

The Boston Red Sox Monday, September 2, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

It's not the blown saves dragging down Red Sox, it's this.

Alex Speier

Yes, the Red Sox lead the American League with 27 blown saves, but that statistic tells a very incomplete story. After all, the A's have blown 26 saves, while the Yankees and Rays each have 23.

It is one thing to blow a save, and quite another to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. And the Red Sox' postseason position on the outside looking in has a great deal to do with their inability to put away games that are, for most teams, already in hand.

On Saturday night, the Sox carried a 4-3 lead through seven innings, only to see an eighth-inning bullpen meltdown turn a one-run advantage into a 10-4 loss. It marked the ninth time this year that the Red Sox lost a game that they led after seven.

The Sox have led after seven innings 72 times — nearly as many as the Rays (74), and more than Cleveland (69). Yet the Sox are just 63-9 (.875) in those games thanks to numerous late blown leads from which they never recovered. By comparison, the Rays are 70-4. Cleveland is 66-3.

In other words, the Sox have six more losses than Cleveland when leading after seven innings, and five more losses than Tampa Bay — just about exactly the gap between those teams in the loss column for the season.

“Honestly, I don't have an explanation,” manager Alex Cora said of his team's struggles to preserve leads. “[Saturday] we didn't execute pitches. It happens. Sometimes it's defense. I don't know. I wish I could have an answer. But you roll with the guys that you have. They're doing their best. It just happened that certain days, it's not happening for us.”

The impact on the Red Sox season has been considerable, and magnified by the fact that Cora typically uses his best relievers in an effort to secure those games. Thus, when they go awry, not only does the team suffer a gut-punch of a loss, but it also faces a depleted bullpen the next day.

“You go all in as far as the usage in the bullpen and then it doesn't happen. It's tough to manage the next game,” said Cora. “It's been like that the whole season, but hey, it is what it is, and now you've got X amount of games to gain X amount of games and make it to the playoffs.”

Six for September

With Sept. 1 bringing the ability to expand the big-league roster from 25 to 40 players, the Red Sox added a half-dozen on Sunday. Outfielder Gorkys Hernandez, catcher Juan Centeno, and righthanders Hector Velazquez, Ryan Weber, and Travis Lakins joined the team from Triple A Pawtucket, as did righthander Jhoulys Chacin — who reached a minor league deal with the Sox on Saturday after being released by the Brewers in August.

Hernandez, who signed a minor league deal with the Sox last winter, was immediately put in the lineup on Sunday as the starting centerfielder against Angels lefty Andrew Heaney. Though Hernandez hit .219/.319/.377 in Pawtucket this year, he posted a .305/.408/.533 line against southpaws. Given the Red Sox' season-long struggles against lefties (20-24 after Sunday, compared to 54-39 against righthanded starters), the Sox were eager to add a bit of righthanded thump.

Hernandez went 0 for 3, Cora pinch-hitting Jackie Bradley Jr. against righty Hansel Robles in the ninth.

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“As everybody knows, this September is going to be different as far as pitcher usage. Be ready for four hours — well, we usually play those games anyway — but it seems like the teams we have on the schedule, they’re going to load up the rosters with pitchers and it will be matchup games from the get-go. So we’ll join the party.”

Lakins, Weber, and Velazquez all add depth to the bullpen, and all pitched on Sunday — they covered the third to the seventh collectively, with Lakins allowing five hits and two runs in his two innings. Centeno gives the Red Sox more flexibility to manage their usage of catchers Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon.

Chacin (3-10, 5.79 in 19 starts with the Brewers) hasn’t pitched in a game since July 24. While the Sox could consider him for a start down the road, particularly in a bullpen game, he’ll be available initially as a reliever.

“Obviously there’s going to be a few days where it will be a bullpen day and we’ll see the matchups,” said Cora. “If we feel that he’ll start and can give us three innings, we’ll start with him, but as of now, today obviously he’s in the bullpen.”

Velazquez, Weber, and Lakins were already on the 40-man roster. To clear spots for Hernandez, Centeno, and Chacin, the Red Sox transferred Chris Sale and Steven Wright from the 10-day to the 60-day injured list, and outrighted Double A Portland first baseman Joey Curletta off the 40-man roster.

Bradley on bench

Bradley started on the bench for all three contests against the Angels, who started three lefties in the series. The outfielder said that his absence from the lineup wasn’t driven by health concerns. “I ain’t on the DL,” he observed. “I’m just ready whenever my name is called.” Bradley hit .200, but with a .393 OBP, against lefties in August . . . The Red Sox have at least one extra-base hit in 151 straight games, tied with the 2000-01 Reds for the fourth-longest streak in modern MLB history. The record of 164 games is held by the 2004-05 Red Sox . . . Mike Silverman, in his 25th season on the Red Sox beat, covered his final game for the Boston Herald. He will join the Globe this month as a sports business reporter.

From this season to last, nothing has altered Alex Cora’s even-keeled perspective

Peter Abraham

A sense of perspective can be fleeting when you manage a team like the Red Sox. Every loss is a disaster and victories can feel more like a reprieve than a reason to celebrate.

That is particularly the case this season as the Sox are following up a championship season with a slow march to 85 or 86 victories and a seat on the couch for October barring a team in front of them collapsing

The Sox were so desperate for pitching on Sunday that three September call-ups were used for five innings in a 4-3 victory against the Los Angeles Angels.

But through it all, manager Alex Cora has maintained the same personality he did when the Sox were storming through last season. It’s what made him the right choice to manage the team in the first place.

Good managing is about keeping the players moving in the same direction far more than lineup decisions or pitching changes. The minutia doesn’t matter if the players don’t believe.

If you care to drill down on the details, the Sox used relief pitchers for 25 innings over three games here and won twice. They were 6-2 on the road trip and moved from 6½ games out of a wild card spot to five.

There's progress.

"We're starting to play better baseball. The teams playing better baseball at the end of the year can make a run," said David Price, who gave the Sox two scoreless innings on his return from the injured list then watched the bullpen hold an early lead. "For us to pick it up now, that's pretty cool."

The Sox play their next seven games against the Twins and Yankees, which will test Cora's ability to get outs from worn-down relievers.

"There's challenges every season," he said. "I laugh when people say it was a magic carpet ride last year. There's no Aladdin here. There was no magic dust. It was a good team that played good baseball."

"They had challenges and they showed up every day. We were very consistent at being consistent. This year the topic has been we're consistent at being inconsistent."

Cora delivered what he promised last season, finding a way to unify a group of talented players during the regular season then manipulating the pitching staff through the postseason to earn a championship.

That the Sox are unlikely to follow that with another trophy shouldn't come as surprise. No team has accomplished that since the 1999 Yankees.

Bruce Bochy, Terry Francona, Tony La Russa, Joe Maddon, and Mike Scioscia are among the managers who couldn't crack that code.

The Sox tried to take it easy on their pitchers in spring training and the result was a slow start, injuries, and poor performances.

"I learn every day. I learned last year every day, all the way to Oct. 28. I'm learning each day this year," Cora said. "It's a different season but it's the same principles. People think that I'm going to change because of that? I believe in what I believe."

"I'm pretty confident in how to do things. I have conviction. If not, I'll be home changing diapers with the kids and taking care of my daughter in Puerto Rico."

"I'm human. There's a few days that the kids go to sleep and I sit down on the couch and I'm like, 'Damn, that didn't work.' But last year I did it, too. So what's the difference?"

Cora found balance in his personal life a few years ago and that guides his professional life. It's the only way to survive.

"I know how big this is, being the Red Sox manager," he said. "But at the same time, there's bigger things in life."

A few days ago, Cora was worried about Hurricane Dorian striking Puerto Rico and adding to the misery of Hurricane Maria's damage in 2018. He wears a Puerto Rico-themed T-shirt under his uniform every day as a reminder of who he also represents.

"It wasn't easy to come here and think about, 'OK, here we go again,' " he said. "But then today I've got people in Florida, too, and that thing is humungous. My mind is here but it's [also] over there and hopefully everybody's OK."

The 2011 Red Sox collapsed and let the Rays sneak into the playoffs. Joey Cora reminded his brother that the 1995 Mariners team he played for went 20-9 down the stretch and ended up in the ALCS after being counted out. Things can and often do happen in September.

“It’s tough to gain five games in five days but we’ll take whatever we can take,” Cora said. “We’ll be ready for Tuesday and keep doing what we’re doing. We can control only one team.”

Bullpen comes up big this time as Red Sox win Angels series

Alex Speier

The time for blueprints passed long ago. The 2019 season departed from its anticipated form in the first days of the Red Sox season and, through five months, never resembled either the 2018 edition or expectations for this bunch.

If the Red Sox are to pull off an improbable September surge, it will have to come through unexpected contributions with plenty of improvisation. With stars performing to their fullest abilities, but also with supporting cast members who deliver performances that no one anticipated.

And so, it seemed appropriate that the Red Sox opened September with precisely the sort of seat-of-their-pants victory that they hope will characterize much of the season’s final month. On a day when returning starter David Price lasted just two innings to conclude a series where their relievers totaled 25, the Red Sox took the rubber match of a three-game survival set against the Angels, 4-3.

With the win, the Sox headed back to Fenway Park from their final Western swing of the season with a 6-2 record, and an 11-4 mark since Aug. 13.

“It didn’t look pretty,” exhaled manager Alex Cora, “but we got it done.”

In the early innings, the Red Sox enjoyed a flicker of hope that Sunday might follow a relaxed course. Mookie Betts continued to play the role of catalyst, lining a changeup to center off Angels lefty Andrew Heaney to lead off the first — Betts opened all three games in Anaheim with a hit. A pair of wild pitches advanced Betts to third before Xander Bogaerts yanked a full-count changeup to left for an RBI single.

Two innings later, the top of the order gave the Red Sox breathing room. Rafael Devers snapped an 0-for-11 skid with a single to left — this one on yet another Heaney two-strike changeup — and then trotted home when Bogaerts blasted a change into the rocks in center for his 31st homer of the season.

The two-run blast gave the Red Sox a 3-0 lead and gave the shortstop 103 RBI, tying his 2018 career-high. He later added a double, with his 3-for-4 game improving his line to .312/.388/.580.

“He’s having an MVP type of year,” said Price.

One batter later, J.D. Martinez continued his incredible late-summer run, demolishing a Heaney first-pitch curveball for a solo homer to left. The launch was the 34th of the year by Martinez and his 17th of the season off a lefty — second most to the 18 that David Ortiz blasted in 2006 in Red Sox history.

Martinez, who went 1 for 2 and walked twice on Sunday, finished the eight-game trip 14 for 31, with six homers while driving in 18. He has 15 homers in 36 games dating to July 22.

“Pretty good roadtrip to say the least,” said Cora.

Yet the 4-0 lead still seemed tenuous, given a weekend series in which the Sox had twice blown late-innings leads while asking their bullpen to assume Herculean workloads. Particularly given the limitations on Price in his first start since a wrist cyst sidelined him Aug. 4.

Price lacked power, with an 89-91 m.p.h. fastball, but showed the ability to mix and command his pitches over two scoreless innings in which he allowed one hit and walked a batter. To the lefthander, the difference compared to before his injured list stint was obvious.

“I was one side of the plate before I went on the injured list. And today, I made a lot of good fastballs on the inside to righties,” said Price. “Just being able to get the ball on the right side of the plate, that’s what I want.”

But with his pitch count at 45 after two laborious innings, the Red Sox turned the last seven over to their bullpen. In particular, to several players who’d been called up on Sunday to capitalize on the expanded rosters. Travis Lakins (2 innings, 2 runs), Ryan Weber (2 scoreless innings), and Hector Velazquez (a scoreless seventh aided by a searing Brian Goodwin liner that found the glove of Sam Travis at first for an unassisted double play) steered the Sox within six outs of victory.

They put an advantage into the hands of their highest-leverage relievers, though that still came with no guarantees. Matt Barnes, asked to pitch on a third straight day for just the third time this year, allowed a leadoff homer to Justin Upton in the eighth, but closed the inning with a 4-3 lead still in hand thanks to a pair of strikeouts.

That, in turn, put the game in the hands of Brandon Workman, who’d blown a save opportunity on Friday night that set in motion a 15-inning marathon. This time, Workman completed the task, working around hitting Mike Trout with two out to induce a harmless Goodwin flyout to center and secure his 10th save.

Exhausted, the Red Sox exhaled on their way back to Boston, looking forward to Monday’s off-day, but mindful that a sizable task remains in front of them.

“It’s definitely tough, but we’re making a push here,” said Barnes. “It’s what you’ve got to do.”

With the win, the Red Sox moved within 5½ games of the Rays, five of Cleveland, and 4½ of Oakland with 25 games to play. They remain a longshot, but one that has not lost hope of starting to find some answers in a season of riddles.

“We definitely need to have the best month of the season, and probably in the last two seasons,” said Bogaerts. “[But] as that number keeps going down, we’re more optimistic.”

“Nothing is impossible in this game,” added Cora. “I’ve been saying it all along, there are different ways to get to the World Series. We took the difficult road. We’re ready for it.”

Red Sox call up six as rosters expand for September

Alex Speier

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Lakins, Weber, and Velazquez all add depth to the bullpen, and all pitched on Sunday — they covered the third to the seventh collectively, with Lakins allowing five hits and two runs in his two innings. Centeno gives more flexibility to manage their usage of catchers Christian Vazquez and Sandy Leon.

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*** *The Boston Herald***

Alex Cora remembers the importance of September

Michael Silverman

Alex Cora did not need a reminder that the calendar flipped to September at the stroke of midnight Saturday night.

To him, there is no underestimating the significance of the start of the final month of the regular season.

“I’ve been saying it all along, even last year: You get to Sept. 1 and you look up and you’re like, ‘OK, we’re five games back, six games back, whatever it is. We’ve got X amount of games,’” Cora said. “We’ve got four against Tampa that we have to make it count. We don’t have control on the Indians or the A’s. That’s the tough part of it. But it’s not impossible. It happened before. And we’re very talented. We just have to finish this road trip in the right way and then the topic is going to be the Twins and Yankees are going to Fenway.

“We know it, we know how it works, we’re ready and I think we’re prepared. There’s a lot of guys that, they’re going to have different roles throughout September and they’re going to have to step up. The pitchers, especially. Get three outs in high leverage situations because you’re the right man for the matchup, regardless if you throw 98 or you throw 87, 88. We’ll map it out. As long as our offense keeps rolling, we have a chance.”

PRICE SATISFIED

David Price, who missed nearly a month because of a cyst on his wrist, went only two innings in the 4-3 victory against the Angels, but they were a very positive two innings.

“Commanded the strike zone with three pitches for the most part, executed pitches when I needed to, that was good,” said Price, who allowed just one hit, struck out two, walked one and allowed no runs.

As for the return of his pitch command that deserted him before he was sidelined, Price said, “Oh yeah, absolutely. I was one side of the plate before I went on the injured list. And today, I made a lot of good fastballs on the inside to righties, a really good one to Justin Upton, a good one to (Mike) Trout that he fouled off, just being able to get the ball on the right side of the plate, that’s what I want.”

Cora took encouragement from what he saw.

“We were thinking three (innings), but then the effort and obviously he hasn’t pitched in a while,” said Cora. “It was kind of a tough day. You see the stuff, although we got the pitch count up, we didn’t feel too comfortable just pushing him. This is a guy we really need for what we’re going to accomplish. We took a gamble. We took him out. He’ll be ready for the next one.”

Said Xander Bogaerts: “I think that it will be nice to have him and stretch him out through all of September. Obviously we know we have a lot of urgency, but if we can get a pitcher like him go four or five innings and then put in someone for a couple of innings and get to the back end of the bullpen, it would be nice. Seeing him throw and come out healthy, that’s the main key we wanted from this game.”

MARTINEZ RAKES

What a road trip for J.D. Martinez. He hit six home runs with 18 RBI in the eight games.

“Pretty good road trip to say the least,” Cora said. “It seems like he found his rhythm. We talked about it the whole season, expanding pitches on the inside part of the plate. Now it seems he’s back to attacking pitches where he wants to without expanding. You see the results.” ...

Bogaerts collected three RBI to match his career high of 103. ...

Rafael Devers snapped his 0-for-12 streak with a single in the third inning. And then he went out and singled again two at-bats later in the seventh.

REINFORCEMENTS

The rosters expanded Sunday, and the Red Sox made six additions: right-hander Jhoulys Chacín, Travis Lakins, Hector Velazquez and Ryan Weber, catcher Juan Centeno and outfielder Gorkys Hernández.

Chacin, Centeno and Hernandez were selected to the active big league roster from Pawtucket, while the other three were recalled from there. To make room for Chacin, Centeno, and Hernández on the 40-man roster, the Red Sox transferred left-handed pitcher Chris Sale and right-handed pitcher Steven Wright to the 60-day injured list, and first baseman Joey Curletta was outrighted off the 40-man roster and remains with Double-A Portland.

Hernandez was in the starting lineup and played center field. His overall stats with Pawtucket did not jump off the stat sheet in 123 games (.219/.319/.377) as their center fielder, but he was markedly better against lefties (.941 OPS) this season.

“I don’t know if it’s a small sample size or whatever, he actually had a good season against lefties,” Cora said. “He’s a guy that has done it before, is a good defender, he can run, bring some energy. So that was the reason we decided to call him up.”

LIGHTING UP LEFTY

Heading into Sunday’s game in which the Red Sox faced left-handed starter Andrew Heaney, the Red Sox were in search of better results against southpaw starters — they are 19-24 this season.

“That’s something that for X or Y reason, we haven’t been able to get going against lefties — there’s a reason, but that’s not an excuse, we have to step up,” Cora said. “Last year, we went through that patch in between Hanley (Ramirez) and (Steve) Pearce. We didn’t hit lefties last year. This year it’s been on and off. We just feel like we’re going to face one today, obviously next weekend we’ll probably face two or three. It gives us options to manage the game.”

In a comment guaranteed to please nobody who’s already distressed about long baseball games, Cora hinted that September bodes poorly in that department.

“As everybody knows, this September is going to be different as far as pitcher usage — be ready for four hours – well, we usually play those games anyway – but it seems like the teams we have on the schedule, they’re going to load up the rosters with pitchers and it will be matchup games from the get-go,” said Cora. “So, we’ll join the party.” ...

Chacin, a starter, will work out of the bullpen.

“Obviously there’s going to be a few days where it will be a bullpen day and we’ll see the matchups,” said Cora. “If we feel that he’ll start and can give us three innings, we’ll start with him, but as of now, today obviously he’s in the bullpen.

“It’s going to take a while. He threw well the other day. We felt comfortable with a few things that he did last year that he wasn’t doing this year. Hopefully we can get him to that place and get him to be as good as he was last year.” ...

For those who were wondering why Cora did not manage with more urgency Saturday by using a starter like Rick Porcello on a bullpen day the day after the club needed eight relievers over 15 innings, wonder no more — the manager had his reasons.

“You can take advantage of X amount of off-days, but they still have to roll the next 10 days against the Twins and the Yankees and whoever we play next, Toronto,” Cora said. “It’s not as easy as people think it is. What we did in October last year, that was out of the norm. Like I told you guys two days ago, you look back at the World Series champs or runner-ups, what we did, it was never done before. David Price was ready to pitch every day. Rick Porcello was ready to pitch every day. Nate Eovaldi was ready to pitch every day. Now, 162 games, there are certain games we can do that, but the schedule will let you know when. It’s not that easy. There’s stuff that we know that we don’t have to tell people about, but, hey, we’ve got to take care of these guys. It’s all-in, but you’ve got to be careful. There’s no November coming up. We’ve got September and October. So we’ve got to be careful with it.”

Red Sox beat Angels, fly home with playoff hopes still alive

Michael Silverman

Before Sunday, the last time the Red Sox flew home from La-La Land, they were freshly minted world champions.

This time, they flew home dreamers and chasers.

After a 4-3 victory against the Angels, the Red Sox jettied back from a successful 6-2, three-city West Coast swing. They are 11-4 since Aug. 13, the best record of any AL team. While the Sox closed within five games of the Indians in the race for the second AL wild card, their quest still qualifies as a long shot.

But it’s still a shot.

“Sometimes you want to look after the game and see we went down half a point in the standings. Hopefully soon we’ll be going down one point in total, make it less and less,” said star of the game Xander Bogaerts, who homered and had three RBI. “Obviously as that number keeps going down, we’re more optimistic, to

be closer and not have to be chasing so much. A new month, we definitely need to have the best month of the season and probably in the last two seasons.”

This victory came hard on the heels of a tough Saturday night loss in which the bullpen lost a slim lead in the eighth inning.

With David Price making a successful but short (two scoreless innings) return to action, the Red Sox needed to patch together another bullpen game.

Their 4-0 lead kept getting tighter, as the Angels scored single runs in the third, fourth and eighth innings. But with the bullpen fortified by September call-ups, the post-Price quintet of Travis Lakins, Ryan Weber, Hector Velazquez, Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman held off the Angels in the end.

“They did a great job — Weber, Hector — they all did great,” said Price, who was pleased with the return of his command after a nearly month-long layoff. “That’s what we’ve been able to do recently, every guy that’s come in has picked up the starter and picked up that slack, and that’s what we need to continue to do.”

As they did in their two other games here, the Red Sox scored a run in the first inning. The ice-breaker came on Bogaerts’ RBI single, scoring Mookie Betts who had advanced to third base on two wild pitches after he singled.

Bogaerts came up even bigger in the third inning. With one out and one on, he launched a missile over the center field fence to increase the lead to 3-0.

J.D. Martinez was up next and copy-catted Bogaerts with a solo shot pulled to left field for the 4-0 lead.

Manager Alex Cora expressed his belief that momentum still is within reach.

“You’re not going to gain five games — you can do that, obviously — but with the way the A’s are playing, it’s kind of tough to gain five games in five days, we take whatever we can take,” Cora said. “We’ll be ready for Tuesday and keep doing what we’re doing. Like I said before the game, we can control only one team out of the three, but we saw what happened today. It was a good day for us.”

The Red Sox still have two road trips and three homestands left.

They are not returning to the West Coast — although they would if that meant facing a really good National League team from this area in October.

“Nothing is impossible in this game, we’re very talented,” Cora said. “That’s the same group that won the World Series. Obviously it hasn’t happened the way we wanted it, but I’ve been saying it all along, there are different ways to get to the World Series. We took the difficult road. We’re ready for it.”

*** *MassLive.com***

Boston Red Sox remain MLB’s top pace-of-play offender; so why not start games earlier for fans? Sam Kennedy weighs in

Christopher Smith

The Boston Red Sox are averaging the longest games in Major League Baseball for a third straight year (tied with Dodgers in ’18). They lead the American League for a fourth straight season.

Boston’s 3-hour, 24-minute average (entering Sunday) is 7 minutes longer than any other MLB team for 2019.

Manager Alex Cora's club has played 15 games longer than 4 hours. They have played 53 games of 3 hours, 30 minutes or longer.

The Fenway Park stands have looked half empty during the eighth and ninth innings as well as extra innings several times this season. The Red Sox have struggled at home (34-32), losing 14 games there by at least four runs. That's certainly a significant factor.

But Red Sox fans on Twitter often mention the MBTA schedule as a reason for leaving long games before the final pitch. Schedules vary but Boston trains don't run all night like the New York Subway does.

Some fans also have work and school early the next morning. Some have long drives home. It's asking a lot for fans to stay 4-plus hours, especially when parents bring young children.

"A four-hour game is too much to handle for kids and many adults for that matter," Red Sox president Sam Kennedy wrote in an email to MassLive.com on Aug. 22. "We are focused here in Boston on working with MLB to work on a number of pace of play initiatives to ensure that we are capturing the next generation of fans. 2:45 hour games should be the norm; 3:15 hour games the anomaly."

The majority of night games at Fenway Park begin at 7:10 p.m. A game longer than 3 hours, 30 minutes, therefore, ends at 10:40 p.m. or later. Games of 4 hours or more last until 11:10 p.m. or later.

Should the Red Sox consider starting games earlier? Is television a factor? Fans might be able to stay until the final pitch more often if the Red Sox considered starting night games 20 minutes earlier at 6:50 p.m. or 30 minutes earlier at 6:40 p.m.

It's uncommon for professional sports teams to begin night games before 7 p.m. But it's also not the norm to average 3-hour, 24-minute games.

The photo below is from the ninth inning July 31 at 10:59 p.m.. The Red Sox lost by only three runs (a save-situation game) and brought the tying run to the plate with two outs against the Rays. But the game lasted 3 hours, 50 minutes and many fans left early.

Red Sox principal owner John Henry and chairman Tom Werner are strong advocates of decreasing the MLB average time of game (3:04 for 2019). The MLB average never exceeded 3 hours until 2014. It has exceeded 3 hours five of the past six years.

Five years ago, Werner and limited partner Mike Gordon were members of a seven-person major league executive committee to find ways to speed the pace of the average game.

Ironically, the Red Sox remain the major league's top pace-of-play offender despite the efforts of ownership and its understanding that games must be played quicker.

Of the 157 pitchers who had tossed at least 70 innings this year entering Sunday, 156 averaged more than 20 seconds between pitch, per Fangraphs.com. Astros starter Wade Miley (19.4 seconds) is the only pitcher of the 157 under 20 seconds.

Red Sox's David Price leads all 157 pitchers in longest time between pitches (29.6 seconds). Eduardo Rodriguez averages 25.6 seconds between pitches, Rick Porcello 24.0 seconds and Chris Sale 23.0 seconds.

But a 20-second pitch clock is unlikely until at least the 2022 season, ESPN's Jeff Passan reported earlier this year.

"Baseball's kind of a hard thing for kids. ... Games are long," Brock Holt said Aug. 22 when children 18-and-under entered Fenway Park for free to watch Boston's resumed game vs. the Royals. "And kid's attention spans aren't (there)— so as a parent, I'm not going to bring my kid to a 9-inning, 4-hour game."

The Red Sox have tried start times in April before 7 p.m. in previous seasons.

Sam Kennedy noted "TV certainly has an impact" on start times.

He added via email, "We work to maximize the experience for fans at the ballpark. ... We have experimented with the earlier start times over the years with mixed success. We saw the majority of our fans still coming later as they had a hard time getting into the gates much before 7 p.m. (even now, at first pitch many fans have not yet arrived and the gates don't slow until about 7:30). We have tried to make a more concerted effort on weekends to have 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. start times to ensure we are getting a larger mix.

"Every year, we do look at what adjustments we can make with respect to all aspects of the experience. Next year will be no different."

J.D. Martinez homers again to lead Boston Red Sox over Angels, finishes road trip with 6 home runs, 18 RBIs, .452 average

Christopher Smith

J.D. Martinez capped off his dominant road trip by going back-to-back with Xander Bogaerts in the third inning Sunday.

Bogaerts belted his 31st homer to give Boston a 3-0 lead. J.D. Martinez followed with his 34th blast. The Red Sox won 4-3 over the Angels to finish the road trip 6-2.

The top four hitters — Mookie Betts, Rafael Devers, Bogaerts and Martinez — in the Red Sox batting order Sunday combined to go 7-for-15 with four RBIs, four runs, two walks, one double and two home runs.

During the eight-game road trip, Martinez went 14-for-31 (.452) with six homers, two doubles, 18 RBIs and 11 runs.

Bogaerts gave the Red Sox a 1-0 lead with an RBI single in the first inning. His third inning homer traveled 418 feet.

Martinez's home run went 411 feet.

David Price returned from the injured list (cyst on left wrist) to pitch for the first time since Aug. 4 in New York. He hurled 2 scoreless innings, allowing one hit and one walk while striking out two.

Boston Red Sox roster moves: Chris Sale, Steven Wright moved to 60-day IL, 6 September call-ups promoted

Christopher Smith

The Boston Red Sox transferred ace Chris Sale (elbow inflammation) and knuckleballer Steven Wright (elbow, toe) to the 60-day injured list to make room for September call-ups Gorkys Hernandez, an outfielder, and Juan Centeno, a catcher.

Boston outrighted first baseman Joey Curletta off the 40-man roster to open a spot for free agent acquisition Jhoulys Chacin, a starting pitcher who they signed to a contract Saturday.

The Sox also recalled pitchers Travis Lakins, Ryan Weber and Hector Velazquez from Triple-A Pawtucket.

Centeno has appeared in 111 major league games over parts of six seasons with the Mets, Brewers, Twins, Astros and Rangers. He has a .227/.278/.331/.609 career line in 353 plate appearances.

Hernandez appeared in 270 major league games for the Giants the past two seasons, slashing .243/.303/.363/.666.

He provides a right-handed bat off the bench. He had a 308/411/.538/.950 line with seven homers, three doubles and 16 RBIs in 104 at-bats vs. left-handed pitchers at Pawtucket.

Hernandez will start in center field for the Red Sox on Sunday vs. the Angels.

*** *RedSox.com***

Price, callups help Sox lock down series win

Sarah Wexler

Following a pair of bullpen-heavy games to open their series against the Angels, the Red Sox had five new pitchers available for Sunday's finale at Angel Stadium, between David Price's return from the injured list and rosters expanding.

Four of those pitchers got into the game as the Red Sox beat the Angels, 4-3, bolstered by back-to-back homers from Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez in the third.

"These guys today, they stepped up and helped us win a ballgame," manager Alex Cora said.

Out since Aug. 5 with a cyst on his left wrist, Price's return was brief, but effective. In two scoreless innings, he allowed a hit and a walk while striking out two. Price threw 45 pitches (26 strikes), with his four-seam fastball topping out at 91.7 mph, right around his average for the season.

"We were thinking three [innings], but then, the effort, and obviously he hasn't pitched in a while," said Cora. "I didn't feel too comfortable pushing him, this guy we really need for what we are going to accomplish. I took a gamble, we took him out. He'll be ready for the next one."

"I'm good," said Price. "Commanded the strike zone with the three pitches, for the most part. Executed pitches when I needed to. That was good."

Three September callups then combined to get through the next five innings: Travis Lakins (2 IP), Ryan Weber (2 IP) and Hector Velazquez (1 IP).

The rookie Lakins, back with the Red Sox for his fifth Major League stint of the season, allowed a pair of runs on five hits and a walk. Though it's been an arduous season going back and forth between the big leagues and Triple-A, he's glad to do what he can when the team needs him.

"It's still a dream every time I get called up," said Lakins. "Just to be in this environment, to help the team out as much as I can in any sort of possible situation is awesome."

Weber and Velazquez know a thing or two about bouncing around as well. It's Weber's fourth callup of 2019, which he opened with two scoreless frames. Velazquez, meanwhile, has spent the season going between the Majors, the injured list and Triple-A while alternating starting and relieving. He threw a scoreless seventh, aided by first baseman Sam Travis' nice snag on a 100-mph hot shot off the bat of Brian Goodwin for a double play.

"They did a great job," said Price. "That's what we've been able to do recently. Everybody that's come in has picked up the starters."

The Red Sox are now five games back of the second American League Wild Card spot. The Rays finished off a sweep of the Indians to move into the first spot by a half-game, while the A's lost to slide out of the second Wild Card slot, a half-game behind the Tribe. Oakland is 4 1/2 games ahead of Boston.

The Red Sox's schedule over the final month of the season starts this week with series at home against the first-place Twins and Yankees. They also have a four-game set against Tampa Bay from Sept. 20-23, which might be the best chance for Boston to make a charge in the Wild Card race.

“For us, nothing is impossible in this game,” said Cora. “We’re very talented. That’s the same group that won a World Series. Obviously, it hasn’t happened the way we wanted, but I’ve been saying it all along: There’s different ways to get to the World Series. We took the difficult route, and we’re ready for it.”

Callups reinforce Sox's 'pen, so what's next?

Ian Browne and Sarah Wexler

The Red Sox rang in the opening of expanded roster season by making a flurry of moves ahead of Sunday's series finale against the Angels at Angel Stadium.

Right-hander Jhoulys Chacín, catcher Juan Centeno and outfielder Gorkys Hernández were added to the 40-man and Major League rosters. Right-handers Travis Lakins, Hector Velázquez and Ryan Weber, already on the 40-man roster, were recalled from Triple-A Pawtucket.

Additionally, left-hander David Price was reinstated from the injured list to start on Sunday.

To make room for Chacín, Centeno and Hernández, left-hander Chris Sale (left elbow inflammation) and right-hander Steven Wright (right toe contusion) were transferred from the 10-day injured list to the 60-day, while first baseman Joey Curletta was outrighted off the 40-man roster.

The Red Sox will get an immediate look at Hernández, as he was in the starting lineup on Sunday, batting ninth and playing center field against Angels left-hander Andrew Heaney. Hernández, who spent the season in Pawtucket after signing a Minor League deal with the Red Sox in December 2018, is a right-handed hitter whose career splits have been worse against left-handed pitching.

“He actually had a good season against lefties,” manager Alex Cora explained. “He’s a good defender. He can run, bring some energy, so that was the reason that we decided to call him up.”

Cora was also able to provide some clarity on a role for Chacín, who joined the Red Sox on a Minor League deal on Saturday. For the time being, he’ll be pitching out of the bullpen.

“Obviously, there’s gonna be a few days that it’s gonna be a bullpen day, and we’ll see the matchups, and if we feel that he’ll start and can give us three innings, we’ll start with him,” said Cora.

Here’s a look at some other players who have made an impact for the Red Sox this season, or could in the very near future:

Arrival: Left-hander Darwinzon Hernandez

Level: Major Leagues

Of note: One earned run allowed in last 10 innings pitched (eight games)

Hernandez has proved emphatically that his stuff plays in the Major Leagues. While Hernandez was groomed as a starter in the Minors, he has been dominant for the Red Sox as a reliever, striking out 42 in 22 1/3 innings.

Breakout: Right-hander Tanner Houck
Level: Triple-A
Prospect ranking: No. 5
Of note: 105 strikeouts in 105 innings between Double-A Portland and Pawtucket

Houck looks like he could become the first solid homegrown starter the Red Sox have had in a while. In his 22 1/3 innings at Triple-A, Houck has a 3.22 ERA.

Something to prove: Right-hander Durbin Feltman
Level: Double-A
Prospect ranking: No. 16
Of note: 6.12 ERA in the second half

Prior to the season, Feltman was on everyone's list as a reliever who might be able to make a swift impact, just one season after he was drafted. However, Feltman has had a tough go of it at Double-A, as evidenced by a 5.26 ERA and 31 walks in 51 1/3 innings.

Name to watch: Infielder Bobby Dalbec Level: Triple-A
Prospect ranking: No. 2
Of note: Batted .274/.313/.509 in 28 games since promotion to Triple-A

Dalbec could be a big part of the Red Sox in 2020. Dalbec belted 20 homers at Double-A and then another seven after his promotion to Triple-A. With Rafael Devers looking entrenched at third base for years to come, Dalbec could be in the mix for playing time at first base next season.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

AL wild card standings make it clear that Red Sox must target these two teams

John Tomase

The Red Sox are still treating the 2019 season as if it can end with a spot in the Wild Card game, so in the spirit of the holiday weekend, let's play along and indulge this exercise in wishful thinking.

They trail the Indians by six games and the Rays and A's by 5.5 each. Forget about Oakland. The A's have beaten good teams all year -- they're 25-22 vs. the other AL contenders -- and their schedule is packed with softies like the Tigers, Angels, Mariners, and Royals down the stretch.

If the Red Sox are going to leapfrog two teams, it's going to have to be Cleveland and Tampa.

There's some vulnerability there. The Indians seemed out of reach as recently as last week, but injuries keep sidelining starters. On Friday night, outfielder Tyler Naquin tore his ACL while making a spectacular running catch in the corner vs. the Rays.

He joins third baseman Jose Ramirez (broken hamate) on the shelf, robbing the lineup of two of its few productive hitters and effectively reducing the offense to Francisco Lindor and Carlos Santana.

The Indians have overcome adversity all season, but they're hanging by their fingernails. Second baseman Jason Kipnis left a recent game with a sore wrist. Ace Corey Kluber broke his arm after being hit by a line drive on May 1 and hasn't pitched since. He recently suffered an oblique injury during his rehab and could be out for the season. Outfielder Jordan Luplow, who had provided unexpected production in a reserve role, hasn't played since early August because of a hamstring injury. One bright spot: right-hander Carlos Carrasco just returned after missing three months while battling leukemia.

Add it all up, and the Indians have dropped in the standings. They led the Twins by a half game on Aug. 12, but they trail by 4.5 games today. They've lost three games in the standings to the A's and four to the Red Sox since, putting them ever so slightly in play as the final month begins.

With six games remaining against the Twins and six more against the Phillies and Nationals in the final 10 days of September, the Indians face a tough road to the postseason. Could they open a door for the Red Sox?

Only if the Rays collapse, too. The Red Sox at least somewhat control their own destiny in that regard, with four games in Tampa looming on Sept. 20. Unfortunately, the rest of the schedule isn't particularly kind to Boston, with games remaining against the Twins, Yankees, Phillies, and Giants as well.

The Rays have rebounded from a four-game losing streak to win three straight, and will try to complete a sweep of Cleveland on Sunday. They've been crushed by injuries, too, with defending Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell (elbow surgery), breakout star Tyler Glasnow (forearm strain), and solid starter Yonny Chirinos (finger) all on the injured list. Tampa, which has perfected the art of the opener, has used 14 different starting pitchers and still ranks second in the AL in ERA (3.67).

The Rays are 9-6 against the Red Sox and have consistently outplayed them. Boston is trying to win the Tampa way, with openers and bullpens ruling the day, though the Red Sox boast the clearly superior offense.

After Sunday's finale in Anaheim, the Red Sox will have 25 games left to make up a significant wild card deficit. The odds remain decidedly against them, but the path they must follow is clear. It passes through Cleveland and Tampa.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

How the West was won – on the Red Sox' second try

Sean McAdam

It took them a while — almost five full months — but the Red Sox, finally, figured out how to have a successful road trip to the West Coast.

In terms of results, this one couldn't have been more different than that one.

On that one, you'll no doubt recall, the Red Sox tripped and stumbled their way from Seattle to Oakland to Arizona at the tail end of March and the first week or so of April, losing eight of the first 11. In a sense, they've been trying to overcome that pratfall ever since.

Their 4-3 win over the Los Angeles Angels Sunday capped another winning series and left the Red Sox 6-2 on the eight-game trek that took them to San Diego, Colorado and Anaheim.

The second time's the charm, apparently.

The win Sunday left the Sox five games out of the second and final wildcard spot with 25 games remaining. Their postseason chances remain remote, but not quite non-existent.

The season began with the starting pitchers woefully unprepared for the rigors of the regular season, a weakness that the Mariners, A's and Diamondbacks all exploited in winning their respective series against the Sox. With starters not yet fully built up, the Sox fell behind early and often on that first road trip, and couldn't climb out of the holes they had constructed.

By the time the Sox returned to Boston for their home opener, they were already reeling. It wasn't until two weeks later, with a sweep of the Rays on the road, that they began something of a turnaround.

Flash forward 120 or so games, and some of the problems haven't changed.

Chris Sale will not, to borrow a phrase from Rick Pitino, be walking through that door. David Price returned Sunday for the first time in almost a month, rarely topped 91 mph with his fastball and was judged to be done after two innings, thanks to 45 pitches. Nathan Eovaldi, who, in-between visits to the West Coast, missed half a season, is getting stronger, but still not yet completely built up after elbow surgery and an emergency detour to the bullpen.

Rick Porcello gamely soldiers on, taking the ball every five days. He's second on the team in innings and wins but there's been little pretty about his season. Eduardo Rodriguez has emerged — in this case, somewhat by default — as the team's preeminent starter.

The fifth starter, for now, doesn't exist, though the role could be filled by Jhoulys Chacin, who was cut loose recently by a team whose playoff prospects were only slightly more dire than the Sox' themselves.

The new formula — the one that allowed the Sox to take two-of-three from the Padres, two straight from the Rockies and two-of-three from the Angels — consists of a powerful Boston lineup jumping out to early leads, at which point the offense goes to sleep and counts on the bullpen to hold on for dear life. Mostly, it worked out fine over the last 10 days.

On Sunday, that included entrusting three pitchers who, until rosters expanded earlier in the day, weren't good enough to be part of a 13-man pitching staff ranked 19th out of all 30 MLB teams.

That meant Travis Lakins, Ryan Weber and Hector Velazquez were asked to get 15 of the 27 outs, which they did. From there, Matt Barnes gave up his eighth homer of the year and Brandon Workman walked the usual tightrope in the ninth, with the potential tying run on first when it ended.

The trip — and the series against the Angels in particular — did nothing to completely erase concerns about the bullpen, which blew saves in each of the first two games of the series and seemed to be giving it serious consideration again in the eighth and ninth innings Sunday.

At this point, it's hard to say what is emotionally driving the Red Sox more in the final weeks: the looseness that comes with the we're-probably-not-gonna-do-this-but-let's-have-some-fun-anyway atmosphere that tends to envelop almost-out-of-it teams everywhere OR the desperation that seeps in when an underachieving team looks up at the calendar and realizes it can't afford more than a handful of losses the rest of the way.

In the end, motivation doesn't matter. The 6-2 trip keeps the Red Sox alive for a while longer, with the vastly superior Twins and Yankees awaiting back at Fenway.

Much later than they would have preferred, let the record show that the Sox finally figured out some things out West.

Whether they did so in time remain a longshot at best.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 4, Angels 3 – Sox hold off Angels in bounce-back victory

Sean McAdam

Martinez, Bogaerts shoulder the load: The Red Sox don't even want to think about where they would have been on this road trip without Xander Bogaerts and J.D. Martinez. Together, they combined for 13 hits in the three-game series in Anaheim. Over the last five games, Bogaerts is hitting .435 (10-for-23) with four doubles, four homers and seven RBI with six runs scored. On Sunday, he knocked in the first run of the

game with a single, then homered in the fourth as part of a three-hit, three RBI game. Meanwhile, J.D. Martinez hit .452 for the entire trip with six homers and 18 RBI and 11 runs scored in eight games. He had a solo homer and two walks on Sunday. Said his manager, Alex Cora: "He's back to attacking pitches he wants." Whatever it is, it's working and it's come at a critical time.

Bullpen newbies chip in: When the Red Sox added three pitchers from Pawtucket Sunday morning, it didn't figure that they would all figure in the day's win. But Travis Lakins, Ryan Weber and Hector Velazquez all chipped in when starter David Price was limited to just two innings in his return to the rotation. Usually, September callups are utilized in low-leverage spots, to save the bullpen regulars from having to work in games in which a team is either way ahead or way behind. But these aren't typical times. The Sox had gone to the bullpen for 19 innings in the previous two games and needed the new arrivals to contribute immediately. Lakins struggled a bit, giving up two runs in two innings, but Weber gave them two scoreless innings and Velazquez took care of the sixth. "It's a grind," acknowledged Alex Cora. "They did an outstanding job. It didn't look pretty, but we got it done."

Price returns: Cora had been vague about what he was expecting in terms of length from David Price following a layoff of almost four weeks. Price tossed two scoreless innings and was lifted after 45 pitches, as the Sox were intent on bringing him along slowly, not pushing him too far as he returns from the IL. Price was able to locate his pitches well and wasn't hit hard, but his velocity was definitely down, with his fastball often limited to 90-91 mph. In all likelihood, Price would have been allowed to go deeper, but his inefficiency contributed to the shorter outing. "I didn't feel too comfortable pushing him," acknowledged Cora. "This is a guy we need for where we're going." Thanks to the off-day in the schedule, Price will get an extra day to recover before going again on Saturday against the Yankees, and the roster expansion that comes with Sept. 1 will help, giving the Sox more reliever options as Price builds arm strength.

TURNING POINT: In the seventh inning, with the Red Sox holding a 4-2 lead and Velazquez on, Mike Trout drew a leadoff walk. Brian Goodwin then laced a rocket that seemed headed for the right field line, but first baseman Sam Travis snared the ball, then stepped on the bag to double up Trout for a double play. So, instead of perhaps a run in and the potential tying run in scoring position, the Sox had two outs and nobody on base.

ONE UP:

Ryan Weber: Part of the group of callups as rosters expanded, Weber gave the Sox two innings of shutout ball, bridging the game from the early innings until the seventh when the Sox could turn to their high-leverage bullpen options.

ONE DOWN:

Sam Travis: Travis has been getting opportunities to start against lefties, but hasn't been able to do much with the chance. On Sunday, he hit into a double play, then fanned twice before being lifted for a pinch-hitter.

QUOTE OF NOTE:

"I think this win is the biggest one of the season, definitely of the road trip, after a tough game (Saturday) night. We bounced back." – Xander Bogaerts.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

After the Sox saw their homer streak come to an end at 19 straight Saturday night, they began another, with two homers, giving them homers in 20 of the last 21 games.

The save for Brandon Workman was his 10th this season.

The Sox are 8-2 in their last 10 road games.

UP NEXT:

Following an off-day Monday, the Red Sox begin a seven-game homestand with a game against Minnesota at 7:10. It will be RHP Rick Porcello (12-10, 5.42) vs. TBA.

* *The Athletic*

With September call-ups, Red Sox opt for a minimalist approach

Chad Jennings

The Red Sox announced their first wave of September call-ups Sunday, and it's a relatively modest group of four relievers, a veteran outfielder, a third catcher and a starting pitcher coming off the injured list. It is not an influx of young talent, but rather a collection of role players and familiar faces.

RHP David Price (activated from I.L.)
RHP Jhoulys Chacin (signed to minor league deal yesterday)
OF Gorkys Hernandez
C Juan Centeno
RHP Hector Velazquez
RHP Travis Lakins
RHP Ryan Weber

The Triple-A season ends on Monday, so there could be another wave of call-ups arriving for the upcoming homestand. But the initial batch sends a pretty clear message of what the Red Sox are and are not trying to accomplish with these additions.

A few thoughts and observations

These moves are typical of a contender. Bullpen depth, an experienced outfielder who can run, and an extra catcher for flexibility — these are almost cookie-cutter moves for the month of September, and they suggest the Red Sox are not looking for a shake-up but rather to give themselves options behind their go-to players.

There are no wide-open spots in the lineup, so everyday playing time is not readily available for a top prospect, and while the team needs rotation help, it's getting Price off the injured list to fill one spot, while the additional bullpen arms should make up the difference in the fifth-starter role. The Red Sox' top Triple-A starter has a 3.86 ERA, so it's not exactly a slam dunk that they would improve that fifth spot anyway.

Protecting prospects from the Rule 5 will wait for the offseason. For now, the Red Sox have used their expanded roster to provide short-term depth with role players.

At the same time, these are not quite all-in additions. The most aggressive, go-for-it call up would have been Tanner Houck, the first-round pick who's pitched well since moving into the Triple-A bullpen. Houck might have been a high-upside shot in the arm for the bullpen, like Darwinzon Hernandez but from the right side.

Adding him, though, would have meant unnecessarily clogging the 40-man roster with a player who won't be Rule 5 eligible for another year. Might have been worth it if the bullpen were still a disaster, but the Red Sox pen was one of the best in baseball in August. With their odds of making the playoffs still hovering around 5 percent, Houck became largely unnecessary and unlikely to make a difference. Better to save that roster spot for someone who needs it this winter.

Finding prospects who fit

Speaking of someone who needs a 40-man roster spot this winter, consider these names: Bobby Dalbec, C.J. Chatham and Marcus Wilson. Those are three of the top position prospects in the organization, and all three will be Rule 5 eligible this winter. That alone was enough to consider them call-up candidates, but without much playing time available, the Red Sox kept all three in the minors (Chatham and Wilson are already scheduled for more playing time in the Arizona Fall League, along with Houck). Their 40-man spots are more likely to come this winter.

Other Rule 5 eligible minor leaguers finishing interesting seasons are lefties Kyle Hart and Daniel McGrath, first baseman Josh Ockimey and utility man Chad De La Guerra. Those four don't have nearly the prospect stock of some other roster candidates, but under different circumstances, they might too have been call-up options. Instead, the Red Sox will delay those 40-man roster decisions until November.

Still time for more (but maybe not many more)

Had Michael Chavis not suffered a seeming mild setback in his rehab from a shoulder injury, he might have been another roster addition on Sunday. As it is, he could rejoin the team relatively soon. Reliever Heath Hembree could also come off the I.L. in the coming month.

It will be interesting to see if a player like Dalbec or Chatham gets called up when the Triple-A season ends, but barring an injury, there seems to be little playing time available for them.

Relievers Colten Brewer, Mike Shawaryn, Trevor Kelley and Bobby Dalbec could also return if the Red Sox see any value in having even more bullpen options, but the initial wave of call-ups suggests a minimalist approach. The Red Sox have said all along that they have the players necessary to make a playoff push, and they've used September call-ups to supplement rather than replace them.

Still, the most notable Sept. 1 move might not have been an addition, but rather the transfer of Chris Sale to the 60-day disabled list, officially ending his season and making even a longshot October return nearly impossible.

*** *The Los Angeles Times***

Andrew Heaney can't tame Boston's heavy hitters in Angels' loss

Jack Harris

Albert Pujols slowed to a jog as he rounded first base.

Unlike the night before, when the Angels' aging slugger kicked his 39-year-old legs into high gear while stretching for a double, Pujols pulled into second at a much more leisurely pace on Sunday afternoon.

With his ground-rule double down the left-field line, Pujols eclipsed another personal milestone. It was the 3,185th hit of his career, moving him past Cal Ripken Jr. and all alone into 14th place on MLB's all-time hits list.

"The guys that have the success and survive are the ones that are mentally strong," Pujols said on Saturday night, when he reached another career landmark by becoming the fifth player to record at least 20 home runs in 17 different seasons.

"The thing is, keep your head up," he added. "Come back tomorrow, and get a win."

That ethos will be put to the test for the Angels this month.

Unlike Pujols — who said he hasn't felt this healthy entering September since his last season with the St. Louis Cardinals in 2011, and is hitting nearly .350 over the past 14 games — the team at large has slumped into irrelevancy in recent weeks.

After a dismal 9-18 record in August, the franchise's worst full month since June 2016, the Angels opened September with another defeat Sunday, falling to the Boston Red Sox 4-3 in front of an announced crowd of 39,382 in Anaheim.

"I think we've been pretty much doing the same thing all year," said Brian Goodwin, who collected a pair of hits but also lined into a rally-killing double-play in the seventh. "We're able to play everybody tough."

They just haven't been able to win enough to stay in the mix, wasting another year of Mike Trout's prime.

Pujols' third-inning ground-rule double was emblematic of their struggles. Though Trout scored on the play, Goodwin was held up at third after the ball bounced off the chalk and into the seats. The inning ended with both him and Pujols still stranded.

"In hindsight, yeah it would have been great to have that," Goodwin said. "Just some bad bounces today."

Moving forward, Pujols believes he has "another couple years" left in him, the same time frame in which the Angels (65-73) are hoping to become a contender again. Though they're out of the wild-card race, trailing the Cleveland Indians by 14.5 games for the American League's final playoff spot, they might be able to use the season's final month to get back on track for the future.

Shohei Ohtani is a prime example.

The two-way player has been busy lately. On the mound, he's been rebuilding his stamina after last season's Tommy John surgery. At the plate, he's trying to snap out of a three-for-30 skid.

Manager Brad Ausmus — who was ejected at the end of Sunday's loss for arguing that Red Sox (74-63) reliever Brandon Workman wasn't coming set from the stretch — held Ohtani out of the starting lineup during both games this weekend, giving him a chance to reset offensively. During a lone pinch-hit at-bat Sunday, Ohtani swung the bat just once before taking a walk.

"It's easier from a mental perspective, if you're working on something, to just kind of run your drills and not be too concerned with game results," Ausmus said, adding: "It's not like he's all of a sudden become an incapable hitter. He's just a little bit off."

Ohtani felt good after a bullpen session Sunday morning, saying he threw with the "same intensity, same pitch count" as a 35-pitch session last week (though he still hadn't begun tossing his splitter).

His hitting struggles, however, which he described as a mechanical problem rather than a timing issue, continued to frustrate him.

"I'm not performing well enough to be in [the lineup]," he said through interpreter Ipppei Mizuhara. "There's a lot of factors. There's just a little tweak that I need to do to my swing."

Andrew Heaney — who, depending on Ohtani's health, is perhaps the most likely pitcher to reprise a role in the Angels' 2020 rotation — is another work-in-progress. Instead of extending his string of three-consecutive quality starts Sunday, he lacked command early, allowed home runs on back-to-back pitches in the third to Xander Bogaerts and JD Martinez, and took the loss in a five-inning, four-run display.

"Didn't have great energy on the mound, some mechanical-type stuff," Heaney said.

September will afford the Angels a chance to evaluate their organizational depth too. Sunday was the first day rosters could be expanded to 40 men, enabling the club to call up hitters Justin Bour, Michael Hermosillo and Taylor Ward, and pitchers Jake Jewell, Luke Bard, Jared Walsh and Adalberto Mejia.

Ausmus said there are a few more players who could be added to the roster, but called the initial wave of arrivals “the bulk” of the team’s expected transactions.

“The most important thing is getting guys experience that don’t necessarily have a lot of experience,” Ausmus said. “Giving the organization the opportunity to watch them play against major league pitching, or major league pitchers facing major league batters. That being said, a chunk of these guys we’ve already seen, that we’ve called up.”

Ward, a former first-round draft pick in 2015 out of Fresno State, fits that description. The 25-year-old has bounced between the big league club and triple-A Salt Lake over the last two seasons — though his career MLB batting average is just .172, he hit .306 with 27 home runs in Salt Lake this season – and might get a more extended look in the majors this month.

“Being here, you’re going to see something you haven’t seen,” Ward said. “You’re going to grow. The experience here is very important.”

That can be true even as the Angels fade from the postseason race. The more their season winds down, the more their attention will turn toward the future.

“If we continue to stay here and continue to battle, and everybody has each other’s backs,” Goodwin said, “you’ll start seeing a lot of those games, close games, we’ll end up being on the right side of.”

*** *Associated Press***

Bogaerts homers, has 3 hits as Red Sox defeat Angels 4-3

Xander Bogaerts knows the Boston Red Sox aren't going to erase their wild-card deficit quickly, but he did his part on Sunday to help them make up more ground.

Bogaerts had three hits, including a homer, and three RBI as the Red Sox wrapped up a successful road swing with a 4-3 victory over the Los Angeles Angels.

Boston took two of three from Los Angeles and went 6-2 on the trip. Combined with Tampa Bay's weekend sweep of Cleveland and the Yankees taking two of three from Oakland, the Red Sox moved within five games of the second AL wild card. They began the trip 6 1/2 games back on Aug. 19.

"Sometimes you want to see it go down a full game, but hopefully we will start seeing it go down some more," Bogaerts said. "We definitely are going to have to have the best month of the season, maybe the last two seasons."

J.D. Martinez also homered for Boston and extended his hitting streak to nine games. The slugger had six home runs and 18 RBI during the road trip.

Angels slugger Albert Pujols had an RBI double in the third inning for his 3,185th career hit, passing Cal Ripken Jr. for 14th place. Justin Upton homered in the eighth.

Bogaerts and Martinez went back-to-back in the third. Rafael Devers singled with one out and Bogaerts sent Andrew Heaney's changeup over the wall in center for his 31st homer of the year. He has 103 RBI, which matches a career high.

On the next pitch, Martinez homered to left-center. It was the ninth time this season Boston hit consecutive homers. Bogaerts also drove in Mookie Betts with a single in the first.

"It seems like he has found his rhythm. He is attacking pitches where he wants to and isn't expanding the zone," manager Alex Cora said of Martinez, whose 34 homers are tied for fourth in the AL.

David Price came off the injured list and made his first start for the Red Sox since Aug. 4. The left-hander threw 45 pitches in two innings and allowed one hit and a walk with two strikeouts.

"I'm good. Executed pitches when I needed to. It was good," Price said. "I was one side of the plate before I went on the injured list and today had some good fastballs."

Ryan Weber (2-2), the third of six Boston pitchers, gave up one hit and a walk in two innings to get the win.

Brandon Workman handled the ninth for his 10th save. He hit Mike Trout with a two-out pitch before getting Brian Goodwin to fly out.

Heaney (3-4) went five innings and permitted four runs on seven hits. The left-hander allowed only two runs (one earned) in his previous two starts.

"From the beginning I just didn't have a great rhythm. I didn't have a great energy on the mound," Heaney said. "That caused me to leak some balls middle and just not really get it going. I felt like I found a little bit late, but at that point it's trying to salvage."

The Angels went 2/3 on their homestand and are a season-low eight games under .500 for the second time this season.

QUITE A WEEKEND

Pujols had one of his best weekend series in a long time. The 39-year-old first baseman played all three games and was 7 for 20 with a home run and seven RBI.

"He does an excellent job of cutting down his swing with runners in scoring position. Not trying to do too much and going the other way more frequently," Angels manager Brad Ausmus said. "He's maintained a good maintenance program all year long. Has kept himself healthy. We have some off days coming up here with the schedule that should keep him fresh, including the fact he played in a 15-inning game the other night."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: INF Michael Chavis (sprained left shoulder) is dealing with upper-body soreness on his right side. Chavis is on a rehab assignment at Triple-A Pawtucket and will be evaluated by the training staff Monday.

Angels: 2B Tommy La Stella (broken right leg) is taking grounders and working in the batting cage, but there is no timetable for his return.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: Off on Monday before beginning a seven-game homestand Tuesday. RHP Rick Porcello (12-10, 5.42 ERA) starts the series opener against Minnesota.

Angels: Off on Monday before heading to Oakland to begin a six-game road trip. RHP Jamie Barria (4-7, 6.10 ERA) gets the call Tuesday.