“That was awesome, especially here at Fenway,” Sabathia said. “Price is like a little brother to me. To have him out there to give me that piece of Fenway was pretty cool.

“It’s pretty fun to pitch in this rivalry. I’ve got some bad memories here, some good ones here.”

UPON FURTHER REVIEW

Dombrowski got job done for Sox

It wasn’t unreasonable for the Red Sox to believe that the decisions they have to make about their roster over the next two seasons should be made by somebody other than Dave Dombrowski.

This will be a period where creativity will be needed, not just the most direct path.

But still, Dombrowski getting fired in the middle of a game will be looked back upon as a peculiar event.

Dombrowski had a .588 winning percentage over his time as president of baseball operations. In the four seasons Dombrowski had full control over — 2016-19 — the Sox won three American League East championships and one World Series. That had never happened before.

And for all the carping about the farm system, he kept the right prospects and none of the ones he gave up have turned into much. The deals for Chris Sale and Craig Kimbrel were winners in every sense.

Travis Shaw, you ask? He was 27 when he was dealt and has a .526 OPS for Milwaukee this season. Dombrowski had no way of knowing Tyler Thornburg would get injured.

Dombrowski did what he was hired to do and got a wayward organization focused on winning again. For whatever the internal dynamics were — and apparently they weren’t great — he’ll go down as one of the most successful executives in franchise history and deserved a better exit.

A few other observations on the Red Sox:

- Raquel Ferreira should get every consideration to be the next general manager. She started in baseball operations in 1999 with the Sox as an administrative assistant and has worked her way up to senior vice president of major and minor league operations.

That Ferreira has stayed on the staff through the administration of five general managers is a testament to her abilities and drive. Outside of traveling secretary Jack McCormick and several members of the clubhouse staff, nobody has been in baseball operations longer.

It would be groundbreaking for the Sox to select Ferreira. But that's not why she deserves a shot. It's because nobody knows the organization better or commands more respect.

Ferreira also has the best shot of getting Mookie Betts to sign a contract extension, too. She's the team executive he trusts most.

- There was a time not too many seasons ago when Red Sox road games were routinely staffed by seven or eight local media outlets. That number has steadily declined in recent years to a point where only the Globe and Herald covered the series against the Angels in Anaheim last month.

Cutbacks in the media industry have been so deep that there could come a time when some MLB teams are covered only by the team website.

That's what made some recent decisions and comments by the Red Sox so chilling.

The team did not make any executives available for questions when Dombrowski was fired. It only issued a press release announcing his "departure." Like he was getting on a cruise ship.

A day later, team president Sam Kennedy went on WEEI and actually said, "I've observed press conferences with sports figures leaving organizations for a long, long time. I'm not sure what purpose they ultimately serve."

Since the day he was hired, manager Alex Cora has promoted a culture of accountability among his players. Sox players, in moments good or bad, are made available to speak to reporters.

That should apply throughout the organization. The Red Sox have passionate and knowledgeable fans, many who are avid consumers of news stories, features, and analysis about their team. Trying to restrict the information fans receive is not good business for the Sox.

Press conferences aren't for reporters; they provide an avenue for fans to learn more about their team. Nor did the Sox do Dombrowski any favors. Ducking questions left the impression that there was something that needed covering up.

- Noah Syndergaard is 27 and can become a free agent after the 2021 season. Andrew Benintendi is 25 and can become a free agent after the 2022 season.

There is a deal to be made here. The Mets put Syndergaard on the market in July but didn't find a trade they liked. He has since complained about having to throw to catcher Wilson Ramos, and his relationship with the team is strained.

The Mets need outfield help; the Red Sox need a starting pitcher. Syndergaard is the more valuable player, but the Mets get the extra year of control with Benintendi and maybe the Sox toss in a prospect to get it done.

The Sox can then convert Michael Chavis to left field, which opens up a spot for Bobby Dalbec at first base.

- Only 11 Red Sox players have spent the entire season on the active roster: Matt Barnes, Benintendi, Betts, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Rafael Devers, J.D. Martinez, Rick Porcello, Eduardo Rodriguez, Christian Vazquez, and Brandon Workman.
- Betts needs two more home runs to join Hall of Famers Lou Gehrig, Hank Greenberg, Rogers Hornsby, Chuck Klein, and Stan Musial as the only players with at least 40 doubles, 30 home runs, and 5 triples in three or more seasons.
- The Sox aren't eliminated quite yet. But once they are, they will become the 10th defending World Series champion in the last 19 seasons not to make the playoffs. Since the Yankees won three in a row from 1998-2000, no team has repeated, and only the 2008 Phillies returned to the World Series the following season.

It's easy to be aggravated with the Sox this season; they certainly underachieved. But for reasons nobody has been able to solve, winning the World Series leads to a step back a year later.

ETC.

Top-notch scout on open market

The Giants fired eight of their professional scouts this past week, part of a new direction being taken by president of baseball operations Farhan Zaidi. It's a trend throughout baseball.

One of those let go was 64-year-old Glenn Tufts, a Middleboro native who now lives in Bridgewater. He was with the Giants for 34 seasons and has three World Series rings.

Tufts has had quite a career in baseball. He was the fifth overall pick of the 1973 draft out of Bridgewater-Raynham High, a hard-hitting first baseman who looked like a sure thing for the Indians.

Tufts was taken right after Hall of Famers Robin Yount and Dave Winfield and before Fred Lynn, who went in the second round. Eddie Murray was a third-round pick.

Five months later, Tufts broke his leg in a car accident. Other injuries led to his playing career being finished in 1977 without having reached the majors.

But Tufts went into coaching and had great success at Bridgewater State before the Giants hired him as a minor league manager. He then went into scouting and was a key adviser for former GM Brian Sabean and respected throughout the scouting community. He's a regular at Fenway Park and minor league parks throughout New England.

Tufts is hoping to join another organization.

Extra bases

As the Red Sox seek another general manager, Brian Cashman is in his 22nd season in that post for the Yankees. He has outlasted five Red Sox counterparts in that time: Dan Duquette, Mike Port, Theo Epstein, Ben Cherington, and now Dave Dombrowski . . . The Rays added an interesting player who could have an impact on the postseason in 29-year-old Johnny Davis. He has kicked around baseball for seven years in the Milwaukee organization, the independent Frontier League, and the Mexican League. Davis had a modest .326 career on-base percentage and only six home runs. But he does have 234 stolen bases and could be a pinch runner in the playoffs. The Rays signed Davis on Aug. 29 and added him to the major league roster on Wednesday . . . Bruce Bochy, who will retire after the season, has been a manager since 1995 with the Padres and Giants. When the Giants lost to the Pirates on Monday, his record was 1,995-

2,019 . . . Rookie first baseman Pete Alonso asked Major League Baseball if the Mets could wear caps with the logos of New York City first responders for their game on Sept. 11 and was turned down. An exception should have been made. The spot that is now Citi Field was a staging area to bring supplies to the site where the Twin Towers collapsed and the Mets were involved to a point that many of their players and manager Bobby Valentine helped load trucks and comfort rescuers . . . Happy 43rd birthday to Matt Thornton, who played for six teams over 13 seasons from 2004-16 including the Red Sox for 20 games in 2013.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Red Sox beat Phillies, 2-1, but Eduardo Rodriguez no closer to 20 wins

Jason Mastrodonato

With a swing so sloppy his teammates doubt that he'll ever record a hit, Eduardo Rodriguez walked toward the plate with the bases loaded in the seventh inning and looked to the bench.

Alex Cora was still. The manager made no substitution. Rodriguez hit for himself and predictably struck out to end the inning, moving his career line to 0-for-20.

It was a bold move by Cora, who has done everything he can to put Rodriguez in position to chase the first 20-win season by a Red Sox pitcher since Rick Porcello in 2016.

But the decision backfired when Rodriguez went back to work in the bottom of the inning on 80 pitches and quickly tired out, eventually walking in the game-tying run and eliminating his chance at win No. 18.

It wasn't until the ninth inning that the Red Sox would retake the lead as Andrew Benintendi came off the bench to hit a sacrifice fly off Phillies closer Hector Neris in the Sox' 2-1 win.

With the playoffs an afterthought at this point, the win seemed secondary to Rodriguez's personal loss.

"Excellent again," Cora said of Rodriguez, whose 3.64 ERA is the eighth-best in the American League. "His stuff was outstanding. He threw a lot of breaking balls early in the game. His changeup was great. The fastball. He's throwing like an ace."

Rodriguez will get three more starts this season and still has an outside chance at 20 wins.

"There's a chance," he said. "My real goal is 200 innings. That's my real goal. Wins and losses, you see the game, 1-0 game and I give up a run. Wins depends on how the games go. I'm thinking about 200 innings and if 20 happens, it happens."

His low-90s fastball doing just enough to create separation for a high-80s changeup that had the Phillies fooled all evening, Rodriguez looked like a deserving winner in this one.

When J.D. Martinez botched a flyball that landed at the warning track in right-center (he later looked at Jackie Bradley Jr. and appeared to think it was the center fielder's ball) to give Rhys Hoskins a freebie double in the fifth, Rodriguez looked stunned. Then he struck out Scott Kingery on three pitches to end the threat.

He finished five shutout innings on just 69 pitches. He handled the sixth on just 11 pitches.

So when the Sox took a 1-0 lead in the top of the seventh and loaded the bases for Rodriguez, Cora stuck with the 26-year-old lefty and hoped it would pay dividends with another inning or two of brilliance.

Instead, Bryce Harper started the inning on a groundball single that starting second baseman Brock Holt probably would've reached, but it scooted by the lesser range of Marco Hernandez. Rodriguez then struck out Hoskins on perhaps his best changeup of the night and again whiffed Kingery on three pitches, all changeups.

With two outs, Rodriguez was gassed. Cesar Hernandez singled. Adam Hasely was hit by a changeup square in the rear. And Rodriguez lost all command in a six-pitch walk to Maikel Franco to tie the game.

"Overall was feeling really good with every pitch," Rodriguez said. "Just had the only two pitches I missed the whole game was the hit-by-pitch and the last pitch to Franco. I want to throw a changeup around the middle and you see what happens. That's the worst way to give up a run with the bases loaded and walking somebody. Wanted to throw the changeup down the middle but I missed location and walked the guy."

That was all for Rodriguez, who struck out 12 batters in 6-²/₃ innings and has allowed just five runs in his last 39 innings.

Cora said if the Red Sox were still in the playoff hunt he might've been more aggressive pinch-hitting in the top of the seventh.

"I would've pinch hit probably for Gorkys Hernandez, but Brock Holt wasn't feeling great," he said. "It's one of those that's a one-shot and (Aaron Nola's) stuff was that good... The one before I thought about it but didn't want to tie my hands up. Tried to stay away from Benintendi."

The Sox haven't had a 20-game winner since Porcello's Cy Young season in 2016.

They've had just eight pitchers win 20 games in a Red Sox uniform over the last 50 years: Porcello, Josh Beckett ('07), Curt Schilling ('04), Pedro Martinez ('02, '99), Derek Lowe ('02), Roger Clemens ('90, '87, '86), Dennis Eckersley ('78) and Luis Tiant ('76, '74, '73).

With the Sox nearly eliminated, getting Rodriguez to 20 has become one of the few remaining goals.

"He's pitching every five days," Cora said before the game. "There's some cool stuff he might obtain. People talk about 20 wins, what is 20 wins? You should ask him and the starters and people who start 30 games in the big leagues, how do they feel about 20 wins? I think everybody is pulling for him to do that."

Rodriguez didn't agree with Cora's assessment that he's pitching like the ace.

"We have the real aces on this team," he said. "I just feel like I'm part of the team. You know those guys with the numbers they have. If they were healthy they'd have way better numbers than I have. Because they're hurt everybody is saying that. But that's what I think."

Marco Hernandez to get a look at 2B as Red Sox take new approach on 2019

Jason Mastrodonato

It may be now or never for Marco Hernandez.

He's 27 years old and has just two weeks left to prove that the Red Sox should plan on him being a contributor in 2020.

Brock Holt is a pending free agent and Michael Chavis remains injured, leaving second base up in the air for next year.

Hernandez is "the guy I'm trying to get him more at-bats," manager Alex Cora said before Saturday's game against the Phillies. "Today he wasn't supposed to play but with Brock out he'll play. Trying to see what we got.

“He hasn’t played in a few years. He played a little bit earlier. He goes back, plays a lot down there in the minors, comes here and doesn’t play. It’ll be good for him to get at-bats.”

Hernandez is hitting .284 with six doubles and two homers in 102 at-bats. He hit .285 with a .724 OPS in 35 games for Triple-A Pawtucket when he first returned from shoulder surgery.

“The plan for him is to go to the Dominican and play the second part of the season (in the winter),” Cora said. “He’ll benefit from that. I haven’t seen him play a lot so it’ll be good for him to go out there and show the type of player he is.”

The Sox view him as a second baseman primarily, but are comfortable with him at shortstop and third base in a utility role.

The final two weeks provide a chance to experiment. It’s unlike anything Cora’s experienced as a coach or manager.

“It’s way different,” he said. “This is not cool, to be honest. I joke around with the guys, what do I do? My only experience as a coach is playing all the way to Nov. 1.”

The Red Sox entered Saturday 10 games out of the wild card with only 15 games to play.

“Whatever window we have, it’s very thin, it’s almost impossible,” Cora said. “But they’re showing up every day, the meetings are going the same way, the preparation is going the same way... You come here trying to win every game. That’s our goal. They’re part of it but at the same time you have to be smart about it.”

Cora plans to be careful with relievers Matt Barnes, Brandon Workman, Josh Taylor and Darwinzon Hernandez down the stretch.

“The other day, Hernandez got one out and I got him out,” Cora said. “He’s like, ‘that’s it?’ I said, ‘yeah, you’re throwing 92 mph.’ He started laughing. But he made some good pitches to Tevez and that’s probably the way we’re going to manage him.”

Christian Vazquez will also have his workload diminished. He’s started 94 games at catcher, seventh-most in the majors, while also starting 10 games at designated hitter, six at first base and one at second.

“He’ll play two here, two out of three at home against the Giants and he’ll play three out of four against the Rays,” Cora said.

Mookie Betts out with foot injury, Red Sox think Toronto turf is responsible

Jason Mastrodonato

Mookie Betts missed his fourth game of the season on Saturday night, when the reigning American League MVP was held out of action with an injured left foot.

Betts’ foot started hurting after the final game in Toronto on Thursday and he’ll be unavailable for the Sox in their two-game series against the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park.

“One of my toes, I don’t know how it happened,” Betts said after the Sox’ 2-1 win on Saturday. “I don’t remember diving or anything. Just sore for a couple days, give it a little time and see what happens.”

The injury wasn’t serious enough to warrant any imaging, manager Alex Cora said.

Players often leave the turf in Toronto or Tampa feeling sore.

“For some reason in this series, people felt it a lot,” Cora said. “I think the lengths of the game were OK but we haven’t played on that surface in a while, A lot of people were sore. He mentioned it right away after the game. I was paying attention to it and today he called me.”

Betts has played in 144 of the team’s 147 games entering Saturday. He leads the league with 131 runs after leading the league with 129 runs a year ago. But he’s no longer in the MVP race after winning the award last year. Teammates Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts look to be ahead of Betts while Mike Trout remains the clear frontrunner.

Holt dealing with dizziness again

The dizziness that so often plagued Brock Holt in previous years was back again on Saturday.

Holt was held out of the lineup after a bad night’s sleep on Friday due to similar symptoms that he dealt with while battling concussions and vertigo.

“As you know with him, he gets dizzy,” Cora said. “We’ll avoid that.”

Cora wasn’t too concerned. He said if the Red Sox were still in the playoff hunt, both Holt and Betts would be playing.

“I think so,” the skipper said. “I think both were like, ‘hey we’re good.’ I’m like, ‘no.’ I’ll take it away from them.”

Holt drew a walk in a pinch-hit appearance off the bench on Saturday.

Still pushing for Price

With just two weeks to go, the Red Sox are still preparing for David Price to make a comeback.

Though it seems unnecessary to push Price back to the mound while he recovers from a cyst on his throwing wrist, the Sox want him to end the season on a high note.

Price played catch Saturday.

“He’s feeling OK,” Cora said. “We thought that he was going to get closer to where we want to be. He’s making strides but not fast. Kind of like still maneuvering his pitchers, the shape of it. They’re OK but not where we want it. Let’s see where we go.”

The goal is still to get Price on the mound before the season ends.

“But if it’s not there, it’s not there,” Cora said. “I’ve been saying all along, he’s important for us this year but also for the upcoming years. I don’t feel like if he doesn’t have the changeup or his cutter, to send him out there and compete out there doesn’t make any sense.”

Heath Hembree, recovering from a shot in his elbow, threw a bullpen session and could return from a long layoff at the end of the week.

Romero with the team again

Without Dave Dombrowski, things have been different around the Red Sox on the road, Cora said.

Assistant general managers Eddie Romero and Brian O’Halloran were with the Sox on the road in Toronto but only Romero was present in Philadelphia.

“Talking to them, it’s working the same way it worked before,” Cora said. “Dave always had people around and a part of the conversation. The only thing that’s changed is Dave is not here with us.

“To be honest it’s different. I was thinking yesterday, I appreciate what they’re doing. They’re working hard to get this right. But at the same time you work with a guy for two years, having those conversations, you miss that. It is what it is. But it’s different, to be honest.”

Principal owner John Henry was also with the team in Philly.

Was move from Cherington to Dombrowski a mistake by Red Sox?

Jason Mastrodonato

According to an industry source this week, Ben Cherington does not figure to be in the running to replace Dave Dombrowski atop the Red Sox organization.

And that’s a shame.

Looking back, the argument could be made that the Red Sox should’ve never made the move from Cherington to Dombrowski in the first place.

It was June 2015 when principal owner John Henry made the declaration that Cherington “is going to be the general manager of this club for a very long time.” Henry’s words killed any speculation that Cherington might be in danger, though the speculation wasn’t all that rampant.

Most of the talk was about John Farrell and whether or not his voice was still carrying much weight in the locker room. It probably wasn’t. But the Sox had been reluctant to make a change at manager, still hoping that Farrell’s pitching expertise would lead them to a turnaround.

The failures of Hanley Ramirez and Pablo Sandoval led Cherington to take some heat too.

The Red Sox were having a historically bad year, about to pay \$2.4 million per win for a 78-win team, the most expensive disappointment since 2012, when they paid \$2.4 million per win for a 69-win team (though the disaster of 2019, when they’re on pace to pay \$2.9 million per win for another non-playoff team, is worse than both those figures).

But Cherington had still done more good than bad in his time with the Sox. The culture in the front office had a healthy and functional feel around it. The processes that had been designed for long-term growth were still in place. And Cherington made it clear to Henry that he was all-in on determining what went wrong in 2014 and 2015, which is why he hired former Angels general manager Jerry DiPoto as a consultant, with Henry’s approval.

Then in August, Dombrowski made a confusing exit from the Detroit Tigers. Similarly to his ending in Boston, he had won four straight division titles before being fired. There was speculation that Dombrowski had planned all along to reunite with Henry, speculation furthered by a statement made by Tigers owner Mike Illitch at the time.

“I’ve decided to release Dave from his contract in order to afford him the time to pursue other career opportunities,” he said.

And just like that, Cherington went from the long-term GM of the Red Sox to resigning from an organization he worked for since 1999.

The change was drastic

Cherington never believed in the president of baseball operations structure, the one the Tigers were using in Detroit.

“I talked to Dave briefly yesterday on the phone, and we didn’t spend a lot of time on it,” Cherington said when he walked away in Aug. 2015. “He made it clear to me, and I heard this from John (Henry) also, that he was coming in as the president of baseball operations, chief baseball officer, whatever you want to call it. In that position, he was being given sole decision-making authority for baseball matters, as I would expect he would.”

In Detroit, Dombrowski was the president but originally kept his general manager, Randy Smith, in his role. Until six days into the first season, when Smith was fired and Dombrowski made himself the GM.

Cherington had no desire to go through that.

“We all know baseball operations is a big job, there’s a lot to do,” Cherington said at the time. “I’ve always felt it’s about a team of people. It’s not about one person. We didn’t get into a detailed conversation about exactly what my role would have been. I do know that the only way it was going to work for Dave or for me or ultimately for the Red Sox is if I was all-in and fully committed to that vision. I came to the determination that I wasn’t.”

Cherington always preached teamwork. He empowered those around him and created a family feel with his assistant general managers in the front office. One of them, Mike Hazen, has since gone on to become the general manager in Arizona, where the Diamondbacks are trying to build a sustainable success the way Cherington had tried in Boston.

“It’s never one person doing everything,” Cherington said back then. “It’s been a group making decisions. It’s not about needing to only exercise my vision. This is simply about what’s best for the Red Sox. The Red Sox need everyone all-in on going forward. That’s what Dave needs. For a variety of reasons, I just didn’t feel I could be. I’ve been happiest in my career in baseball when I’ve been part of a group making decisions, and that leads to success.”

Adding to the confusion was the announcement that Larry Lucchino was stepping down from his role as president and CEO just a week before Dombrowski was let go in Detroit.

ESPN reported that it was just a coincidence, that the Sox had no plans to pursue Dombrowski.

Then the Sox hired Dombrowski in a role as president of baseball operations two weeks later.

“Tom (Werner) and I wanted to see if there was a fit for Dave within the Red Sox organization,” Henry said in 2015. “Ben did not object. Would our philosophies coincide in the present day?... We all left there thinking we could substantially strengthen the organization with Dave as president of baseball. We realized that our baseball views were, in fact, going to be in sync.”

Henry praised Dombrowski for building organizations “the right way.”

Looking back, that seems odd given Dombrowski’s long history of going all-in at the top, often at the price of the owner’s pocketbook and the farm system’s depth.

“Dave tends to balance scouting, data analytics and player makeup and all the tools in his tool box,” Henry said. “We hoped that Ben Cherington would remain as general manager but we knew there was a substantial risk he would not.”

The Sox had moved on, having seemingly stolen Dombrowski from Detroit and blindsided Cherington just after announcing to the world that Cherington was the long-term leader of the franchise.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can wonder if it was the wrong choice.

Was the transition a mistake?

Under Dombrowski, the Red Sox won the division three straight years and captured a title in 2018. That makes it difficult to call his hiring a mistake. Three years from now, we should have even more clarity when we watch the Sox try to dig themselves out of exorbitant financial commitments, a bottom-ranked farm system and a roster that must rely on an injury-plagued starting rotation for the next three years, when David Price, Nathan Eovaldi and Chris Sale are all under contract with top-tier salaries.

Then there's the issue of front office culture. Multiple reports this week confirmed whispers around the industry that Dombrowski was not running a well-oiled machine in Boston, that those around him questioned his creativity and willingness to cooperate with others.

The Detroit Free Press added another layer, reporting that Dombrowski had the same reputation with the Tigers.

"He is demanding to work for — none of his assistants in Detroit went to Boston with him, though it's also unknown if any were offered the chance — and largely builds his teams on his terms," the Free Press wrote.

Never were such claims presented about Cherington.

His baseball decisions will always be questioned, but at his best he was arguably better than Dombrowski.

In 2013, Cherington built a Red Sox team that won 95 games and cruised to a World Series title in a postseason that was smooth from beginning to end (knocking off Dombrowski's Tigers in the ALCS when the Tigers' bullpen collapsed — sound familiar?).

And Cherington did it while spending just \$176.5 million. It was a masterful performance in roster building, with the 40-man bunch costing a total of \$1.8 million per win, the least amount the Red Sox have spent per win in any year from 2010 through 2019.

Like Dombrowski's Sox in 2018, Cherington's 2013 roster had the fingerprints of both the current and former general manager all over it. No way they would've won without Theo Epstein's guys in 2013, just like there's no way they would've won without Cherington's guys in 2018.

The same can be said for Cherington's guys in 2013 (Mike Napoli, Shane Victorino, Jonny Gomes, Stephen Drew, David Ross, Ryan Dempster) and Dombrowski's guys in 2018 (Sale, Price, Eovaldi, J.D. Martinez, Steve Pearce, Mitch Moreland).

But Cherington is often remembered poorly around Boston, largely because he thought David Ortiz could get the best out of Hanley Ramirez, or because he saw the trend of over-paying starting pitchers and thought he struck a bargain on Rick Porcello, whose underlying numbers were all trending up, or because the market was over-valuing Cuban prospects and Cherington utilized Henry's resources to take a gamble on Rusney Castillo that ultimately failed.

Certainly the biggest mistake was that Cherington couldn't develop starting pitching. While he departed with a farm system that was widely considered one of the best in baseball, the Sox failed on just about every homegrown starting pitcher under his watch.

But has Dombrowski done any better? Maybe in time we'll look back and say Tanner Houck turned into a nice reliever (as farm director, Cherington found Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman) or Jay Groome overcame his off-the-field concerns and recovered from Tommy John surgery to be a productive starter.

If not, Dombrowski is equally as guilty as failing to develop anybody on the mound.

The farm system is considered one of the worst. The financial commitments will leave the next general manager with razor-thin financial flexibility and difficult decisions ahead.

Dombrowski and Cherington each won a World Series in Boston. Each lasted only four years in their roles at the top. But only one of them left the Red Sox in good shape for the years ahead.

*** *MassLive.com***

Xander Bogaerts' home run power is something Boston Red Sox legend David Ortiz saw coming 4 years ago; did Bogaerts?

Christopher Smith

Xander Bogaerts became only the second shortstop in MLB history along with Alex Rodriguez to belt 30 homers and 50 doubles in the same season. He also joined David Ortiz as the only two members of the Red Sox organization ever to do it.

Ortiz always knew Bogaerts had legitimate home run power, even after the Red Sox shortstop hit just seven homers in 2015.

After the 2015 season, Ortiz urged Bogaerts to add more muscle to his frame that offseason.

"I wanted him to add more weight, 10, 15 pounds more muscle because that would help him with more power and he did it," Ortiz told MassLive.com in May 2016. "He came to spring training stronger."

Bogaerts recalled some of that conversation.

"Go home, keep working, add on but don't add on enough to be an NFL guy. You know? Huge like that," Bogaerts said. "Add on some and it will help you take your game to another level.

"He saw more projection-wise physically probably because I had some room to still grow," Bogaerts added.

Bogaerts belted 21 homers and slugged .466 in 2016. He experienced a disappointing 2017 season because he played through a wrist injury. But he returned strong in 2018 with a focus on launch angle. He crushed 23 homers and slugged .522.

He has taken his power to another level this year with 30 homers, 81 extra-base hits and a .559 slugging percentage.

Did Bogaerts believe in his power four years ago like Ortiz did?

Asked by MassLive.com in May 2015 about his home run potential, Bogaerts replied, "Ortiz power, no. Let's say around (Mike) Napoli -- 15-20, 20-25 (homers), around that range. In a few more years probably."

Did he undersell himself? Reflecting back, he said 25 homers was a reasonable projection. He really didn't think he'd reach 30 in a season.

"But I'm happy I did," he said. "I just made some adjustments to my swing. And like I said, just get stronger and try to remain strong throughout the season. It's been huge for me."

He stays through the ball longer and has a different swing path that has allowed him to hit the ball in the air more often.

Staying strong physically the entire season has been incredibly important. Bogaerts struggled during the second half both in 2015 (.253/.317/.412/.729 line after the All-Star break) and 2016 (.268/.336/.403/.739).

Bogaerts has emerged this year both as Boston's franchise shortstop and a team leader who always speaks with the media after a difficult loss. This career year came after he signed a six-year, \$120-million extension in April.

Bogaerts hopes to have the impact as shortstop of the Red Sox that Derek Jeter had on the Yankees. Bogaerts grew up a big fan of Jeter and wears No. 2 because of him.

"Obviously he played his whole career with the Yankees. And I was very thankful to these guys for giving me an opportunity," Bogaerts said. "Of course I got to the big leagues just trying to help out with the organization winning as (many) championships as possible."

He recognizes his job now is to help the team win World Series and help the younger players grow.

"Especially now," he said. "We have a lot of young guys coming up. We have a lot of young guys in the bullpen this year. Position-wise we've got (Michael) Chavis and (Rafael) Devers ... It's such a young wave. I think that's been nice, just being able to know everyone and help each other out getting better."

Would Alex Cora have let Boston Red Sox's Eduardo Rodriguez hit with bases loaded in seventh inning if game meant more?

Christopher Smith

Manager Alex Cora's decision to let starting pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez hit with the bases loaded and two outs in the seventh inning would have been scrutinized heavily if the Red Sox trailed by one or two games in the AL Wild Card race.

But it's simply a blip on the radar with Boston 9 ½ games behind with only 14 games remaining.

Rodriguez struck out with the bases loaded to end the seventh. The lefty then walked in the tying run in the bottom half of the seventh.

The Red Sox rallied in the ninth to win 2-1 over the Phillies on Saturday here at Citizens Bank Park.

Rodriguez was at 80 pitches when he hit during the seventh. He was tossing a gem. He finished with 12 strikeouts, one shy of tying his career high. Why not let him hit so he could stay in to pitch in a game with little importance?

Cora was asked if he would have pinch hit for Rodriguez if his team still was in Wild Card contention.

"We would have pinch hit for Gorkys (Hernandez)," Cora replied.

Hernandez, the No. 8 hitter, was a late addition to the lineup when Cora scratched Mookie Betts because of a sore toe. Hernandez grounded to third base and Maikel Franco threw home for the second out.

"His stuff was that good, too," Cora said about Rodriguez. "So it's not that easy to make the decision, especially with two outs. Two outs is a tough at-bat. The one before, I thought about it, but I didn't want to tie my hands up. We're trying to stay away from Benny (Andrew Benintendi) just from a mental side of it."

Cora also wanted to try to stay away from Brock Holt who felt sick. He ended up using both Benintendi and Holt as pinch hitters during the ninth. Holt walked to the load the bases. Benintendi stroked the go-ahead sac fly to left field.

“Too bad he walked the guys,” Cora said about Rodriguez. “But I think he learned a lot today. That’s part of the process.”

Rodriguez has a 3.64 ERA in 31 starts. He has allowed only five runs in his past 39 innings (1.15 ERA) over six starts.

“He’s throwing like an ace,” Cora said.

Eduardo Rodriguez K’s 12 as Boston Red Sox beat Phillies; Andrew Benintendi, Brock Holt come off bench to help 9th-inning rally

Christopher Smith

Red Sox’s Eduardo Rodriguez recorded his sixth career double-digit strikeout game.

The lefty punched out 12, one shy of tying his career high. But he failed to earn his 18th victory when he walked in the tying run with the bases loaded and two outs in the seventh. Maikel Franco drew the walk to tie the game 1-1.

The Red Sox took back the lead in the ninth though to win 2-1 over the Phillies here at Citizens Bank Park on Saturday. Boston hurlers struck out 15.

Mitch Moreland and Christian Vazquez singled to begin the top of the ninth. Pinch hitter Brock Holt walked to load the bases with one out. Andrew Benintendi, who also was pinch hitting, stroked a 271-foot sacrifice fly to left field to score pinch runner Chris Owings.

Holt came off the bench to hit despite feeling sick.

“He couldn’t sleep well and kind of like under the weather,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said about Holt before the game.

Rodriguez allowed just one run, four hits and one walk in 6 ²/₃ innings.

He had thrown just 80 pitches when his spot in the batting order came up in the seventh with the bases loaded, two outs and Boston ahead 1-0.

Cora chose not to pinch hit for Rodriguez who struck out swinging to end the frame.

Rodriguez has a 3.64 ERA in 31 starts. He has allowed only five runs in his past 39 innings (1.15 ERA).

Rodriguez’s six double-digit strikeout games:

Sept. 14, 2019 at Phillies: 12

July 12, 2019 vs. Dodgers: 10

May 15, 2019 vs. Colorado: 10

Sept. 1, 2018 at White Sox: 12

May 5, 2018 at Texas: 10

Sept. 25, 2016 at Tampa 13

The Red Sox took a 1-0 lead in the seventh inning. Rafael Devers walked and J.D. Martinez singled with no outs. Christian Vazquez knocked in Devers with an RBI double to right-center field.

Price injury: 'Goal' remains for Red Sox lefty to pitch again in 2019, but Cora won't push it

Christopher Smith

David Price (wrist) was scheduled to play catch again Saturday.

"He's making strides but not fast," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Price felt tightness in his left wrist during a bullpen session Sept. 4. He spent from Aug. 8-Sept. 1 on the injured list because of a cyst on his left wrist.

Cora said Price still needs to improve the shape of his pitches.

"They're OK but not where we want it," Cora said.

The Red Sox still hope Price will pitch again in 2019 but they haven't ruled out shutting him down.

"That's the goal obviously," Cora said. "But if he's not there, he's not there. I've been saying all along, he's important for us this year but also, he's very important for the upcoming years. And we're not going to push him. If he doesn't have his changeup or his cutter, to send him out there and compete that way doesn't make sense."

Boston is nearing elimination from the Wild Card race. Cora's team is 10 games behind with 15 games remaining.

Hembree could return by end of next week

Heath Hembree, who has been on the injured list with right lateral elbow inflammation since Aug. 2, threw a 35-pitch bullpen Saturday.

The righty will throw a simulated game Tuesday.

"If he jumps past that hurdle most likely he'll be active towards the end of the week," Cora said.

Mookie Betts has sore foot: Boston Red Sox star to see doctor but Alex Cora doesn't think it's serious

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox scratched Mookie Betts from their lineup vs. the Phillies on Saturday because of a sore left foot.

Betts told manager Alex Cora his foot felt sore after Thursday's game in Toronto. It didn't happen on a specific play.

"He felt OK yesterday," Cora said. "Today he was a little bit sore. So I decided to scratch him."

The Red Sox had a day off Friday.

"Mookie is going to see a doctor in a little bit," Cora said. "We don't think it's something serious. So hopefully he can play tomorrow. If not, he'll be ready to play on Tuesday."

He's not expected to undergo X-rays or an MRI.

“There’s a lot of people sore because of the turf (in Toronto),” Cora said. “For some reason in this series (at Rogers Centre), people felt it. I think the length of the games were OK but obviously we hadn’t played on that surface in a while. There were other people that were sore. And he mentioned it right away.”

Brock Holt is sick

Cora initially planned for Brock Holt to play Saturday but the super utility man is sick.

*** *RedSox.com***

E-Rod fans 12 in pursuit of 20 wins

Paul Casella

A pitcher winning 20 games may not mean as much to some as it used to, but Eduardo Rodriguez's outing in Saturday's 2-1 victory over the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park epitomized why it's a feat still cherished by many within Major League clubhouses.

"A lot of people talk about 20 wins like, 'What is 20 wins?'" Red Sox manager Alex Cora said prior to the game. "Well, you should ask the starters and the people who start 30 games in the big leagues how they feel about winning 20 games. I think everybody is pulling for him to do that."

Perhaps that's why Cora opted to let Rodriguez remain in the game to hit against Phillies ace Aaron Nola with the bases loaded, two outs and Boston clinging to a 1-0 lead in the seventh inning. Rodriguez, who had thrown just 80 pitches to that point, was 0-for-20 with 10 strikeouts (including the postseason) prior to that at-bat. He went down swinging to strand the bases loaded.

"I think the best two curveballs I've ever seen were the one Rich Hill threw me in the World Series and the two that Nola threw me right there," said Rodriguez, who had dropped down a successful sacrifice bunt in his previous at-bat. "At least I got the bunt down. That's something I feel proud about. At least I can bunt. But hit? No chance."

Cora said he had actually considered pinch-hitting for his No. 8 hitter, Gorkys Hernández, with the bags full and one out, but he decided to save his pinch-hit options for later in the game, with Mookie Betts unavailable and Brock Holt feeling ill. Hernandez grounded into a forceout, with the Phillies throwing out J.D. Martinez at the plate, and Rodriguez followed with his strikeout.

Still, thanks to Christian Vázquez's RBI double earlier in the inning, Rodriguez took the mound in the bottom half of the frame in line for his 18th win. He would instead depart with two outs and no chance to earn a victory after he airmailed a 3-2 changeup to Maikel Franco to walk in the tying run. That was the only walk of the night for Rodriguez, who allowed just one run over 6 2/3 innings, while striking out a season-high 12 batters.

"I feel like, as a pitcher, that's the worst way to give up a run -- bases loaded and you walk somebody," Rodriguez said. "I feel like that's the worst way to do it, so I decided to throw that changeup right down the middle, but I missed the location and I walked the guy."

"He aimed that one," Cora said. "He'll tell you that's probably the worst changeup in his career."

That left Rodriguez with a no-decision, which comes on the heels of a hard-luck loss his last time out. Rodriguez allowed just one run over six innings Monday against the Yankees, while striking out nine, but took the loss in a 5-0 defeat. That gives him a 1.42 ERA and 21 strikeouts over 12 2/3 innings in his last two starts -- but zero wins.

Rodriguez will need to win each of his final three starts this season -- one each against the Giants, Rangers and Orioles -- to reach 20 wins. He's trying to join Rick Porcello (2016) as the only Red Sox pitchers in the last decade to win 20 games. Even going back 40 years, the only other Boston hurlers to do so in that span are Josh Beckett ('07), Curt Schilling ('04), Derek Lowe ('02), Pedro Martinez (twice) and Roger Clemens (three times).

"I've still got three more starts, so there's a chance," said Rodriguez, who has thrown 185 1/3 innings this season. "But my real goal is 200 innings. That's my real goal right now. Wins and losses, I mean, you see that game, 1-0 game and I give up a run. Wins depend on how the game goes.

"If 20 happens, it happens. If not, I'm just happy with what I get."

Regardless of whether Rodriguez joins the 20-win club, he's certainly established himself as a front-of-the-rotation starter and a key piece of Boston's future. He's allowed either one run or no runs in five of his last six starts, lowering his season ERA from 4.31 to 3.64 in the process.

"Excellent again. His stuff was outstanding," Cora said. "He's throwing like an ace."

Rodriguez wasn't ready to go that far, though his 2.78 ERA over his last 18 starts might suggest otherwise.

"We have the real aces on this team," he said. "I just feel like I'm part of the team. You know those guys with the numbers they have. If they were healthy, they'd have way better numbers than I have. They're hurt, so everybody is saying that. But that's what I think."

Mookie Betts (foot) to sit Sunday

Paul Casella

Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts was scratched from Saturday's lineup against the Phillies due to a sore left foot, and he is also expected to miss Sunday's finale at Citizens Bank Park. Boston has an off-day Monday before opening a series at Fenway Park against the Giants on Tuesday.

"He's day to day," Cora said after Saturday's 2-1 win in Philadelphia. "We'll stay away from him tomorrow too, so he can benefit from tomorrow and Monday. The hope is that he'll be back on Tuesday."

Betts initially felt the pain Thursday after playing on the Rogers Centre turf in Toronto. He visited with the doctor on Saturday afternoon, though he did not undergo any X-rays or an MRI.

"I really don't know how it happened, I don't remember diving or anything," Betts said. "Just sore for a couple days. It is what it is. Just give it a little time and see what happens."

J.D. Martinez started in Betts' place in right field, while Gorkys Hernández took over in left. Cora also planned to have Brock Holt in the original lineup, but decided against it with Holt feeling "under the weather." Holt entered the game in the ninth as a pinch-hitter and worked a walk, before Andrew Benintendi hit a go-ahead sacrifice fly.

Cora indicated that the team's position in the standings -- Boston entered the day 10 games back of the final American League Wild Card spot -- factored into the decision to hold out Betts and Holt.

"I think so," Cora said when asked if the duo would be playing if the game had more significant postseason implications. "They both were like, 'Hey, we're good,' but I'll take [the decision] away from them."

Betts had been on a tear lately, hitting .412/.466/.863 over the last 12 games, dating to his two-homer game in Boston's 15-inning victory over the Angels on Aug. 30. The reigning AL Most Valuable Player was 21-for-51 with nine extra-base hits, including seven homers, in those dozen contests.

Betts' recent surge raised his season average to .293, to go along with 28 homers, a .918 OPS and a Major League-leading 131 runs.

"Regardless if he's hitting .335 or .290, he dominates the game from the leadoff spot," Cora said. "He has [131] runs -- that's what you do as a leadoff guy."

Price's status up in the air

Left-hander David Price played catch prior to Saturday's game at Citizens Bank Park, but it remains unclear whether he'll make another start in 2019. Price has thrown just two innings since Aug. 5 due to a left wrist issue.

"He's feeling OK," Cora said. "We thought that he was going to get closer to where we want to. He's making strides, but still not fast."

Price, who turned 34 years old last month, has three years remaining on his seven-year, \$217 million deal. After playing a pivotal role in last year's World Series run, Price put up a 2.70 ERA through his first 11 starts this season before hitting some bumps in the road.

He's still hoping to pitch at least once more over the final two weeks of the season, though Cora said that will depend entirely on the progress the lefty makes in the coming days.

"That's the goal, obviously," Cora said of getting Price another start. "But if he's not there, he's not there. I've been saying all along, he's important for us this year, but also he's very important for the upcoming years. We're not going to push him."

Cora was far more optimistic about right-hander Heath Hembree, who has not pitched since Aug. 1 due to right elbow inflammation. Hembree threw a bullpen session on Saturday, and he is expected to pitch a simulated game Tuesday in Boston.

"If he jumps past that hurdle, most likely he'll be active toward the end of the week," Cora said.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

MLB Notebook: Ownership deserves share of the blame in latest Red Sox mess

Sean McAdam

It's not quite an annual tradition, like the leaves turning color or Christmas decorations being put up, but the Red Sox changing their top baseball executive has happened far too often in the past decade.

From October 2011 through last week, the Sox have cycled through four general managers/presidents of baseball operations.

That's three more than the New York Yankees, who used to have an owner who would change GMs on a whim. And three more than the Houston Astros have had in that time span. And two more than the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Yes, the Red Sox have won two World Series since 2011, and that's one more than the Dodgers, Yankees and Astros have won combined. (That total will almost certainly change by November, as it seems a virtual certainty that one of the aforementioned clubs will be crowned champions for 2019. But we digress).

So, the Red Sox have enjoyed no shortage of success. In a market that has transformed into a "title ... or didn't happen," environment, the Sox have twice won it all. What's more, that's four championships since 2004, two years after the current ownership group took over.

That's an impressive legacy for any group of owners — four titles in 17 years — and particularly so for a franchise that had been wandering the desert in search of one championship for the previous 86 years.

John Henry, Tom Werner and their partners have overseen the golden age of Red Sox baseball. On their watch, the Red Sox have regularly been contenders with 10 postseason appearances. Add in the renovations made to Fenway Park and the team's philanthropy — both in the continued support of the Jimmy Fund and the creation of the Red Sox Foundation — and their stewardship has been a hugely successful one.

But if they're going to take bows for all that they've accomplished, they must also be held accountable for their missteps. And make no mistake: the revolving door on the executive suite is largely ownership's doing.

Theo Epstein, who won two World Series, left out of frustration over interference from ownership and upper management and the belief that the product on the field had been supplanted as the team's top priority.

But at least Epstein got to leave of his own volition, which is more than can be said of his successors, Ben Cherington and Dave Dombrowski, both of whom won a World Series only to be shown the door in less than two years.

Some change may be good for an organization, but firing two executives on the heels of delivering a title to which all teams aspire is borderline dysfunctional.

Henry, Werner and Co. have supplied the necessary resources to win these championships, but too often, they've also sent mixed messages.

And as they undertake the search for Dombrowski's replacement, it's worth asking: what is that they seek?

Because, based on recent history, that's not at all obvious.

There's been an impetuosity to the process.

For a time, winning on the field didn't seem to be enough. Remember when Werner mused about having stars and personalities that would help garner ratings for NESN?

Or when Henry bounced between advocating for a front office guided by analytics to suggesting that perhaps the Sox had erred in being too dependent on data, only to switch back again?

Even the level of public accountability has been lacking. If Henry and Werner can be on the makeshift stage set up on the Dodger Stadium infield last fall to accept the World Series trophy from Rob Manfred, then surely they can sit in the Fenway Park interview room and explain why they fired Dombrowski.

From a distance, even without any official communication from either, the answer seemed obvious: Dombrowski had done what had been asked of him (namely, make the Red Sox relevant again and contend annually), but with some free agent defections expected and a player development system in need of an overhaul, he wasn't the man to oversee the next phase of the organization.

(There. Was that so hard, guys?)

It's admirable that the Sox have won more championships than any other team in the game since the turn of the century, a feat unimaginable given the team's tortuous history in the previous century.

But this practice of churning through top executives has to stop.

Whoever the Sox hire in the coming weeks (months?), they should be someone who can lead the team for the next decade, and not just, as has been the practice of late, the next underperforming season. He needs to be someone who will anticipate changes in the game at every level, from roster building to scouting to player evaluation.

That's what this ownership had in Epstein and his integration of the entire Baseball Operations department, with every employee pulling in the same direction, resulted in two World Series wins, another season (2008) that fell a win shy of a chance to win another and a third title just two years after he left, accomplished with many of the players and prospects for whom he was responsible — to say nothing of the fact that it was directed by Cherington, his protégé.

This recent habit of acting like an updated version of George Steinbrenner is not becoming for the franchise.

Ownership needs to make clear to Sam Kennedy, the man tasked with heading the search, exactly what is being prioritized in a new executive ... and then allow him to do his job.

More importantly, when that person is hired, he should be given the resources and the freedom to do the job.

Anything less will continue to be a blight on an otherwise successful legacy.

One of the advantages to moving Dombrowski out with three weeks to go in the regular season — as one baseball official noted — is that it gives time for interested executives to “get their ducks in a row.”

In other words, with the job open, those working for other clubs and under contract might take the time to maneuver ahead of time to position themselves. This could involve informing owners of their interest — should the Sox reciprocate — or even arranging for permission to speak to the Red Sox should they come calling.

This, in turn, would allow for teams to be pro-active. If they believe a GM or a president of baseball operations harbors interest to, given the opportunity, go to Boston, they can begin thinking about a line of succession in their organizations.

By jumping the line a bit here, the Red Sox can also be in a position to have their pick of candidates to interview. For all the instability in the last decade, the Red Sox' opening is still a desired one, given the resources, tradition and talent at the major league level. But it never hurts to be the first to ahead of the pack when it comes to surveying the field, especially when front offices could be changing in Seattle, Pittsburgh and Colorado.

Of course, there's the flip side of the equation: executives believed to be on the Red Sox' wish list could parlay that interest (or even perceived interest) into extensions and/or promotions.

On Friday, the Arizona Diamondbacks gave GM Mike Hazen a multi-year contract extension in what was clearly a response to rumors about the Sox having interest in bringing Hazen back to Boston.

Hazen might be the first benefit from the dominos falling, but he surely won't be the last.

With the benefit of some hindsight, it's worth noting the similarities between Dombrowski's dismissal last weekend and his firing in Detroit four years ago.

Just after the trade deadline in 2015, Dombrowski was keen to know about his future. His contract was set to expire at the end of that season, and seeking clarification on his status, went to owner Mike Ilitch.

The answer forthcoming was not the one he wanted, and also strangely similar to the one he received last weekend from Red Sox ownership: no extension, and oh-by-the-way, you're out now, effective immediately.

The parallels between the two are striking: the Tigers had won four straight division series prior to the 2015 season, losing in the ALCS twice and losing in the World Series in another year. It was an impressive sustained run — just like the one Dombrowski oversaw in Boston three straight division titles and one World Series.

But once a disappointing season happened in both cities, it was the end of the line. The Tigers were three games under .500 when the Tigers fired him on Aug. 4, 2015; the Sox had a winning record when Dombrowski got the news last Sunday night, but the previous week's results had made it obvious that they weren't going to make it back to the postseason to defend their championship.

In both cases, the teams were careful to couch the firing in diplomatic ways. The Tigers, in a statement, said Dombrowski had been "released," from his contract, temporarily lending credence to the idea that Dombrowski had asked out of his deal when in fact he hadn't.

With the Red Sox, the euphemism was "parted ways."

The effect was the same: Dombrowski was out of work.

A key difference: when Detroit made a change in management, the Tigers weren't ready to rebuild, not with Ilitch, then in his mid-80s and desperate for a championship on his watch. Only when Ilitch passed away in 2017 did the Tigers truly start over again.

And here's a sobering thought: some four years after Dombrowski's firing, the Tigers are still nowhere near being competitive. In fact, they've already lost five more games than they did in each of the two previous seasons, with two weeks remaining on the schedule.

Red Sox fans had better hope that it doesn't take another four seasons for the team to hit rock bottom.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 2, Phillies 1 – Rodriguez loses chance for win, but Sox come back late

Sean McAdam

Sox scratch it out: The Red Sox managed only six hits, but two of them Of them in the ninth helped to set up the winning run. The big at-bat came from pinch-hitter Andrew Benintendi, who came to the plate with the bases loaded and one out in the inning. After sitting around for three hours, Benintendi didn't waste any time, swinging at a tough breaking ball and lofting it in the air to left. It wasn't terribly deep, but it was enough for pinch-runner Chris Owings to score from third base. That won't go down as another hit for pinch-hitters this season — the Sox have been remarkably successful in that situation this year — but the RBI was the difference between going ahead or perhaps going into extra innings.

Rodriguez loses chance at win: For the second straight outing, Eduardo Rodriguez deserved a better fate. Last time out, he allowed just one run over six innings against the Yankees, but with the Red Sox getting shutout in that one, he was tagged with the loss. On Saturday, he was even better, shutting out the Phils for six innings. The Sox finally managed to get him a run in the top of the seventh, but in the bottom of the inning, the Phillies had two on before Rodriguez, ahead 1-and-2, hit Adam Haseley and, with the bases loaded, walked Maikel Franco to force in the tying run. That was it for Rodriguez, who was lifted with the game tied, losing any chance to pick up the win. But after the game, Alex Cora said the Sox would pitch Rodriguez Thursday in regular rest — despite the off-day Monday — enabling him to get 20 wins with

three more scheduled starts. Rodriguez finished with 12 strikeouts, one run on four hits allowed and one very costly walk.

Sox can't solve Nola: Aaron Nola faced the Red Sox last season ... and allowed one run. He faced them last month at Fenway ... and allowed one run. He started against the Sox Saturday night ... and allowed one run. Sensing a pattern here? Nola hasn't had the season expected of him, but don't tell that to the Red Sox, who can't seem to get anything going against him. They were blanked for six innings before they managed their requisite run against him in the seventh. "He's a good pitcher," said Cora. "He was able to expand the zone with the breaking ball and the fastball. We've seen him the last few years. With all due respect to the pitchers we've faced, he's been the best one. I love the way he competes, love his stuff ... They really have a good one. He's a special one."

SECOND GUESS

In the top of the seventh inning, with the bases loaded and the Sox leading 1-0, Cora allowed Rodriguez to hit for himself. Predictably, Rodriguez, whose futility with the bat has been an ongoing joke with his teammates this season, struck out to end the inning. Cora undoubtedly was motivated by his desire to help Rodriguez get the win and keep alive the chances of a 20-win season. But it would have been better to send up a hitter in the hope that a base hit stretches the lead to 3-0, and then entrust the bullpen to protect a three-run lead with nine outs to go.

ONE UP

Christian Vazquez: Vazquez had four plate appearances and reached base three times, with the biggest one coming in the seventh when his double to the left-center gap scored Rafael Devers. He later singled to set up the game-winning rally in the ninth.

ONE DOWN

Marco Hernandez: Inserted into the leadoff spot for the night, Hernandez was unable to get on base in any of his five plate appearances.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

"He's throwing like an ace." – Alex Cora on Rodriguez.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:

Vazquez has set career highs in doubles, homers, RBI and runs scored.

The Red Sox improved to 8-8 in interleague play.

Fifty-five of Brandon Workman's 66 appearances have been scoreless this season.

UP NEXT

The Red Sox and Phillies wrap up their brief weekend series at 1:05 Sunday with RHP Rick Porcello (12-12, 5.83) vs. RHP Jason Vargas (6-7, 4.31)

*** *The Philadelphia Inquirer***

Phillies lose to Red Sox, waste Aaron Nola start once again as bats go cold

Matt Breen

Rhys Hoskins rounded first base on Saturday night, the roar of the crowd behind him, as he and the fans watched his fly ball soar to deep right field.

The Phillies, clinging to slim playoff dreams, were desperate for a big hit. So was Hoskins, who had homered in just one of the last 17 games. And so were the fans at Citizens Bank Park, who have not seen playoff baseball in eight years.

For a moment, this felt like the one. But then the eighth-inning fly ball died near the warning track, landing in the glove of J.D. Martinez, and the Phillies were headed to a 2-1 loss to the Red Sox. The Phillies could not find a big hit against Boston, and another loss makes it increasingly difficult to find a path to October.

The Phillies are 3½ games behind the Cubs for the National League's second wild-card spot. They have 15 games remaining and would need to go 11-4 against a difficult schedule if the Cubs managed to play .500 baseball the rest of the way against much easier opponents.

They, then would need the Brewers, who lead the Phillies by 2½ games, and the Mets, who lead the Phillies by a half-game, to stumble, too. The Phillies, according to FanGraphs, have a 1.7-percent chance to reach the playoffs.

"I'm not going to sugarcoat it and say we have a bunch of time left," starter Aaron Nola said. "Because we really don't."

Nola allowed just one run in seven innings, but the Phillies lost his start for the fifth-straight time. The Phillies are thin on pitching, but they have an ace in Nola. Failing to win his starts, especially when he pitches the way he did on Saturday, is not the best way to reach October. He struck out nine and held the Red Sox to four hits.

Aaron Nola of the Phillies pitches against the Red Sox at Citizens Bank Park on Sept. 14, 2019. Boston scored a run in the ninth against Hector Neris, but the game was lost by the Phillies' failure to supply run support for Nola. They were stymied by left-hander Eduardo Rodriguez and his change-up, as he struck out 12 batters in 6⅔ innings.

The Phillies mustered five hits all night, struck out 15 times, went 0 for 5 with runners in scoring position, and left eight runners on base. They loaded the bases in the seventh, but their only run that inning came on a bases-loaded walk. Hoskins' fly out in the eighth came with runners on first and second and one out. Scott Kingery followed with a fly out. The Phillies had their chances.

"Every loss feels heavier, and every win feels a lot better," Hoskins said. "A big one tomorrow to obviously try to split a series, try to create some momentum to go on the road. We know the teams that we're playing are good, but ... if we can play our game and obviously pitch the way we did tonight and hit the way we know we can, we believe and are confident that we can beat anybody. Home or away."

The Red Sox scored a run off Nola in the seventh, but then allowed their starting pitcher to bat with two outs and the bases loaded. Rodriguez had just 20 plate appearances before Saturday night, none of which ended with him on base or even hitting a ball out of the infield. He's an American League pitcher.

Rodriguez had quieted the Phillies offense enough that Red Sox manager Alex Cora believed he could win the game, 1-0. Rodriguez struck out with the bases loaded to end the seventh inning. It turned out that the Red Sox just needed one more run. Brock Holt and Andrew Benintendi, the pinch-hitters Cora could have used against Nola, were dispatched in the ninth to beat Neris.

"We have to find ways to scratch out runs for Nola," manager Gabe Kapler said. "It's tough. It's definitely something that we have to correct."

Nola was dominant until the seventh, when he seemed to run out of gas. The Red Sox loaded the bases, and Nola had thrown 98 pitches. Mike Morin was warmed in the bullpen. This seemed like the end.

Instead of Kapler lifting him, pitching coach Chris Young went to the mound for a brief chat. Nola forced Gorkys Hernandez to ground out to third base. The Phillies had two outs, and the Red Sox allowed their pitcher to hit. The Phillies still had a chance. An inning later, Hoskins thought his fly ball did, too.

"I thought I got it enough to at least get it over his head," Hoskins said.

The crowd moaned as Hoskins' fly ball was caught, the slugger threw up his arms in disbelief, and the chances became even slimmer that Philadelphia will enjoy playoff baseball this October.

"It's go time," Hoskins said.

*** *Associated Press***

Benintendi's sac fly lifts Red Sox past Phillies 2-1

Pitching their ace every fifth day to boost their postseason hopes hasn't worked out for the Philadelphia Phillies.

Pinch-hitter Andrew Benintendi's sacrifice fly in the top of the ninth inning lifted the Boston Red Sox to a 2-1 win over Philadelphia on Saturday night.

The Phillies were mathematically eliminated from the NL East race when the Braves beat Washington earlier in the day to increase their lead in the division to 10 1/2 games over the Nationals. Philadelphia fell 3 1/2 games behind the Chicago Cubs for the second wild card spot and also trails the Brewers and Mets.

"I'm not gonna sugarcoat it and say we have much time left but we won't hang our heads," right-hander Aaron Nola said after allowing one run and four hits with nine strikeouts in seven innings.

Red Sox starter Eduardo Rodriguez had a season-high 12 strikeouts for the defending World Series champions, who entered the night 10 games out of a postseason berth.

After Nola beat Boston at Fenway Park on Aug. 20, manager Gabe Kapler has used him on his normal four days' rest even when the team has off days in between his starts. The Phillies are 0-5 in Nola's starts since then and have only scored 15 runs combined in those games. Nola has a 4.15 ERA in the five games but allowed three runs or less in six innings or more in three of them.

"We have to find ways to scratch more runs across for Nola," Kapler said. "It's tough. Something we have to correct."

They're running out of time with 15 games remaining.

Mitch Moreland led off the ninth with a single off Hector Neris (3-6) and Christian Vazquez ripped a single to left-center, sending pinch-runner Chris Owings to third. Shortstop Jean Segura made a leaping catch on Jackie Bradley Jr.'s hard liner but pinch-hitter Brock Holt walked to load the bases. Benintendi then sliced a fly ball to left that scored Owings to put Boston up 2-1.

Matt Barnes (5-4) tossed a scoreless eighth and Brandon Workman finished for his 16th save in 22 tries.

Rodriguez allowed one run and four hits in 6 2/3 innings and remains at 17 wins.

Nola took a two-hitter into the seventh before running into trouble. Rafael Devers walked to start the inning and J.D. Martinez singled up the middle. After Moreland struck out, Vazquez drove a double off the wall in left-center to score Devers.

Nola then walked Bradley to load the bases but Gorkys Hernandez grounded into a third-to-home forceout. Red Sox manager Alex Cora elected to keep Rodriguez in the game and Nola struck him out to end the inning.

But Rodriguez surrendered the lead in the bottom half.

Bryce Harper led off with a single and Cesar Hernandez hit a two-out single. Rodriguez hit Adam Haseley with a pitch to load the bases and Maikel Franco walked on a 3-2 pitch, forcing in the tying run.

Josh Taylor replaced Rodriguez and struck out pinch-hitter Phil Gosselin to end the inning.

Nola retired the first 10 batters before Xander Bogaerts lined a single to right in the fourth.

"We've seen him the last two years," Cora said of Nola. "With all due respect to all the pitchers that we have faced, he's been the best one. I love the way he competes, love his stuff, he doesn't panic. He's pitched twice over there at home and twice here, but with the offense that we have, he still dominates us. They really have a good one. He's a special one. It would have been cool to face him in October, but I guess we'll face him next year."

INTERLEAGUE EXCELLENCE

The Red Sox are 13-0 in Rodriguez's Interleague starts since 2017.

SWIPING RIGHT

The Phillies are 17-for-17 in stolen base attempts in their last 17 games. It's the first time they have stolen 17 or more straight bases since 18 in a row in 2010.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: OF Mookie Betts was scratched because of a sore left foot and Holt was scratched due to illness. Cora said Betts could return Tuesday.

Phillies: LF Corey Dickerson did not start because of a sore left foot. He could return Sunday.

UP NEXT

RHP Rick Porcello (12-12, 5.83 ERA) starts for the Red Sox and LHP Jason Vargas (6-7, 4.31) goes for the Phillies on Sunday. Porcello is 1-1, 2.77 in two career starts in Philadelphia. Vargas is 3-3, 3.48 in eight career starts vs. Boston.