

## ***The Boston Red Sox Monday, September 16, 2019***

### **\* *The Boston Globe***

**These are the best of times for Christian Vazquez**

Peter Abraham

Chicken was on the menu in Toronto last Thursday when Red Sox manager Alex Cora asked Christian Vazquez to come along when he met an old friend for lunch.

It was retired Blue Jays star Carlos Delgado, who was back in town for a charity fund-raiser.

Vazquez had fallen into a slump brought on by trying too hard to hit his 20th home run. Cora thought talking to Delgado would help his catcher.

Delgado's 473 home runs are the most by a player from Puerto Rico and only Carlos Beltran has more RBIs. So, of course, Vazquez sat up straight and paid attention.

"That's a big name in Puerto Rico, Carlos Delgado," Vazquez said. "He's an idol. I wanted to hear what he had to say."

The slugger had a simple, if unexpected, message: Stop trying to hit home runs.

"We were talking about trying to reach milestones and all that," Cora said. "Carlos talked to him and said, 'Dude, the less you try the better it's going to be. Hit the ball the other way like you do it. Don't put pressure on yourself.'"

Vazquez didn't play Thursday night. But he was 2 for 3 with a walk and a double on Saturday against the Philadelphia Phillies and on Sunday homered twice and drove in a career-best five runs in a 6-3 victory.

Make it 21 homers for Vazquez. He joined Carlton Fisk, Rich Gedman, Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Mike Stanley, and Jason Varitek as the only Sox catchers to hit that mark.

Fisk did it three times, Varitek twice, and the others once.

At 29, Vazquez is having his best offensive season, hitting .273 with a .781 OPS over 127 games.

In a 1-1 game, Vazquez came to the plate with the bases loaded and two outs in the third inning and drove a curveball from Jason Vargas over the fence in left field for his first career grand slam.

His second homer, also to left field, came off Mike Morin in the sixth inning on a fastball. The two home runs and five RBIs were career highs.

"He's having a terrific season," Cora said.

As he hits for power, Vazquez also has cleaned up his defensive play by cutting down on the number of wild pitches and passed balls that were happening with him behind the plate.

"He wasn't as sharp as he usually is," Cora said. "He has some high goals, but we have to push him."

Vazquez arrived in the majors in 2014 on the strength of his defense and that had slipped this season. The Sox addressed it.

Vazquez felt he was jumping at the ball instead of shifting to let his body block it. The adjustments were subtle but needed.

“The last month and a half, defensively, he’s been the guy we envisioned,” Cora said. “Blocking balls, throwing people out, taking charge behind the plate.”

The Red Sox have been no picnic for their catchers this season. They’ve used 15 starting pitchers and had 28 games during which the bullpen worked six or more innings. But Vazquez has hung in there.

No Sox player was more excited about Cora being named manager than he was. They knew each other well from the Puerto Rico winter league and there was great mutual respect.

“We have a great relationship,” Cora said. “I feel like although he’s a player, I see him as a little brother.”

But Cora’s fondness for Vazquez ended at the lineup card last season. Sandy Leon started 12 more games for the Sox and Vazquez chafed at losing a job he thought was his.

“I’m always tough with him,” Cora said. “We’re from the same country so he better play well.”

Vazquez earned the job back in spring training and has held it since. At the same time, his relationship with Cora has strengthened to a point that even their families are close.

But Delgado was needed to pinch hit with some advice. Cora, after all, never hit more than 10 home runs in a season.

“You need to hit the ball hard. If it goes out, it goes out. If it’s a double, it’s a double. You don’t control that,” Vazquez said.

Vazquez never expected to hit 20 home runs in the majors. Five was his most before this season.

“Maybe 10,” he said. “But 20? Come on, man.”

But there’s a baseball headed home with him to prove it.

### **Mookie Betts to pay visit to team doctors about sore foot**

Julian McWilliams

Mookie Betts is still experiencing soreness in in his left foot, the effects he believes of playing on the turf in Toronto last week.

Betts said he never has had issues with his feet after playing on turf, “more just like aches with the hamstrings stuff,” he said. He described this one as unusual.

Manager Alex Cora stayed away from using Betts in the Red Sox’ 6-3 victory over the Phillies on Sunday but he hoped to have him back in the lineup during the three-game series with the San Francisco Giants, which begins Tuesday at Fenway Park. However, Betts will first visit team doctors when the Red Sox return home.

“He’s still sore,” Cora said. “But we don’t feel like it’s something that’s going to take him a while. Hopefully, he’ll be back in the lineup for the Giants and finish the season strong.”

Cora’s target date for Betts will depend on the tests. With the Red Sox out of the playoff hunt, they will take every precaution necessary. In Betts’s case, they certainly won’t rush it, particularly with just two weeks left in the season. Betts said Saturday he was hopeful this wouldn’t be a long-term deal.

“It will be all right,” Betts said. “It’s just one of those things where when you’re coming off the turf, it’s kind of tough.”

Betts has put together another great year, leading the league in runs scored (131) while also hitting .292 with 28 homers and a .918 OPS.

Hembree season in question

The Red Sox are racing against the clock with reliever Heath Hembree. Hembree (elbow) has been on the injured list since Aug. 2 and there’s a possibility he might stay there for the remainder of the season. He was scheduled to pitch a simulated game Saturday, but Cora and pitching coach Dana LeVangie decided to give it a bit more time, rescheduling the session for Tuesday. On Sunday, though, Cora said that the simulated game would have to be pushed back even more. Perhaps, it might not even happen.

“It’s not like he’s in a bad spot, but he doesn’t feel great,” Cora said. “He was sore around the area. With that one, we’ll talk [about what to do next]. If we’re running out of time, we’re running out of time. We’re not going to push him to pitch just to pitch. We’ll talk it about it probably [Monday] and make a decision.”

Closing it out strong

Brandon Workman registered his 14th save of the season on Sunday. After issuing a two-out walk to Adam Haseley in the ninth inning, he struck out Maikel Franco on four pitches, lowering his ERA to 2.04 on the season.

Workman has a 1.03 WHIP in 66½ innings and has become the Sox’ most reliable arm at the back end of the bullpen. He’s given up just one homer this season and 56 of his 67 innings have been scoreless.

It wasn’t always like this for Workman, who was left off last year’s Opening Day roster and spent most of the season on the shuttle between Pawtucket and Fenway.

“Last year was a lot different,” Cora said. “In spring training, he was throwing 84 [miles per hour], 85, 87. That was it. This year, he showed up in much better shape. It was a different offseason for him. I do believe that [leaving him] off the roster had something to do with it. It was a wake-up call.”

Next up: Giants

The Red Sox are 9-8 against the National League with three games coming up against the San Francisco Giants starting on Tuesday . . . With Rick Porcello going 0 for 2, Sox pitchers are 1 for 21 in interleague games this season with one RBI and 11 strikeouts. David Price has the only hit (April 6 at Arizona) . . . Chris Owings (0 for 4) and Sam Travis (0 for 4) continued slumps. Owings is 2 for 25 with 13 strikeouts since being called up. Travis is 0 for 19 in his last eight games with a plate appearance and 1 for 25 since Aug. 23 . . . Phillies manager Gabe Kapler and All-Star outfielder Bryce Harper were ejected Sunday for arguing balls and strikes.

### **Christian Vazquez is simply grand for Red Sox**

Julian McWilliams

Sunday’s outing for Rick Porcello was different than many of his previous ones in 2019.

Porcello’s 1-2 offering that he snapped in for a called third strike against Bryce Harper had some different life to it. It was Porcello’s two-seamer of old with late movement, his forte for much of his career.

The pitch looked off the plate. Still, it was placed in a good spot. Harper lashed out at home plate umpire Gabe Morales and was ejected. His manager, Gabe Kapler, was ejected, too.

Regardless of the call, the location was important. Porcello buried the pitch inside where Harper couldn't do anything with it. It was thrown with confidence, something he's lacked for much of the season.

"Good fastball today," Cora said afterward. "Good tempo after the first two innings. There was a lot of conviction behind the pitches. I think that was his best fastball since Minnesota [June 17.]

The Sox won, 6-3, to sweep the two-game set at Citizens Bank Park, making the Phillies' postseason hopes look just about as bleak as those of the Sox. Porcello went five innings, surrendering two runs while striking out six. He surrendered a solo shot to Rhys Hoskins in the second and Cesar Hernandez's RBI single in the fifth, but Porcello avoided giving up the big hit or homer that has typically unraveled his outings this season.

"I had better command of my pitches," Porcello said. "I had a pretty good curveball and I was able to lean on that a little bit. I just commanded the ball better. I had good life on [my fastball]. We were able to attack guys, get ahead and punch some guys out."

It helped, too, that Christian Vazquez had a career day. With the game knotted in the third inning, Vazquez roped a grand slam to give the Sox a 5-1 lead. It was his 20th homer of the season and his first big league grand slam. The last Red Sox catcher to reach 20 homers was Jarrod Saltalamacchia, who hit 25 in 2012. In the sixth, Vazquez hit another homer to left for a career-high five RBIs.

"That was good," Cora said. "When you don't get caught up on trying to do stuff, just keep it simple and go straight to the ball and battle at-bats good things happen. Yesterday, he had a good game and today he stayed on the breaking ball [against Jason Vargas] and hit it out of the ballpark. He's having a terrific season.

Vazquez had two clutch hits for the Red Sox in Saturday night's 2-1 victory over the Phillies and Cora mentioned afterward that he thought he had been pressing to get to 20 homers. Vazquez's swing became long, Cora thought. The two had lunch with Carlos Delgado during their trip to Toronto and he suggested to Vazquez that 20 homers would come with a month left to play and if it didn't, so what. The approach in the at-bats is what mattered the most.

In two games against the Blue Jays, Vazquez went 0 for 6 but redeemed himself by going 4 for 7 with six RBIs in the two-game set against the Phillies.

"The confidence is back," Vazquez said. "I hit the ball hard [on Saturday] and it felt good. I kept it going."

Said Cora: "We've seen it back home [in Puerto Rico]. We know he wants to be great. He has some high goals. We have to push him because then when he relaxes his game suffers."

The Red Sox now turn the page and host the San Francisco Giants starting on Tuesday. The talk, for the most part, will be centered on Carl Yastrzemski's grandson, Mike, a rookie for the Giants who will play at Fenway for the first time. Still, there are games to win despite the standings, as Cora has said on numerous occasions. He hopes the play from this series is a sign that the team will finish strong.

"It was a good one," Cora said regarding the sweep of the Phillies. "We played clean baseball. We put together good at-bats. We faced one of the best [Aaron Nola] yesterday and Vargas is a tough one. It was good overall. Now we move on and enjoy the off-day and got the Giants."

## **\* *The Boston Herald***

**Rick Porcello on pending free agency: 'I'm not even thinking about it'**

Jason Mastrodonato

A little bit of momentum to finish the season could go a long way for Rick Porcello.

Porcello allowed just two runs in five innings and struck out six, his most K's since July 31, in the Red Sox' 6-3 win against the Phillies on Sunday.

"Better command of my pitches, had a good curveball today, was able to lean on that a little bit," he said.

With free agency just around the corner for the 30-year-old, having some success in his final three starts seems pertinent.

"I'm not even thinking about it man," Porcello said. "I haven't gotten somebody out in two months. I have to figure out how to get people out again before you take those steps."

Porcello's fastball Sunday was the best one he's had since June 17, manager Alex Cora said.

"Today the two-seamer was playing more," Cora said of Porcello's signature pitch. "You can see some bad swings on his fastballs. He's been battling. In between starts he works hard trying to find it."

He's wrapping up a four-year, \$82.5 million contract extension he signed under former general manager Ben Cherington and can test the free agent waters this offseason.

The Red Sox will need to replace his innings in the rotation, especially with injury concerns around Chris Sale and David Price.

"Whatever is going to happen is going to happen," Porcello said. "It'll take care of itself. It's been a tough year, frustrating year. It's been a grind, physically, mentally. I'm still here with the Red Sox and plan to finish this contract up and take it from there."

Red Sox closer still looking strong

Brandon Workman pitched a scoreless ninth inning Sunday and is now 9-1 with 14 saves and a 2.04 ERA on the season.

It's been a remarkable turnaround for the right-hander after the Red Sox held him off their World Series roster last October and he was throwing his fastball in the 80s in spring training.

"This year he showed up in better shape," Cora said. "It was a different offseason for him. I do believe taking him off the roster had something to do with it. It was a wakeup call. A tough one, but it was a wakeup call. He changed a lot of things."

"Going into the season he was in limbo. What role are we going to use him? He was a multi-inning guy in the middle of the game. Little by little he kept growing as his stuff got better and now he's a closer for the Red Sox."

Trout's surgery clouds MVP race

Mike Trout was ruled out for the year because of surgery on his right foot, ending his remarkable season after just 134 games. Trout still appears to be a strong candidate for American League MVP. He leads the league with 8.6 WAR thanks to a .291 average, 1.083 OPS, 45 home runs and 11 stolen bases. Behind Trout in WAR is Alex Bregman (7.3), Marcus Semien (6.5), Mookie Betts (6.3) and Xander Bogaerts (6.2).

Betts remains out with soreness in his left toe. He'll visit with the Red Sox doctors on Monday before the team determines if he can play vs. the Giants on Tuesday.

Brock Holt (dizziness) also remained out of the lineup but is expected to play Tuesday.

Bradley sits again

Jackie Bradley Jr. was on the bench again Sunday and has been out of the lineup against most lefties in the final month, though Cora said that's mostly been because of the National League game forcing J.D. Martinez into the outfield. ...

Price (wrist) played catch Saturday, and the Sox will re-evaluate him on Monday.

Heath Hembree (elbow) was supposed to participate in a simulated game Tuesday and return at the end of the week, but Hembree wasn't feeling great after throwing Saturday and the Sox will now consider shutting him down for the year.

### **Christian Vazquez leads Red Sox over Phillies with 20th, 21st home runs**

Jason Mastrodonato

A year ago, the Red Sox' contract extension with catcher Christian Vazquez was looking like a costly mistake.

Vazquez hit just .207 with three homers in 80 games during an injury-plagued 2018 season, when Vazquez's fellow Puerto Rico native Alex Cora began favoring the defensive specialist, Sandy Leon, behind the plate.

A year later, it looks like the Red Sox have their franchise catcher.

Vazquez hit two home runs, including a grand slam in the third inning, to lift the Red Sox to a 6-3 win over the Phillies on Sunday.

It was the first two-homer, five-RBI game by a Red Sox catcher since Jason Varitek, a neat bit of symbolism as Vazquez begins to look more and more like the Varitek-like backstop behind the plate.

"I'm always tough on him," Cora said. "We're from the same country so he better play well. I know he works hard. We got closer, family wise and we have a great relationship. He's a player, but I see him as a little brother...I know what he can do. He had some high goals and we have to push him. When he relaxes, then his game suffers."

The Sox were tied 1-1 when Vazquez stepped up with the bases loaded and sat back on a low curveball from Jason Vargas and lifted it over the left-field fence for his 20th homer of the season. Vazquez was so excited he held the bat in the air with a one-handed pose as he ran down the first-base line.

In the sixth inning, he got a 91-mph fastball inside and rifled it over the left-field seats for No. 21.

Asked how much he was thinking about hitting No. 20, he said, "a lot. It's tough to see that No. 19. Now it's 20."

Vazquez never envisioned hitting more than 10 home runs in a big league season, he said. But he spent all off-season working on hitting the ball in the air, a popular trend around the game.

He entered the year with nine career homers over four seasons but was determined to play better to prove worthy of the remaining \$20 million over the final four years of his contract, including this year.

"It was tough for me last year to get hurt," he said. "But thank God we won the World Series because it was a tough year offensively. This year I'm having more fun."

Stuck on 19 homers entering this series, Vazquez had lunch with Carlos Delgado in Toronto and received some advice from the two-time All-Star, a Puerto Rico native who hit 473 career home runs.

“He’s been swinging hard and we feel like his swing is getting long,” Cora said. “The last day in Toronto we had lunch with Carlos Delgado and we’re talking about trying to reach milestones and all that. Carlos was like, ‘Dude, the less you try, the better it’s going to be. Just hit the ball the other way the way you do it. You will hit one home run in a month and if it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t happen. Don’t put pressure on yourself.’”

Vazquez, making about \$3 million this year, is the eighth catcher to cross the 20-homer mark this season. He’s the first Red Sox catcher to hit 20 since Jarrod Saltalamacchia hit 25 in 2012. He’s just the seventh catcher in franchise history to do it.

It was Vazquez’s 36th multi-hit game this season, most by a Red Sox catcher since Varitek had 47 in 2004.

Varitek has been working closely with Vazquez this season to clean up his defensive game. While he has four catcher pickoffs, one away from the most in franchise history (Rich Gedman had five in 1974), he’s struggled blocking balls in the dirt and has occasionally looked slow behind the plate.

“He was dropping pitches and that can’t happen,” Cora said. “When he signed everybody was talking about him defensively. All of a sudden he’s swinging the bat well and, it’s not that he didn’t take care of his defense, but he wasn’t as sharp as he usually is. All of a sudden he starts doing a few things mechanically and you see the results.”

Cora’s tough love approach has worked on Vazquez, whose career 37.2 caught stealing percentage leads all active catchers.

“We’re good, I listen to him a lot,” Vazquez said. “We call him ‘Google’ in Puerto Rico. It’s fun to hear his stories about baseball. He knows what kind of player I am. He saw me in winter ball playing. He knows what I can do in the game.”

## **\* *The Providence Journal***

### **Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez has put it all together**

Bill Koch

It seems the Red Sox made the right decision regarding who should be their No. 1 catcher.

Christian Vazquez and Blake Swihart were in constant competition coming through the minor-league ranks. Vazquez was considered the superior defender while Swihart was thought of as the potentially more productive offensive player.

Turns out Vazquez might be both. His Sunday afternoon at Citizens Bank Park was more of the same at the plate, as he enjoyed his first multi-homer game and drove in a career-high five runs. Boston doubled up the Phillies, 6-3, to sweep the two-game set.

“He’s having a terrific season,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “The cool thing about it is the last month and a half he’s been the guy that we envisioned — blocking balls, throwing people out, taking charge behind the plate.”

Vazquez went deep just 10 times in 291 games from 2014-18. He missed all of the 2015 season recovering from Tommy John surgery and showed little pop other than a modest .734 OPS in 2017. Vazquez has improved considerably from an injury-marred season last year, as he missed a significant chunk of time with a broken finger.

“Thank God we won the World Series, because it was a tough year for me offensively,” Vazquez said. “This year I think I’m having more fun. I was working in the offseason trying to hit more fly balls, and it’s working.”

Vazquez entered Sunday putting the ball in play on the ground just 39% of the time, which is a career-low. He was hitting line drives 23.4% of the time and fly balls 37.6% of the time — the second number is a career-best. Those percentages have also translated to a career-high 25 doubles, including one in Saturday’s 2-1 win.

“You need to hit the ball hard,” Vazquez said. “If it goes out, it goes out. If it’s a double, it’s a double. You don’t control that.”

This performance is the culmination of some long-term swing changes. Vazquez put in a significant amount of offseason work with his personal coach, Lorenzo Garmendia, and with Red Sox hitting coaches Tim Hyers and Andy Barkett. Garmendia’s clients also include Boston infielder Chris Owings, who sought out Garmendia after being released by the Royals in June.

“His rhythm looks good,” Owings said. “I think he’s kind of figured out some simple cues, and his swing is good. That’s the easiest way to put it. There’s no wasted movement with what he’s got going on right now.”

Vazquez has received a healthy push from his manager over the last two seasons. Both natives of Puerto Rico, Cora and Vazquez have played Winter Ball against one another and endured through some tough moments last season when Swihart and Sandy Leon emerged as the preferred options behind the plate.

“He played this game a long time,” Vazquez said. “He knows a lot. We call him Google in Puerto Rico. It’s fun to hear his stories about baseball.”

How much more can the Red Sox expect from Vazquez? His growth hasn’t been limited to on the field. Vazquez got married and the offseason and is expecting a son with his wife, Gabriela, in November. His personal and professional futures have aligned nicely into one of the best calendar years of his life.

“We’ve seen it back home and I know he wants to be great,” Cora said. “He has some high goals, and we have to push him.”

## **Red Sox ready to host Mike Yastrzemski, Bruce Bochy and the Giants**

Bill Koch

Two particular visitors from San Francisco will make headlines this week in Boston.

Outfielder Mike Yastrzemski and manager Bruce Bochy will be noteworthy arrivals for Tuesday’s series opener at Fenway Park. Yastrzemski is the grandson of Red Sox legend Carl Yastrzemski while Bochy is retiring at the end of the season.

Yastrzemski has excelled after making his debut in late May. The long-time Orioles farmhand entered Sunday with 19 home runs and an .837 OPS in 95 games. Yastrzemski is a St. John’s Prep (Mass.) product who was drafted by Boston out of high school in 2009 but opted to honor his college commitment to Vanderbilt.

“I saw him in spring training and he’s a good player,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “He’s got a good swing and I think people are excited he’s going to be there. He’s having a good season.”

Bochy finished his playing career with the Padres in 1987, and Cora’s brother, Joey, was one of his teammates. He’s been a manager for all but one season since 1995, piloting San Diego and the Giants. Bochy won World Series titles with San Francisco in 2010, 2012 and 2014.



“I’m only two years into this and there are certain days where you’re like, ‘Wow, it’s only two years?’” Cora said. “But at the same time you see Bochy, you see (Terry Francona), you see (Mike) Scioscia and what he did – you respect that.”

### **Red Sox reliever Heath Hembree (right elbow) suffers a setback**

Bill Koch

Heath Hembree’s chances of returning at any point this season took a hit on Sunday.

The Red Sox reliever reported some elbow soreness when he arrived at the ballpark, and his simulated game on Tuesday has been cancelled. Hembree is now in limbo with 13 games to play and Boston fading from the American League wild card race.

“If we’re running out of time then we’re running out of time,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “We’re not going to push him to pitch just for him to pitch. We’ll talk about it tomorrow when we go to the ballpark and make a decision with that.”

Hembree’s last appearance came on Aug. 1, and he posted an even 9.00 earned-run average over his last 12 games. The right-hander has been on the injured list twice this season, spoiling what was a good start prior to the All-Star break. Hembree pitched to a 0.52 ERA during a 20-game span from April 25 to June 10.

David Price (left wrist) also appears no closer to a return. He played catch on Saturday and will receive treatment on Monday. Price has made just one start since Aug. 4, a two-inning stint against the Angels during Boston’s eight-game road trip to open September.

“He played catch yesterday – nothing today,” Cora said. “Tomorrow he’ll get treatment and we’ll map it out depending on how he feels.”

### **Mookie Betts (left foot) misses Red Sox-Phillies series**

Bill Koch

Mookie Betts missed both games of this weekend series at Citizens Bank Park.

The Red Sox outfielder has a sore left foot and was scratched from the lineup on Saturday against the Phillies. Betts was out Sunday as well and is scheduled to see team doctors on Monday.

“We don’t feel it’s something that’s going to take him a while,” Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. “Hopefully he’ll be back in the lineup for the Giants and finish the season strong.”

Betts is on a five-game hitting streak and has reached base safely in each of his last 25 games. He’s cracked seven of his 28 home runs over the last two weeks, pushing to reach 30 for the third time in his last four seasons. Betts has compiled a 1.026 OPS in his last 62 games.

Boston’s outfield took on a different look with Betts unavailable. Sam Travis started in left, Andrew Benintendi slid to center and J.D. Martinez manned right. Jackie Bradley Jr. sat again with left-hander Jason Vargas starting on the mound for Philadelphia.

“It’s not like we don’t trust the player,” Cora said of Bradley. “But there were a lot of lefties towards the end and we had to play J.D. We tried to put our best offensive lineup out there.”

Bradley is slashing .213/.321/.331 in 160 plate appearances against left-handed pitchers this season. His OPS of .652 is more than 100 points lower than the .766 he’s posted against right-handed pitching.

## **Red Sox 6, Phillies 3: Christian Vazquez's grand slam carries Boston to victory**

Bill Koch

Postseason contender might not be the correct description for the Red Sox as of Sunday afternoon.

Spoiler would certainly apply. The Phillies are all but finished in the National League wild card race after this lost weekend, as Boston wrapped up a two-game sweep on a spectacular day at Citizens Bank Park.

Christian Vazquez continued his offensive breakout with the first multi-homer game of his career. Vazquez's grand slam in the top of the third inning put the Red Sox in command to stay, as the visitors coasted to a 6-3 victory.

Vazquez added a solo home run in the top of the sixth, his fifth RBI of the day to set a new career high. Rick Porcello worked through the first five innings to earn the victory and four different relievers cobbled together the final 12 outs. Philadelphia manager Gabe Kapler and outfielder Bryce Harper both watched the final five frames from the home clubhouse after being ejected by plate umpire Gabe Morales for arguing balls and strikes.

"This series, it was a good one," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "We played clean baseball and put good at-bats."

Phillies starter Jason Vargas was waiting on Kapler and Harper after his abbreviated outing, one that lasted just three innings. His hanging curveball to Vazquez was among the last of his 71 pitches, and it was driven just beyond the top of the wall in straightaway left. That snapped a 1-1 tie and gave the Boston bullpen some margin for error.

"This year I think I'm having more fun," Vazquez said. "I was working in the offseason trying to hit more fly balls, and it's working."

It was the fourth grand slam of the season for the Red Sox and the first in exactly two months. Michael Chavis stroked the last on July 15 against the Blue Jays, and those types of swings have been far too infrequent for Boston in 2019. The Red Sox loaded the bases with nobody out in the first and settled for just a sacrifice fly to right by J.D. Martinez.

"You don't want to get caught up in what happened last year, but it seems like whenever we had chances we scored in bunches," Cora said. "It hasn't happened this year."

Rhys Hoskins crushed a solo home run down the line in left to tie the game in the second, and the Phillies threatened Porcello again in the fifth. Cesar Hernandez bounced an RBI single through the right side to make it 5-2 and J.T. Realmuto represented the tying run as he stepped to the plate. Realmuto sent a harmless two-hopper to third and Philadelphia managed just one more run on an RBI single by Jean Segura in the sixth.

"Better command of some pitches," Porcello said. "I had a pretty good curveball today – was able to lean on that a little bit. Commanding the ball better."

Porcello fell short of the sixth inning for the fifth straight time, but the two earned runs he allowed matched his lowest total during that span. He walked one, struck out six and allowed just the lone extra-base hit along with four singles. Marcus Walden, Andrew Cashner, Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman handled the rest.

Boston improved to 21-11 at this venue and won its ninth series here in 12 tries. The Red Sox are 9-8 in interleague play with three games left against the Giants beginning Tuesday night at Fenway Park. Boston has finished with a winning record against N.L. foes in all but one of its last 14 seasons, going 9-11 in 2014.

## \* **MassLive.com**

### **Red Sox's Christian Vazquez calls Alex Cora 'Google'; manager calls catcher 'a little brother'**

Christopher Smith

Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez has had his eye on home run No. 20. He certainly has thought about reaching the milestone.

"A lot," Vazquez said. "It's tough to see that No. 19. But now it's 21."

Vazquez belted his 20th and 21st homers here Sunday to help lead Boston 6-3 over the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park.

Vazquez hit 10 homers in his first 999 career plate appearances from 2014-18. His 21 blasts this year have come in 482 plate appearances.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora pushed Vazquez, a fellow Puerto Rican, to become a better player this offseason after a down year in 2018.

"I'm always tough with him," Cora said. "We're from the same country so he better play well. I know he works hard. ... We have a great relationship. Although he's a player, I see him as a little brother. I play against him in winter ball; I manage against him. So I know what he can do. We've seen him back home and I know he wants to be great. I know he has some high goals. We have to push him. Because when he relaxes, then his game suffers."

Vazquez — who has a goal to catch for Team Puerto Rico in the next World Baseball Classic — agreed Cora is hard on him.

"I listen to him a lot," Vazquez said. "He's got a lot of experience in this game. He played this game a long time. He knows a lot. We call him 'Google' in Puerto Rico. So it's fun to hear his stories on baseball."

Cora especially is pleased with Vazquez defense recently.

"The last month and a half defensively he's been the guy we envisioned," Cora said. "Blocking balls. Throwing people out. Taking charge behind the plate. He's had some tough games, bullpen games. Starters going short. And you've gotta be creative and stick to the game plan. He's been amazing."

### **Boston Red Sox's Rick Porcello: 'I'm not thinking about (MLB free agency). I haven't gotten anyone out in 2 months'**

Christopher Smith

Rick Porcello's four-year, \$82.5 million contract expires at the end of this season.

He's not looking ahead to free agency with 13 regular season games remaining and the Red Sox no longer in postseason contention.

"I'm not thinking about it right now, man," Porcello said. "I haven't gotten anybody out in two months. I've got to get somebody out again before taking those steps. Whatever's going to happen is going to happen. It will take care of itself. Honestly, it's been a tough year, frustrating year. It's been a grind physically and mentally. And I'm still here with the Red Sox and I plan to finish this contract."

Porcello did record 15 outs Sunday as he helped the Red Sox win 6-3 over the Phillies here at Citizens Bank Park. He allowed two runs, five hits and one walk while striking out six in 5 innings.

The righty, who reportedly tried to negotiate a hometown discount to stay with Boston, has struggled through the worst season of his career. He's 13-12 with a 5.77 ERA, 1.44 WHIP and .283 batting average against in 30 starts.

The Red Sox have the ability to extend him a one-year qualifying offer. But it seems unlikely at this point despite much uncertainty with the rotation, including Chris Sale's health, looking ahead to 2020.

### **Christian Vazquez crushes grand slam, solo homer as Boston Red Sox sweep Phillies**

Christopher Smith

Christian Vazquez never hit more than five home runs in any season until this season.

The Red Sox catcher belted his 20th and 21st homers here Sunday to help lead Boston 6-3 over the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park.

The Sox took both games here in Philly. They now head back to Boston to play three games vs. the San Francisco Giants starting Tuesday.

This marks Vazquez's first career multi-homer game. His 358-foot grand slam in the third inning gave Boston a 5-1 lead.

He crushed a 361-foot solo homer in the sixth to put Boston ahead 6-2.

Vazquez hit 10 homers in his first 999 career plate appearances from 2014-18. He has 21 blasts in 482 plate appearances this season.

Rick Porcello allowed two runs in 5 innings. He gave up five hits and one walk while striking out six.

### **Heath Hembree injury: Red Sox righty (elbow) 'a little bit sore,' his 2019 season might be finished**

Christopher Smith

Heath Hembree threw a 35-pitch bullpen session Saturday here at Citizens Bank Park. He was scheduled for a simulated game Tuesday at Fenway Park.

That won't happen.

"Today he showed up, it's not like he's in a bad spot but he doesn't feel great," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said Sunday. "He's a little bit sore around the area. Not something that we worry about it but I don't think we're going to do the simulated game,"

Hembree, who has been on the injured list with right lateral elbow inflammation since Aug. 2, might be done for the season. The Red Sox have only 14 games remaining after Sunday. They are no longer in postseason contention.

"If we're running out of time we're running out of time," Cora said. "We're not going to push him to pitch just for him to pitch. We'll talk about it probably tomorrow when we go to the ballpark and make a decision with that."

### **Betts injury: Red Sox star likely to visit doctors in Boston on Monday, still could play Tuesday**

Christopher Smith

Mookie Betts again is not in the Red Sox lineup Sunday. But Red Sox manager Alex Cora hopes he'll return Tuesday vs. the San Francisco Giants at home.

Betts has a sore toe on his left foot from the turf at Rogers Centre in Toronto.

"He's doing OK. Still sore," Cora said. "Most likely tomorrow he'll go our doctors. We don't feel like it's something that's going to take him a while. Hopefully he'll be back in the lineup for the Giants (series) and finish the season strong."

Betts also visited the doctors here in Philadelphia. He did not undergo any X-rays or an MRI.

## **\* *RedSox.com***

### **Vazquez, Red Sox still have a lot to show**

Paul Casella

Red Sox manager Alex Cora acknowledged that he likely would have handled multiple things differently during this weekend's series against the Phillies at Citizens Bank Park had his club still been in postseason contention.

He may have used his bench differently in the later innings of Saturday's victory. Mookie Betts and Brock Holt might have attempted to play through their ailments. That said, the Red Sox don't plan on mailing in the final two weeks of the season. Nor do they care about playing spoiler, despite dealing a massive blow to the Phillies' postseason chances with Sunday's 6-3 victory to complete a sweep in the brief two-game Interleague set.

"It's not that we want to spoil people's parties or whatever," Cora said prior to the series. "No, we want to play because we want to win games."

Frankly, it's uncharted territory for Cora in his brief tenure as Boston's skipper. At this time last year, the Red Sox were 8 1/2 games better than any other team in baseball and had all but wrapped up home-field advantage for their eventual World Series run. Cora's only concern was finding the right balance to keep everyone healthy and fresh down the stretch.

"My only experience as a coach is playing all the way until Nov. 1," Cora said. "But at the same time, there are a few things that I'm watching and looking ahead to see what happens over the next couple days, couple weeks."

It's an opportunity for someone like Rick Porcello to prove he can still contribute to a big league rotation, even if it's not in Boston. It's a chance for someone like Andrew Benintendi to end a down season on a high note. For some, like Christian Vázquez, it's simply a time to put the icing on a breakout year.

All of that was on display, to some extent, in Sunday's win.

### **Vazquez keeps rolling**

While Porcello and Benintendi look for answers, Vazquez is simply focused on staying in a groove over the next two weeks. He continued his breakout campaign Sunday by clubbing his first career grand slam in the third inning. He added a solo homer in the sixth for his first career multi-homer game. Vazquez had been stuck on 19 homers since Aug. 27.

"A lot," Vazquez said, when asked how much he'd been thinking about hitting his 20th homer. "Yeah, it's tough to see that No. 19 up there, but now it's 21. It's very important to finish strong. Then come into next year and keep rolling."

Vazquez also had an RBI double and a clutch hit to set up the game-winning sacrifice fly in Saturday's victory. After struggling to a .207 average and only three homers in 80 games last year, Vazquez is hitting .273 with 21 homers and 65 RBIs this season.

"He's having a hell of a year," Porcello said of his batterymate. "I hope he keeps going. The sky's the limit for him."

#### Porcello finishing strong

It's no secret that Porcello has had a forgettable season in the final year of his four-year, \$82.5 million deal with the Red Sox. He entered Sunday with a career-high 5.83 ERA, and had allowed at least five runs in eight of his last 14 outings.

Porcello held the Phillies to two runs over five innings while racking up six strikeouts, his most since July 31. His curveball was perhaps the best it has been all season, with Porcello inducing six swinging strikes on his 19 offerings with the pitch. That matched the total from his previous four starts combined -- and he hadn't forced more than one swing and miss with that pitch in any of his last three starts.

"Rick is going to be 31 [years old] next year. He's still young, and he works hard and he loves this game and he loves working at his craft," Cora said. "Whatever he can find in the next few weeks, I know he's going to benefit from."

As for what happens once the season ends, Porcello said he hasn't put much thought into it yet.

"I haven't gotten anybody out in two months, so I figure I better get somebody out again before I start taking those steps," Porcello said. "Whatever's going to happen is going to happen, it'll take care of itself."

"Honestly, it's been a tough year, a frustrating year. It's been a grind physically and mentally. I'm still here with the Red Sox and I'm trying to finish this contract up."

#### Getting Benintendi on track

Benintendi delivered the game-winning pinch-hit sacrifice fly on Saturday before reaching base three times and scoring a pair of runs out of the leadoff spot on Sunday. He also struck out for the 136th time this season.

"This kid's striking out 130 times, that's not normal. For him to strike out 130-something times, he knows it," Cora said. "He has a few ideas of what he's going to work on during the offseason. This guy's going to bounce back. And I say 'bounce back' -- you look at his numbers, if that's a bad season, wow. Just a few things he didn't do this year that I do believe he's going to get better at."

Benintendi has chased 30.3 percent of pitches outside the zone this season, compared to just 24.0 percent last year. Overall, he's swinging at more than half the pitches he's seen (51.6 percent) after swinging at just 45.9 percent in 2018. As a result, pitchers have started throwing him fewer pitches in the zone, and his whiff rate has jumped from 19.3 percent in '18 to 25.0 percent in '19.

Sunday was a step in the right direction, as Benintendi swung at only two of the 11 pitches he saw outside the zone. He lined one of those two into right field for his second hit of the day.

"I do believe he's a 20-homer guy, 45 doubles -- a complete player," Cora said. "A lot of people love the home runs and all that. I love the complete player. He can be a .400 OBP guy with 20 [steals] and 20 homers and 45 doubles and play good defense. We'll take that player."

## 2nd generation of Yastrzemskis to play in Boston

Paul Casella

Coming off a solid 2018 season with Baltimore's Triple-A affiliate in Norfolk, it seemed to be only a matter of time before Mike Yastrzemski would make his big league debut in '19. As a member of the division foe Orioles, that would mean three potential trips to Fenway Park for the grandson of Hall of Famer and Red Sox legend Carl Yastrzemski.

Then, less than a week before Opening Day, the 29-year-old outfielder was traded to the Giants -- a team that had played in Boston only twice (once each in 2007 and '16) since Interleague Play began in 1997. Yastrzemski, however, is expected to make his long-awaited Fenway Park debut when San Francisco makes its third trip to Boston for a three-game set, beginning with Tuesday's 7:10 p.m. ET series opener.

"I think the narrative with the kid is good," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "He had a good Spring Training, too. He took some good swings against us. I'm surprised with the moves that happened, but it worked out for him. He's doing an outstanding job for the Giants."

Yastrzemski made his big league debut on May 25, and entered Sunday hitting .265 with 19 homers and 51 RBIs through 95 games. His Hall-of-Fame grandfather, who was just 21 at the time of his Major League debut, hit just .254 with six homers through his first 95 contests for the Red Sox -- though he did drive in 52 runs.

Cora, whose older brother, Joey, is also a former big league player and World Series-winning coach, knows all about these types of reunions, though he admitted this week's series will be on a much larger scale.

"Being from a baseball family, you see all this stuff and it's pretty cool. I know how it feels, but this is kind of another level," Cora said. "I know it's going to be a special three days for their family."

Red Sox fans witnessed Carl Yastrzemski win the Triple Crown and American League Most Valuable Player Award in 1967. They saw him take home seven Gold Glove Awards and earn 18 All-Star selections during his 23-year career, all of which was spent in Boston. He clubbed 237 of his 452 career homers at Fenway Park.

Though Cora is excited to be part of the moment, the Red Sox skipper is hoping Fenway plays a little tougher for Mike Yastrzemski than it did for his grandfather.

"Hopefully they can enjoy watching him play defense," Cora quipped, "and he doesn't do too much offensively against us."

### Injury updates

- Mookie Betts (left foot soreness) was out of the lineup for a second straight day on Sunday. He is expected to meet with team doctors on Monday when the club returns to Boston, though Cora remains optimistic that Betts will be able to return to the lineup for Tuesday's series opener against the Giants.

"He's doing OK. Still sore," Cora said. "Most likely tomorrow, he'll go see our doctors. We don't think it's something that's going to take him awhile. Hopefully he'll be back in the lineup for the Giants and finish the season strong."

- Right-hander Heath Hembree was originally scheduled to throw a simulated game Tuesday, but the Red Sox scrapped that plan based on how Hembree felt on Sunday after throwing a bullpen session on Saturday.

"Today, he showed up, it's not like he's in a bad spot, but he doesn't feel great," Cora said. "His elbow's sore around the area. It's not something that we're worried about, but I don't think we're going to do the simulated game."

Hembree's status for the final two weeks is now up in the air, with Cora saying the club will likely make a decision Tuesday on how to handle the righty down the stretch.

"If we're running out of time, we're running out of time," Cora said. "We're not going to push him to pitch just for him to pitch. We'll talk about it probably [Tuesday] when we get to the ballpark and make a decision with that."

- Brock Holt (illness) did not start Sunday, though Cora said the utility man was available off the bench. He is expected to return to the lineup Tuesday.

## \* **WEEL.com**

### **The Sunday Baseball Column: How this GM job has changed**

Rob Bradford

The job has changed. Just ask J.P. Ricciardi.

The 59-year-old has had a unique view of the evolution this position the Red Sox are currently looking to fill, that of the head of baseball operations. Ricciardi was in the middle of the "Moneyball" Oakland A's with Billy Beane before going to become Toronto's general manager for eight seasons. He would be immersed into the world of the Mets in 2010, leading to his role with the new analytics-driven Giants organization over the past two seasons.

Put it this way: What John Henry was looking for when he went after Beane, and ultimately Ricciardi, after the 2002 season wasn't the same focus as when Dave Dombrowski was hired four years ago. And this time around the priorities will have been altered once again.

From perception to execution, different skill-sets figure to be zeroed in on by the Red Sox' principal owner this time around. It has become less of a cookie-cutter position than ever before, as Ricciardi points out ...

#### TRANSPARENCY

"I think the biggest thing is that everybody is aware of the GM now. Everybody is aware of every possible thing in an organization. Social media has made things where everybody knows everybody's farm system, what people think of the farm system. There are so many people that have a say now or an opinion on what an organization is or isn't. There is more awareness of what an organization is now.

"I don't think you have to insulate yourself, but you have to be aware that there are no small problems. Everything is going to be reported on. If you have a kid in low A who gets hurt it gets reported on and you have to be aware of it. You just have to be on top of your organization 24-7. It's like having a police scanner on your desk. You have to know everything that is happening, not only in your organization but in other organizations. It has changed that way. The awareness of what organizations are. Right, wrong, or indifferent a lot of people have opinions on what they should do or shouldn't do so it's out there."

#### SIZE OF FRONT OFFICES

"You're still in charge of baseball operations so you're in charge of all the people who work for you. Personally, I'm not that big a proponent of more is better. I would subscribe to the theory is good people are what you're looking for. I'm not so sure bigger is better but that just seems that's the way most front



offices are leaning these days. I've always subscribed the theory that if you have good people in these positions you're going to be rock-solid."

#### ANALYTICS VS. SCOUTING

"I don't think that has changed a lot. Analytics have really grown in the game but I don't think you can any way shape or form discount what scouting brings to the table. I want good scouts. I want scouts to get the information I need and be able to evaluate on the really important decisions I have to make. I want the analytics to give me the information of why or how or who, to fill in the blanks or to bring attention to things we might not be looking at. I definitely believe there is a hybrid that has to be involved. I just don't think you can be one way. I don't see how it can work. There is a lot of things that scouting brings to the table that is really, really important. In an organization, I think it's really important that you are balanced.

"They are both important and it's how you balance them out is where you're going to get your most success. If you lean one way or the other you just aren't going to have a balanced approach to what you're trying to do. They check and balance each other out. The days of the Herman Munster episode where you're driving down the road and a ball hits the windshield and someone says, 'Where did that ball come from?' And they find out Herman Munster hit the ball from 500 yards away and all of a sudden they pull over and they try to sign Herman Munster, those days are over. The analytics have really brought a lot of things to light and I don't think they're the end-all, be-all but I do think they're important. Just like I don't think a guy standing up in a room pounding the table saying, 'My gut tells me this guy ...' That's like closing your eyes and picking a horse at the Kentucky Derby."

#### PRIORITIZING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

"With the Mets, we really didn't have a big group, either. The Giants, (President of Baseball Operations) Farhan (Zaidi) is trying to grow the group and Farhan is coming from an analytics background. But one of the qualities that Farhan has is that he listens and he doesn't forget when you tell him about someone. That's a good quality to have. You look at the analytics but you still value the opinion of scouts. I don't think it's that hard, I really don't. And I think anyone who tries to draw a line in the sand and say it's this way or that way I think you're setting yourself up for failure.

"I think you have to get information from scouts who have a track record. That really goes a long way. Guys who have helped pull the trigger on trades, the drafts and guys who have helped evaluate your own players, those evaluators have to have a track record and I think that's what makes an organization. It's when you run into an organization which doesn't have a track record and are willy-nilly winging it that's where you can get in trouble just solely relying on the scouts."

#### DEALING WITH AGENTS

"It has definitely changed. Agents talk way more to GMs now than they ever did. They're just more part of the game and players have allowed it to be that way. What are you going to do? You have to deal with it. You can't stick your head in the sand and say, 'I don't ever want to deal with an agent.' Players have agents, players rely those agents and players trust those agents so you have to have a rapport with them."

#### HESITANCY TO MAKE TRADES

"Today it's really hard to make trades. For the most part, most organizations are afraid to make a mistake. They're so afraid to get ripped. They're so afraid to get second-guessed. I think there just is a lot of hesitancy of teams to make trade especially with young players. ... Just go back and look, they don't always turn out to be what we think they're going to be. A lot of guys just don't want to be the one who want to make the mistake. Right, wrong or indifferent, they're their players and they have to look at them in whatever way they need to value them. But there are less trades made today because more teams are afraid of giving up players who can come back to haunt them."

And while digesting this new landscape is important, as is identifying the right person at the right time, it should be understood all of these lists highlighting potential candidates for the Red Sox job are filled with square pegs in round holes. Good people with good track records, but not necessarily someone who is going to scratch where this organization is currently itching. And in the end, there is one person who is going to determine exactly what kind of discomfort the Sox are dealing with: Henry.

#### WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Mike Hazen would have made a lot of sense for the Red Sox for a lot of reasons, including his proven ability with the Diamondbacks to get out ahead of the curve when it comes to big contracts and get what is perceived to be top value in return for big names. But he is no longer an option thanks to the Massachusetts native's new contract extension with Arizona. Put it on the list of what-might-have-beens.

We have the aforementioned pursuit of Beane after the 2002 season, leading to Henry and Co. going after Ricciardi. Then, four years later when Theo Epstein took his hiatus in a power struggle with then-President Larry Lucchino, the Red Sox had made strong overtures for Dayton Moore to fill the position. But Atlanta GM John Schuerholz convinced Moore to stay with the Braves, insinuating he would be the longtime GM's heir apparent. So Moore stayed only to make his move to Kansas City a year later, winning the World Series with the Royals in 2015.

And as long as we're on interesting almosts, after the 2013 season, the Cubs wanted to entertain making Torey Lovullo their next manager but because of the agreement made when Epstein bolted for Chicago the then-Red Sox bench coach wasn't allowed an interview. If Lovullo did leave after that world championship season, John Farrell's new bench coach would have been a familiar name: Current Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash.

#### THE REALITY OF THE RED SOX FARM SYSTEM

"It's not as bad as everyone says it is."

That was one from American League talent evaluator who spent a good chunk of his time in 2019 scouting the Red Sox' farm system.

Asked to identify the five most intriguing Red Sox minor-leaguers (Double-A and higher), this was his list:

1. Starting pitcher Bryan Mata. "He reminds of a young Carlos Zambrano. ... Probably projects to be a No. 3."
2. Outfielder Jarren Duran: "Sort of a Jacoby Ellsbury-like without the power. He's still getting used to playing the outfield, which is understandable. He makes up for some bad routes with his speed."
3. First baseman Bobby Dalbec: "Could be a Four-A guy or a perennial big league All-Star. He obviously has the kind of power that works in the game today but does guess on pitches too much for my liking right now. ... He's a really, really good defender."
4. Infielder C.J. Chatham: "I really like Chatham because I can see him having the ability to play all four infield positions. He puts the ball in play." (Note: Chatham finished the minor-league season dabbling in some time at second base.)
5. Pitcher Tanner Houck: "They should keep him as a reliever. It's good he's gone back to prioritizing that two-seamer instead of worrying too much about throwing his four-seam fastball."

One last note on the Sox minor-league situation: One of the biggest false narratives when it comes to Dombrowski's downfall is that the former President of Baseball Operations gutted the farm system. Listen, there are specific areas Dombrowski should be criticized for, but this really shouldn't be near the top of the list.

Sure, Dombrowski traded a ton of minor-leaguers, but the percentage of those players who the Red Sox could have actually used to turnover the roster are few and far between. Go ahead, name them. The Ty Buttreys, Mauricio Dubons and Shaun Andersons of the world will be solid major leaguers, but would they have represented the answers to what will ail this organization? To get three seasons of Chris Sale a front office is going to have to get uncomfortable with the likes of deals including Yoan Moncada and Michael Kopech. That would be the case with any GM, anywhere. But not including Rafael Devers in the Sale deal is where Dombrowski should get a pat on the back.

And as for the rumor that ownership stepped in at the trade deadline and told Dombrowski to not deal any more prospects, according to sources familiar with the situation, that is another flawed line of thinking. For better or worse, that strategy -- which left with some confusion because of the then-President of Baseball Operations' declaration that his approach was dependent on the two different paths to the postseason -- was a Dombrowski production.

#### A SHIFT IN SCOUTING

It made some in baseball uncomfortable seeing the Giants move on from eight pro scouts, many of whom had proven track records. Initially, it reeked of analytics winning out over the human element once again. But there news from Zaidi that people should have taken notice of when digesting exactly what was going on.

"Zaidi said that it's becoming more and more important to dedicate scouting resources to the low levels of the minor leagues, all the way down to the Dominican Summer League and rookie ball," wrote NBC Sports Bay Area's Alex Pavlovic.

The reality is this is where a lot of organizations might be going, with teams looking to allocate scouts toward levels there just simply isn't as much information. Advance scouting in the big leagues is another example of this shift.

The Red Sox are one of the many teams that don't have a scout on the road advancing their upcoming opponents, instead, relying on video and analytics with Steve Langone and J.T. Watkins collecting and distributing the information while with the big league club.

The process is one that has shifted numerous times throughout the years, with the Red Sox once alternating two advance scouts with one on the road and the other with the big league club, with the pair alternating with each series.

An example of how specific (and potentially imperfect) any approach can be arrived during one of the key Red Sox' losses in the past few weeks. When J.D. Martinez' launched what appeared to be a game-tying double off the left-field wall in the ninth-inning of the Red Sox' Sept. 5 game against the Twins, third base coach Carlos Febles not only had the play in front of him but was also armed with some significant information to help in the decision to send Rafael Devers.

The Red Sox' report had eight occasions in which Twins left fielder Eddie Rosario had executed similar plays -- cleanly throwing a ball off the wall and throwing home. Seven of the previous instances had Rosario's throw sailing well wide of his target. Not this time.

#### SO, YOU LIKE ANALYTICS ...

If you haven't taken a deep dive into the Web site "BaseballSavant.com" then do yourself a favor and give it a whirl.

Some Red Sox-centric items that we came across, for instance ...

- The increase in shifts on Mookie Betts this season is striking. Betts is being shifted on -- (identified as having three or more fielders on one side of second base) -- 43 percent of the time. Last year the number was 11 percent, and in 2017 he saw shifts just 1.4 percent of the time.

- Christian Vazquez is not only taken his offensive game to another level this season but he has taken a huge jump when it comes to his defense. Vazquez is fifth in the majors in pitch-framing after finishing 27th last season. His pop-time (throwing down to second base on stolen base attempts has also gone from 2.04 (46th overall last season) to ninth-best (1.96).

- Andrew Benintendi is tied with Mike Trout and Max Kepler for being identified as the best outfielders when it comes to taking proper routes. Who's last in the big leagues? (Take it for what it's worth) Jackie Bradley Jr. Benintendi is, however, seventh-worst when it comes to Outs Above Average at minus-nine. Victor Robles leads all outfielders at a plus-18, with Bradley Jr. dropping from 12 in 2018 to six this season.

And one non-Red Sox-centric item ...

- Last year there were 54 home runs of 450 feet or more. This year there have been 95 of them.

## **\* *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

### **Finally, Christian Vazquez is putting it all together**

Sean McAdam

In a season full of disappointment, you can count the positive developments on one hand for the Red Sox and still have a few fingers free.

Let's see, there was the emergence of Rafael Devers, who transformed himself from an undisciplined hitter and erratic fielder into one of the game's best young players.

There was Eduardo Rodriguez, finally making good on his considerable potential, and emerging as the team's best starting pitcher.

There was the second-half emergence of two lefty relievers — Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor — who provided some quality arms and the promise of some dependable late-inning bullpen options in 2020.

And there has been the offensive maturation of catcher Christian Vazquez, who has rebounded nicely from a step backward a year ago to become a more complete catcher, finally eliminating any questions about who will fill the role of the team's No. 1 receiver — now, and into the future.

Vazquez dominated the Philadelphia Phillies all weekend. On Saturday,

he smashed a run-scoring double and later singled in the ninth as the Sox rallied to score the winning run. But he outdid himself Sunday, belting a grand slam in the third inning to open up a big lead before adding a solo shot later to provide some insurance.

The first homer was his 20th of the season, making him the seventh Red Sox catcher in history to reach that milestone. Adding to the firsts: his first career grand slam and his first career multi-homer game.

"It was cool," Vazquez told NESN after the Red Sox' 6-3 victory, "to get (No.) 20 (on the grand slam) and get it like that. And it's cool to hit two in the same game, but Mookie (Betts) has like 20 of those."

So, Vazquez still has some catching up to do. But the Red Sox are more than happy with the way his hitting has come along this season.

Toward the end of last year, it appeared the Sox might have to be content to have a catch-and-throw guy as their primary catcher and be satisfied with the occasional big hit. Vazquez hit just .208 in 2018, and though he had better quality at-bats in the team's postseason march to a championship, the results didn't follow.

But over the winter, Vazquez went to work in making some adjustments at the plate. He quieted his stance and focused on taking a more direct approach to the ball. And, critically, he wasn't afraid to use the entire field more, though his power often manifests itself to the pull side.

As the season began, the fact that the Sox retained Blake Swihart to be his backup suggested there were looking for more production out of the position. Swihart didn't stay long enough to supply it, but gradually, Vazquez began being more productive.

He credits the work last winter for his turnaround.

"It's a big difference," Vazquez said. "We made some adjustments in the offseason and they're paying (off) now. It feels good, the swing."

"He's having a terrific season," Alex Cora concurred.

The odd thing is, while his offensive game was soaring, his work behind the plate suffered in the middle of the year. Vazquez has a tendency to get sloppy with his catching mechanics and the decline nearly canceled out his growth with the bat.

But over the last month and a half, Vazquez had finally put both aspects of his game together. He's thrown out nearly 35 percent of would-be base stealers — the arm strength was never a question — and tightened up the number of passed balls and wild pitches.

"The cool thing about it is, defensively, he's been the guy who we envisioned — blocking balls, throwing people out, taking charge behind the plate," said Cora. "He's had some tough games with bullpen games and starters going short and figuring out game plans, but he's done a good job."

"I think he saw that there were some games where he wasn't blocking pitches. He was dropping pitches and that can't happen. It's not like he didn't take care of his defense, but he wasn't as sharp as he usually is. All of a sudden, he changed some things mechanically, blocking pitches and now you see the results."

The defensive resurgence has come after some extra work before games with catching instructors Jason Varitek and Chad Epperson, who helped Vazquez break some bad habits that led to some sloppiness.

"We have to push him because when he relaxes, his game suffers," said Cora.

Now, however, both sides of his game are aligned, finally solidifying a position that has been uneven for the last several seasons in Boston.

### **BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 6, Phillies 3 – Vazquez, Porcello lead Sox to sweep**

Sean McAdam

Vazquez leads the way: On Saturday night, Christian Vazquez had a run-scoring double and a single to pace the ninth-inning rally. But he outdid himself Sunday with a series of firsts. He hit his first career grand slam in the third inning, and then, notching the first multi-homer game of his career, added a second shot — this one with the bases empty — in the sixth inning. In the two-game sweep of the Phillies, the Red Sox scored a total of eight runs and Vazquez knocked in six of them. This has been, by far, the best offensive season of Vazquez's career, and it comes a year after a highly disappointing season at the plate in 2018. This weekend, he proved to be their most important bat.

Porcello turns it around: In his last two starts, Rick Porcello gave up a total of 12 runs. But on Sunday, he was much more effective, allowing two runs over five innings and it wasn't hard to pinpoint the reason for the improvement. Fastball command has been an issue for Porcello for large chunks of the season, but Sunday, he was much better in that regard. "I think that was his best fastball since Minnesota (in June)," said Alex Cora. "Today, it was the two-seamer, but you could see some bad swings on his fastball." Porcello also consistently stayed ahead of hitters and walked just one. One of the two runs against him came on a homer — another issue — but at least it came with the bases empty.

Red Sox' turn to play spoiler: Last month, when the Red Sox were still entertaining thought of the American League wild card spot, the Phillies came into Fenway before the Red Sox' long West Coast road trip and won two close games, dealing a critical blow to Boston's playoff hopes. This time, it was the Red Sox' turn to return the favor. The Phillies were three games out of the second wild card spot when the weekend began, but the Sox did big damage by taking both games and pushed the Phils 4.5 games out with less than two weeks to play and several teams ahead of them in the standings to overcome. "It was a good one," said Cora of the series. "We played clean baseball. We controlled the strike zone (better). It was good overall."

TURNING POINT: With the game tied 1-1 the third, Vazquez came to the plate and drove a pitch from Jason Vargus just over the wall in left, clearing the bases and giving the Red Sox a 5-1 lead. The Phillies never came close again.

ONE UP:

Andrew Benintendi: Returning to the leadoff spot for the first time since the end of May, Benintendi managed to get on base three times two singles and a hit-by-pitch, scoring two of the Red Sox' six runs.

ONE DOWN

Sam Travis: Getting a start in left field, Travis was hitless in four at-bats and is now 0-for-21 as the season winds down.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

"We were able to attack guys, get ahead and punch some guys out, so it was good." Rick Porcello.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING:

Christian Vazquez became the seventh Red Sox catcher to hit 20 homers in a season.

Porcello improved to 2-1 lifetime in Citizen Bank Ballpark.

The sweep snapped a stretch that saw the Red Sox lose three straight series.

UP NEXT: The Red Sox are off Monday, then host the San Francisco Giants beginning Tuesday at 7:10 with RHP Nathan Eovaldi (1-0, 5.81) vs. TBA.

## **\* *The Athletic***

**Christian Vazquez was tired of being a No. 9 hitter. Here's how he became much more**

Chad Jennings

Four years after his major league debut, eight months after his long-term contract extension, and just days after his ride down Boylston Street in the World Series parade, Christian Vazquez decided to do something

about his disappointing career. He was 28 years old, well established as a glove-first big league catcher, and the Red Sox had just proven a team could win with him behind the plate.

But Vazquez couldn't get over the offensive numbers forever attached to his name.

Hitting .207 sucked. Finishing with three home runs sucked. Ranking third-to-last in OPS sucked.

"I was tired of suck," Vazquez said. "I was tired of being the No. 9 hitter in the bottom of the lineup. I don't like that, you know? I need to play better to feel better."

So, in November, Vazquez got on the phone with the people who could make him feel better. He called his mother, he called his best friend, and he finally called a 54-year-old former construction worker who'd never played a game of organized baseball in his life. Lorenzo Garmendia had the solution, and it started with a harsh truth.

"I've got to tell a major leaguer," Garmendia said, "'Hey bro, you're not very good.'"

Vazquez already knew that. Or, at least, he knew his numbers weren't very good. He had a tremendous baseline of talent, and that talent had gotten him this far, but he needed to unlock the mysteries of the modern baseball swing. He needed to learn not to suck.

What happened next was a remarkable rebirth that has Vazquez's career on a whole new trajectory. On Sunday, he hit two home runs, Nos. 20 and 21 this season. He'd never before hit more than five. A year ago, only two players in all of Major League Baseball had at least 250 plate appearance with an OPS lower than Vazquez's .540. This year, only seven catchers with at least 350 plate appearances have an OPS higher than his .781 and only five have hit more home runs. Add his highly ranked defense, and Vazquez has the highest fWAR of any catcher in the American League. He's hit so much, the Red Sox have kept his bat in the lineup by starting him at second base, first base and 10 times at designated hitter — more than quadrupling his career DH appearances. He hit ninth on Opening Day, but he's become a regular in the No. 6 hole.

All because he decided simply being a viable big-league player wasn't enough.

"Top five catcher in the league," he said. "That's my goal. Why not?"

Before this season, there were plenty of reasons why not, but he's spent the past nine months eliminating them.

Imagine a boxing match. One fighter has a tremendous left hook. The other has a crippling inability to block the left hook. That second fighter might land enough blows to win a couple of rounds, but eight times out of 10, his vulnerability is going to leave him laid out on the canvas.

"That's your .200 hitter," Garmendia said.

Garmendia's conversational style is peppered with analogies like that. Bad swings are like iPhone prototypes. It takes a bunch of bad ones to find one that really works. Moving to a robotic strike zone would be like defensive backs not being allowed to touch wide receivers within 5 yards of scrimmage. The offense would have the advantage. Baseball itself is like a James Bond film, and guys like Garmendia are playing the role of Q, the research-and-development expert.

"People don't come to see me," he said. "I've got to keep James Bond alive."

Bond, in this case, is Vazquez. Or it's Mariners catcher Omar Narvaez, another of Garmendia's clients having a breakout season at the plate. On a very basic level, Garmendia teaches all of the things that have become familiar in the past half-decade or so. Get the bat on plane. Barrel the ball for hard contact. Lift the ball in the air. Garmendia's invested heavily in technology so that he can break down video frame-by-

frame. He studies extensive data with spray charts, exit velocity and launch angle (even if he doesn't use that term with his clients).

Garmendia said he literally shows his clients video of Mike Trout's swing. As he sees it, he's not teaching theory, he's teaching fact. These things are not hypothetical. They're right there for everyone to see, as long as they know what they're looking at.

"At the end of the day, this is math," Garmendia said. "All we do is, we look at the best hitters in the world right now. What are they doing? When you look at them, and you know what we know, they're all doing the same thing."

Vazquez didn't know what those hitters were doing. He only knew he wasn't doing it. Frustrated by the worst offensive season of his career, he called his parents in November, and his mother did not sugarcoat her advice.

"My mom said, you need somebody to teach you to swing," Vazquez said. "Somebody that knows more than you."

In search of such a person, Vazquez called his best friend, Marcos Derkes, who'd once played in the Rockies minor league system with a guy named Alex San Juan, who'd begun working at Garmendia's hitting facility in Miami. That's how the connection was made. Garmendia watched video of Vazquez's swing and felt confident he could help, all he had to do was convince Vazquez that he knew what he was talking about, which wasn't a given because Garmendia can't hit at all. He was always more of a basketball guy, but Garmendia's three sons took to baseball. He tried to get them good coaching but couldn't wrap his head around the things his sons were being taught.

"I noticed, whatever they were telling my kids didn't make mathematical sense," he said.

So, 15 years ago, Garmendia's kids became his first pupils. He studied the game and came to consider himself a particularly good fielding coach, but hitting intrigued him the most and became his specialty. One son wound up drafted by the Brewers. Another signed as an undrafted free agent with the Royals. In 2008, Garmendia's daughter was in school at Wake Forest when she suggested he start training more people. He opened a tiny place in Miami — he swears it was no more than 12 feet wide — and that's blossomed into Gradum Baseball, which has four facilities in South Florida.

Garmendia's business is named after the Latin term for "next level." In every way, that's exactly where Vazquez was heading.

Four days a week — Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday — Vazquez went to Garmendia's facility to rework his swing into something built for the modern game. Garmendia remembers it being more like five days a week, but maybe it just felt that way because he was floored by Vazquez's work ethic and commitment.

Among Garmendia's guiding principles is the idea that the pitcher is the enemy, and a hitter has to take away a pitcher's weapons. He has to block the left hook.

Vazquez's greatest weakness, Garmendia said, was the outside pitch, particularly sliders and fastballs. He taught Vazquez a swing that could handle every zone with authority. He started by teaching the inner half, then worked his way to the outside. He taught scouting reports as well, and emphasized driving the ball to all fields.

A swing is an athletic movement, and better athletes seem to make adjustments more easily. Vazquez might not look the part, but there's a reason Alex Cora has trusted him at three different infield positions. He's a better athlete than it seems.

"Have you seen him shoot a basketball?" Garmendia asked. "He could hustle some people for money."



After three months spent overhauling his swing in Miami, Vazquez arrived in Red Sox spring training a changed hitter. He began taking batting practice on back fields he'd been using since he was a 21-year-old prospect, and Vazquez found he was hitting home runs to right field and right-center.

"I'd never do that before," he said.

When the exhibition games started, the results were an epic failure. Vazquez hit just .132 in spring training and only one ball left the ballpark. But other hitters who've gone through the same swing modernization process — J.D. Martinez and Jackie Bradley Jr. notable among them in the Red Sox clubhouse, having also used hitting gurus who never played pro ball — say there's just no turning back.

"You can't fall back to where you were," Martinez said. "Because you know where you were didn't work."

Said Bradley: "I think you just focus on the end-game. You know what looks right, and you know what feels right. Once it all connects, then you start to go right."

Vazquez believed his spring struggles were a product of bad timing. He was executing a new move for the first time against live pitching. Baseball's a game of repetition, and he needed more reps. When he had his timing, the results would follow. He believed that. What he'd learned made too much sense.

First game of the regular season, he doubled. Second game, he homered. His confidence spiked. April was a good month, but every month since has been even better.

"The root was, I think, he's invested in his career," Red Sox hitting coach Tim Hyers said. "(He decided) I want to make a change. I'm better than this. ... I do believe hitters learn (when they) really invest in their career and really learn what's happening with the swing. Some guys just get to the big leagues and they play this game on feel. Perfect. I have no problem with it. But when it goes south with feel, where do you go from there?"

According to Baseball Savant, these are Vazquez's spray charts for the past two years. There will be no difficulty telling which is 2018 and which is 2019.

Notice that Vazquez was all along hitting singles to all fields — coaches have long praised his hand-eye coordination in the box — but this season he's added a brand-new ability to drive extra-base hits to the opposite field, and his natural strength has helped him lift a lot of those fly balls out of the park. Before this season, he'd hit 10 home runs in 999 career plate appearances. This year he has 21 home runs in 482 plate appearances.

"I honestly feel like in years past, he'd only hit whatever — three, four, five — but they were all bombs when he hit them," said longtime teammate Brandon Workman. "He'd hit them 500 feet when he hit them, but he'd only hit four a year."

Vazquez's average launch angle isn't all that different from last season, but his average exit velocity has jumped 1.5 mph and his hard-hit percentage has soared from 28.6 percent in 2018 to 38.7 percent this year. Hyers has noticed improved pitch selection as well. Garmendia has noticed something else.

"Have you seen the pep in his step?" Garmendia said. "Have you seen how he is on deck?"

To Cora, that swagger is familiar. It's the way Vazquez carried himself in the Puerto Rican Winter League back when he was a young big leaguer returning to his small island. Confidence high. Possibilities ahead.

It feels good to not suck.

**\* *The Philadelphia Inquirer***

## **Phillies star Bryce Harper, manager Gabe Kapler ejected in Sunday loss to Red Sox**

Scott Lauber

With the Phillies' remote wild-card chances being further vaporized Sunday, Bryce Harper and Gabe Kapler got ejected in the fourth inning against the Boston Red Sox.

Harper didn't agree with a called third strike from home-plate umpire Gabe Morales. After expressing his displeasure, Harper returned to the dugout and appeared to continue hollering at Morales, who booted him from the game.

Kapler charged onto the field to defend Harper got immediately tossed. Before leaving the field, Kapler gestured emphatically at Morales.

The Phillies were trailing 5-1 at the time. Left-hander Jason Vargas, who entered with a 5.01 ERA and no wins in eight starts since being acquired in a July 29 trade with the New York Mets, gave up a grand slam to Red Sox catcher Christian Vazquez in the third inning.

It marked Harper's 13th career ejection and second of the season. The other came in New York on April 22, also over a called third strike. After that game, a 5-1 loss to the Mets, Phillies starter Jake Arrieta criticized the star right fielder for losing his cool.

"He's got to understand we need him in right field," Arrieta said. "I don't care how bad the umpire is. He wasn't great for either side. I'm out there trying to make pitches, and he misses some calls. So what? We need him out there. I need him in right field, I need him at the plate, and he wasn't there. So that hurts."

Harper concurred with Arrieta, saying that the ejection "can't happen from my side. In a game like that against the Mets, division rival, it just can't happen for me, myself and this team as well."

Kapler was ejected for the fourth time this season.

### **\* *Associated Press***

#### **Vázquez homers twice, drives in 5, Red Sox beat Phillies**

A little lunchtime wisdom served Christian Vazquez well.

Vazquez homered twice, including his first career grand slam, and drove in a career-high five runs to lead the Boston Red Sox to a 6-3 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies on Sunday.

The Red Sox catcher had gone without a homer for 13 straight games and had just one in 25 contests entering Sunday. He was stuck on 19 homers and trying to reach 20 -- probably trying too hard. Over lunch on Thursday with manager Alex Cora and former big league slugger Carlos Delgado, Vazquez listened as the two told him not to press.

"Don't look for No. 20, it's going to come," Vazquez said of their advice. "Look for line drives, get a couple hits and get your confidence back. It's going to come."

Vazquez put Boston ahead 5-1 in the third with his grand slam, a drive just over the wall in left on a 2-1, 71-mph curveball from Jason Vargas (6-8).

Cesar Hernandez's RBI single in the fifth pulled Philadelphia within 5-2, but Vazquez responded in the sixth by taking Mike Morin deep to left. It was Vazquez's 21st homer and first career multi-homer game,

becoming the first Red Sox catcher with multiple homers in a contest since Jason Varitek clubbed three on May 20, 2001.

"He's swinging the bat well," Cora said.

Andrew Benintendi had a pair of hits for the defending World Series champions, who have won three in a row. Boston began play trailing Tampa Bay by 10 games for the AL's second wild card.

Rick Porcello (13-12) allowed two runs on five hits with six strikeouts and a walk in five innings.

"The breaking ball was good, good conviction behind all his pitches," Cora said. "He works hard trying to find it. We felt that five innings was good. He did an outstanding job."

Rhys Hoskins homered for Philadelphia, which started Sunday 3 1/2 games behind the Cubs for the final wild card spot in the NL. The Phillies also trailed the Brewers and Mets, and they'll now head on the road for an 11-game trip.

"Definitely is a tough spot," Phillies manager Gabe Kapler said. "From here on out, every game is like Game 7 of a playoff series."

Brandon Workman pitched a scoreless ninth for his 14th save.

The Red Sox loaded the bases with no outs in the first, but Vargas got out of the jam with just one run allowed on J.D. Martinez's sacrifice fly to right. But Vargas couldn't escape similar trouble in the third.

Vargas lasted three innings, giving up five runs -- four earned -- on three hits with six strikeouts and a walk. The 36-year-old lefty dropped to 0-3 with a 5.48 ERA in nine starts since being acquired from the Mets on July 29.

#### QUICK HOOK?

Kapler and right fielder Bryce Harper were ejected in the fourth inning by plate umpire Gabe Morales for arguing after Harper was called out on strikes for the second time in the game.

Morales rung up Harper on a pitch that looked to be low. Harper watched the video and then told Morales, "It's not even (bleeping) close."

Both Harper and Kapler felt Morales should've showed some restraint.

"You've just got to be better in big games," Harper said. "He wasn't going to take it today."

Kapler charged out to the plate for an animated conversation with Morales, earning the manager his fourth ejection of the season.

"Everybody can look at the pitch and see why Bryce was upset," Kapler said. "In a game of this magnitude, there could've been a longer leash."

#### EXTRA-EXTRA

Hoskins has 12 extra-base hits (eight doubles, a triple and three homers) in his last 17 games.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: OF Mookie Betts (sore left foot) was out of the lineup for the second straight day. Manager Alex Cora said Betts would visit a doctor on Monday in Boston. ... RHP Heath Hembree, out since June 11 with a right elbow strain, felt sore after Saturday's bullpen session and will be re-evaluated on Tuesday.

Phillies: LF Corey Dickerson (sore left foot) was not in the lineup for the third straight game.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: After an off day, Boston hosts San Francisco for three games beginning Tuesday with Red Sox RHP Nathan Eovaldi (1-0, 5.81 ERA) on the mound.

Phillies: Philadelphia also has Monday off before starting an 11-game trip at Atlanta on Tuesday night. Phillies RHP Vince Velasquez (6-7, 4.95) opposes Braves LHP Dallas Keuchel (8-5, 3.35).