

The Boston Red Sox Monday, September 23, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

David Price will undergo wrist surgery on Thursday

Julian McWilliams

Red Sox lefthander David Price is scheduled to undergo surgery on Thursday to remove a triangular fibrocartilage complex cyst from his wrist.

“We want to get it over with and start the offseason the right way . . . and be ready for next year,” manager Alex Cora said prior to Sunday’s 7-4 win over the Tampa Bay Rays.

Dr. Matthew Liebman will perform the procedure at Newton-Wellesley Hospital. Price was diagnosed with the issue in early August and has made only one start since, on Sept. 1, and pitched two innings.

The expectation is that Price will be ready for spring training. Cora’s optimistic — while also remaining cautious — that Price will also have a normal offseason.

“Obviously you never know,” Cora said. “They could go in there and find something else. But as of now, everything seems like, take care of the cyst and he should be fine. I don’t know what the recovery time is, but it seems like it’s something simple.”

Price, 34, finished the season 7-5 with a 4.28 earned run average over 22 starts. He is 46-24 with a 3.84 ERA in four seasons with the Sox.

Rodriguez aims at 20

Eduardo Rodriguez will take the ball again Tuesday, looking to add on to what’s already been an impressive season.

Rodriguez heads into Tuesday’s series opener in Texas sporting a 3.53 ERA. In his last four starts, he’s surrendered just two earned runs over 25 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

With 18 wins, Rodriguez has two starts remaining in his quest to reach 20. Despite the win in baseball not holding as much value as it used to, Cora believes there’s still something to be said about 20 wins.

“Ask [Blake] Snell, Charlie [Morton], and [Price],” Cora said. “With Eduardo, earlier in the season he was giving up five, but we were scoring eight. Lately it’s been like we don’t score and they score one. But it’s something about the number. It’s like runs scored. If you score 100 you did a lot of good things. If you win 20, you did a lot of good things.”

Rodriguez said last week after his start against the Philadelphia Phillies that his first goal is to get to 200 innings (he’s at 191 $\frac{1}{3}$).

“If 20 wins happen, it happens,” Rodriguez said. “If not, I’m happy with what I have.”

Hembree is hopeful

Cora’s said the last couple days that he thinks reliever Heath Hembree will return for the series against the Texas Rangers. He reiterated that Sunday, adding that his appearance will probably come in a bullpen game, which allows Hembree to have a bit more structure.

Betts feeling good

Coming into the Tampa series, the Sox' plan was for Mookie Betts to play three out of four games, so Sunday was his scheduled day off. He was the team's designated hitter Friday and played right field on the turf at Tropicana Field Saturday.

The turf at the Rogers Centre in Toronto was what aggravated Betts's left foot, but he came out of Saturday's contest feeling good, Cora said.

"He moved well [Saturday]," Cora said. "He ran the bases well."

Betts went 2 for 5 Saturday with two singles. He will be back in right field Monday.

Correction: A previous version of this story included the wrong day for Eduardo Rodriguez's start this week. He will start Tuesday.

Rafael Devers broke Butch Hobson's HR record but the ex-Red Sox third baseman is still a big fan

Peter Abraham

Butch Hobson is 68 now, the age where plenty of former ballplayers will happily tell you how much better the game was in their day.

But Hobson was delighted to get the news that Rafael Devers had broken his record for home runs in a season by a Red Sox third baseman.

"That's awesome," Hobson said by phone from his home in Alabama. "I'm excited for him. I haven't seen every game he's played, but that young man has plenty of opposite-field power and I like that. He's a heck of a hitter."

Devers, in fact, homered to left field on Saturday night for his 31st home run, the most by a Sox third baseman since Hobson had 30 in 1977.

"It could have been 32," Hobson said. "Al Bumbry robbed me of a home run in Baltimore and I had another one at Fenway that hit a bar holding up that net over the wall and they called it a double.

"George Brett told me the next day that it went over. But what can you do?"

Hobson usually batted seventh or eighth that season for a team that included Fred Lynn, Carlton Fisk, Jim Rice, George Scott, and Carl Yastrzemski. The Sox won 97 games but finished tied for second place with the Orioles behind the Yankees, who went on to win the World Series.

There were no wild cards back then and the Sox went home.

"That was a heck of a team, we had so many good hitters," Hobson said. "But I'm glad Devers broke my record. I like seeing that. He always plays with a smile on his face and I like that. Baseball should be fun."

Devers and Hobson met at an offseason event last winter. It was a brief conversation but teammate Xander Bogaerts later let Devers know that Hobson was a force at third base.

Devers didn't know he had broken Hobson's record but broke out that smile when he was told.

"It's pretty cool," he said. "There are more records I want to continue to break. It's about trying to stay healthy and moving forward trying to break as many records as I can."

Devers, who was 1 for 4 with a walk and two runs scored in Sunday's 7-4 victory against the Rays, is hitting .307 with a .910 OPS and 112 RBIs. But Sox manager Alex Cora is guarding against complacency.

He wants Devers to continue his improvement on defense and work on his strike zone discipline at the plate.

"He has to be on top of it," Cora said. "Now that everybody knows who you are, they're going to treat you with a lot of respect. There's not too many pitches in the middle right now."

Devers has hit .213 with five extra-base hits this month and has often appeared frustrated.

"The struggles of September, he'll take home and he'll understand what they're trying to do," Cora said. "He'll be better because of that."

Is a 40-home run season possible?

"We'll see," Cora said. "I like the fact that he hit 50 doubles, too. Some of those doubles are going to turn into home runs. I don't want to put a number on it but I know that he's a force offensively."

Hobson agrees with Cora.

"It'll get harder for Raffy," he said. "He's proven he can hit a fastball and the pitchers will adjust. His ability to take that fastball to left field is what makes him so dangerous. I like what I've seen from him."

Hobson was traded to the California Angels after the 1980 season. His playing career lasted five more years (two in the majors, three in the minors) and he started managing in 1989, working his way through the minors to manage the Red Sox for three seasons starting in 1992.

Hobson has since managed a series of minor league and independent league teams. His last two seasons were with the Chicago Dogs of the American Association. The team plays at a new stadium close to O'Hare International Airport.

The Dogs were 59-41 this season after winning 45 games in 2018.

"I love it," Hobson said. "I believe in what the independent leagues are doing and giving some of those players a chance. There are some good stories there. My goal was to win 1,500 games as a manager and I'm over now that now. But I keep plugging away. The game has blessed me over the years."

When he's not managing, Hobson lives in the small town of Demopolis in Alabama. He's close to his daughters and their families and gets to see the University of Alabama football team play from time to time.

Hobson was a backup quarterback for Bear Bryant but was better at baseball. The Sox took him in the 1973 draft and he made his debut with the Sox in 1975.

He treasures those memories but enjoys seeing what a new generation is doing.

"You tell [Devers] I'm happy for him," Hobson said. "I hope he hits a few more this season. It's great to see."

With season winding down, Alex Cora looks forward to recharging his battery

Julian McWilliams

Time didn't slow down for manager Alex Cora the last two seasons.

He won a World Series as bench coach for the Houston Astros in 2017, then was introduced as Red Sox manager that November. Cora and the Sox went on to win a franchise-record 108 games in addition to a World Series title in 2018. Guest appearances followed Cora throughout the offseason and before he knew it, he was right back at spring training this year.

But with the Sox out of the October picture — much to the dismay of Cora and the team — he admitted he can finally take a step back and make adjustments

Prior to the Sox' 7-4 win against the Tampa Bay Rays Sunday where Nathan Eovaldi went six innings and surrendered three earned runs in his first win as a Sox starter since Sept. 24 of last season, Cora intimated some of his plans this offseason.

"I'm going to spend time with the family in the beginning," Cora said. "But they know I am going to be flying all over the place. Or people will be coming to visit us [in Puerto Rico]. There are going to be certain groups that we visit and we're going to get better."

The pitching staff — due to injury and underperformance — unraveled this season. But Cora made a point Sunday that he wanted to key in on some of the position players — Andrew Benintendi is one of them — to break some bad habits at the plate.

"We struggle with fastballs up in the zone," Cora said. "Everybody knows that. Everybody is watching."

In the age of launch angle, pitchers have adjusted, throwing up in the zone and expanding down. Two of the Sox' main foes in the division, the Tampa Bay Rays and New York Yankees, pounded that into their pitchers.

"It's where the game is going," Cora continued. "It's not analytics or old-school or whatever. People are adjusting to swings and we have to keep adjusting."

On paper, the Sox' offensive numbers are similar to last season. They scored 876 runs in 2018. After Sunday's win, the Sox now have 860 runs this season. With seven games to go, the Sox could easily pass their total of 2018. They hit .268 last season. Entering Sunday, oddly enough, their batting average was .268. They've hit 237 homers this year compared to 208 last year. Their OPS before Sunday was .806. Last season? .792. So, what's the difference, if any at all?

"We've had a good year," hitting coach Tim Hyers said. "The timing was just off. We've had some bad performances when we needed [the opposite]. And had some good performances when the games were blown away."

This is what Cora and Hyers are getting at.

Last year, the Sox led the league with 190 RBIs in high-leverage moments, according to Fangraphs. They struck out the least in the league in those moments with 104. Their OPS (.796) ranked fourth in the majors.

In those same high leverage situations before Sunday, the Sox ranked 27th in RBIs (130), they struck out 156 times, trailing just the Detroit Tigers, and their OPS (.743) ranked 21st.

Their situational hitting was off this year.

"It's execution," Cora said. "All these guys have their hitting guys and swing coaches and all that, but there has to be a balance, too. It's great that you clean your game, but there's a certain aspect of all this hitting stuff, that when there's a man at third and less than two outs we want our 'A' swing to hit the ball in the air or do we take a groundball to second and get the RBI?"

Cora noted mentioned the Astros as the blueprint. They struck out the least in the league entering Sunday (18.3 percent) and still led the league in OPS (.848).

“They are leading the league in walks and they don’t strike out,” Cora said. “They’re very talented but they’re doing something probably different than everybody else. We’ll figure it out. We’re not that far off either.”

Said Hyers: “Getting on base and slugging. If you’re successful in those two areas you’re going to have a good year offensively. If one gets above the other that’s when you can have those down years.”

Cora and his staff will have their time to take a breather, but the visits to his players will follow shortly after.

“We have to stay on top of them,” Cora said.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Nathan Eovaldi takes big step in Red Sox’ win

Steve Hewitt

Even when the results haven’t necessarily been there, Nathan Eovaldi has continued to say he’s made progress with each start since rejoining the Red Sox rotation.

But there was no doubting his performance Sunday.

The Red Sox are desperate for some optimism about the future of their pitching rotation, and specifically Eovaldi, who they’ve invested heavily in as a critical piece of their staff going forward. The right-hander was excellent in a 7-4 victory against the Rays at Tropicana Field, throwing six innings and allowing three runs in easily his best outing since coming back as a starter.

“It was great to see because he’s worked hard and it’s been a down year for him,” Red Sox pitching coach Dana LeVangie said. “But that’s Nate Eovaldi.”

Eovaldi threw 100 pitches and struck out six in what was his longest outing in seven starts since rejoining the rotation, and tied his longest stint since going six against the Yankees on April 17.

That was before Eovaldi’s season took a downward turn. He missed three months because of a loose body in his elbow before returning in a bullpen role, doing so earlier than he would as a starter because he hadn’t built up to that point. But on Sunday, the righty looked as strong as he has all season, getting better as the game progressed.

Eovaldi, who earned his first victory as a starter this season, had to grind through the first three innings, as he battled through a 26-pitch first and gave up a homer in the third that brought the Rays within a run. LeVangie said the Rays proved they were sitting on Eovaldi’s fastballs early, but the righty eventually settled into his delivery, slowed it down and mixed his pitches effectively.

“Once he did those things, he kind of took over that game,” LeVangie said.

Deep counts early in the game pushed Eovaldi’s pitch count to 77 through four innings, but he got into a groove. He faced the top of the Rays order in the fifth and set them down with a 1-2-3 inning on seven pitches, allowing him to come back out for the sixth. He fanned Ji-Man Choi, putting him away with a 98 mph fastball before fooling Brandon Lowe with a curveball. He retired Willy Adames to end his day.

Eovaldi’s mix was as good as it’s been. He felt good about the elevation and location of his fastball, and combined with his curveball, which he induced eight of his 20 swings and misses with, the Rays had no answer.

The Red Sox have been waiting a while to see this version of Eovaldi.

“He’s grinded all year, trying to find his delivery, being hurt, trying to find who he is again,” LeVangie said. “I thought today pointed out what he is.”

Eovaldi has one more start remaining this season — likely Friday at home against the Orioles — and Sunday provided a big confidence boost as he tries to end his year on a high note.

“I asked him how he feels for the next one,” Alex Cora said. “He was like, ‘I want it. I want to build off this one.’ Those are good signs. Physically he’s in a good place. That’s a good lineup, they loaded up with all those lefties. He did an outstanding job and it’s good to see him finishing the season strong.”

After what he’s been through this season, that would be a big victory for the Red Sox as they head into the offseason.

“I felt like I’ve missed so much time as it is now,” Eovaldi said. “I just want to be able to make every start that I can and finish on a strong note and go into the offseason and next year (be) healthy and pick up where we left off.”

David Price to have surgery on throwing wrist

Steve Hewitt

David Price will have surgery to remove the cyst in his throwing wrist this Thursday in Boston, Alex Cora said Sunday before the Red Sox’ win against the Rays.

The plan is for the left-hander to fly back to Boston on Monday and talk to a specialist to discuss everything before Thursday’s procedure. The Red Sox expect him to make a full recovery and be ready for the 2020 season.

Price’s surgery will be performed by Dr. Matthew Leibman.

“I think we just want to get it over with and for him to start the offseason, quote unquote, the right way,” Cora said. “He has a week ahead or whatever and start taking care of himself, be ready for next year.”

Price initially hit the injured list Aug. 8 after the cyst was discovered in an MRI. He returned Sept. 1 to make a two-inning start against the Angels, but he was scratched from his next start against the Yankees because he felt tightness in the wrist.

Price made an attempt to return but the Red Sox ultimately decided to shut him down for the rest of the season. The lefty will have the procedure done before the end of the season so he can get an early start to his offseason and be ready for spring training. The expectation is that he will have a normal offseason.

“That’s what everybody’s saying,” Cora said. “Obviously you never know, you might go in there and find something else, but as of now, everything seems like, take care of the cyst and he should be fine. I don’t know what the recovery timetable is, obviously they’re going to talk in the next few days, but it seems like it’s something simple and he should be OK throughout the offseason.”

Offseason plans

Cora doesn’t like that he’ll have an extra month this offseason to prepare for next year because it means the Red Sox missed the playoffs, but he plans on using the time wisely.

The manager said he will visit players throughout the offseason to keep tabs on them. He named Rafael Devers and Andrew Benintendi, among others, as they try to regroup for the 2020 season.

“I’m not saying we’re going all football-style structure,” Cora said. “The way the game is going, we have to be on top of it. You have to be. If you don’t pay attention to them in the offseason, they might gain a few pounds and then they’re behind. I’ll be all over the place.”

As the organization searches for a replacement for Dave Dombrowski, Cora wants to be proactive in resetting the Red Sox’ culture, which he believes took a step back this season.

“I think as a whole, from top to bottom, we’ve got to do a better job,” Cora said. “Like, this is what we want at the big league level and from Boston all the way to the Dominican Summer League, we have to stick to the approach and that’s the way you’re going to be successful. That’s the way you maintain culture or you’re successful at the big league level. You do it from top to bottom.”

Vazquez hits another

Christian Vazquez added on to his career season as he belted his 22nd homer of the season in Sunday’s win, a three-run shot in the first inning that gave the Red Sox an early 4-0 lead.

“That was a good swing,” Cora said. “We talked about it after he got 20, kind of like he’s going to relax now and put more competitive at-bats. He was chasing all over the place for a few weeks.

“Now, I think the problem will be is he’s probably chasing 25, so he’ll start swinging at bad pitches again,” Cora joked. ...

Cora said Mookie Betts felt fine after playing right field in Saturday night’s loss, and he’ll likely be back there for Monday night’s series finale. ... Benintendi, who missed Saturday with a left thumb contusion, returned Sunday in the ninth inning as a defensive replacement in left field. ... The Red Sox (81-74) assured themselves of at least a .500 record this season with Sunday’s win.

*** *MassLive.com***

Nathan Eovaldi making positive strides for Boston Red Sox: ‘I want to finish strong’

Chris Cotillo

For Red Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi, Sunday’s strong start represented a step in the right direction after a long season of injury and inconsistency.

Eovaldi posted his longest start since April 17 against the Rays, going six innings while allowing three runs on seven hits and striking out six batters. He earned the win in his second quality start of the entire season.

The righty, who missed more than three months after having surgery to remove loose bodies from his elbow before spending a month in the bullpen, looked like the pitcher the Sox signed to a four-year, \$68 million deal in his penultimate start of the season.

“He did an outstanding job mixing up pitches,” manager Alex Cora said. “He used the breaking ball a little more, especially in the second part of the outing. The fastball, he elevated a few pitches. They put some good swings the first few at-bats, then after that he went to places with the fastball that we like.”

Gifted a 4-0 lead before taking the mound in the first, Eovaldi took some time to settle in at Tropicana Field. He allowed a run in each of the first three innings but was able to escape without suffering further damage before Boston added insurance and went up, 6-3, in the fourth.

“Especially to last that long after the first three innings, I felt like I was kind of running the pitch count up early,” Eovaldi said. “Any time you put up four runs early, you just want to keep that lead and go as deep into the ballgame as you can. I was able to settle down and do that today.”

Eovaldi improved to 2-0 on the season as the Sox won, 7-4. It was his first win in 10 starts.

Eovaldi has been one of Boston’s greatest disappointments all year, failing to live up to the expectations set for him by his brilliant performance last October and subsequent big contract. But he has made strides over the last month, posting a 3.86 ERA over four outings before struggling in four innings against the Giants on Tuesday at Fenway Park.

Four out of Eovaldi’s last five outings have been positive. The righty threw 100 pitches against the Rays, marking the climax of a month-long buildup as he worked his way back from the bullpen to the rotation.

Eovaldi’s next start will be a chance to end the season positively before moving into the second year of his contract.

“I asked him how he feels for the next one and he said he wanted it,” Cora said. “He wants to build off this one. That’s a good sign. Physically, he’s in a good place. That’s a good lineup. They loaded up with all those lefties. He did an outstanding job. It’s good to see him finishing the season strong.”

Eovaldi echoed that sentiment.

“Building off the game today and going into this next one, I want to finish strong,” he said. “I feel like i’ve missed so much time as it is now. Finishing on a strong note and go into the offseason focused on next year, being healthy and picking up where we left off.”

Nathan Eovaldi goes six innings, Boston Red Sox beat Rays, 7-4

Chris Cotillo

Sunday’s strong outing might amount to a moral victory in what has been a lost season for Red Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi.

Eovaldi made his longest start since April 17-- allowing three runs in six innings-- and took home the win a 7-3 Red Sox victory over the Rays. It was just the second quality start of the season for Eovaldi, who missed more than three months after undergoing elbow surgery and spent another month pitching out of the bullpen.

Boston gave Eovaldi an early cushion, plating four runs in the first inning on a J.D. Martinez RBI single and Christian Vazquez three-run homer. Tampa Bay chipped away at the lead with single runs in each of the next three innings, crawling within one on Joey Wendle’s solo shot in the third.

Boston then added to its lead in the fourth when the Rays got sloppy, scoring on a Martinez walk and a wild pitch from reliever Andrew Kittredge to go up 6-3. Martinez scored on an error in the seventh to make it 7-3.

The Rays threatened briefly in the seventh, putting two runners on with two outs against lefty Darwinson Hernandez. Righty Colten Brewer got Tommy Pham to ground out to end the inning.

Rays two-way player Brendan McKay hit his first career homer off Trevor Kelley in the ninth.

Eovaldi struck out six in his longest start since April 17. The righty will likely make his final start of the year Friday at Fenway Park.

Martinez and Vazquez each had multiple hits for the Sox, who snapped a two-game losing streak to improve to 81-74. They'll face the Rays one more time in the series finale Monday with Jhoulys Chacin starting opposite lefty Blake Snell.

Benintendi returns to field

Left fielder Andrew Benintendi, who was removed from Friday's game with a thumb contusion, entered as a defensive replacement in the ninth inning.

How Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora plans to attack his long offseason visiting players and preaching a cohesive culture

Chris Cotillo

Faced with a much longer offseason than he had a year ago, Red Sox manager Alex Cora plans on making the most of it.

Cora, whose team will miss the postseason for the first time since 2015 after being mathematically eliminated from the wild card race Friday, plans on visiting multiple players during the winter and hosting others at his home in Puerto Rico. After spending time with his family at the beginning of October, he plans to embark on a tour during which he'll see many of his players before spring training.

"(My family) knows we'll be flying all over the place or people will be flying to visit us," Cora said. "I think they like that part of it. (Players can) come to the island and work out, hang out. There are going to be certain groups that we're going to visit and we're going to get better"

After winning the World Series on Oct. 28 last year, the Sox only had about 15 weeks of downtime before pitchers and catchers were due to report to spring training. This year, they'll have an extra month to recover and prepare.

Cora identified a few players who he plans on keeping close tabs on this winter. He might meet with breakout star Rafael Devers in the Dominican Republic and considers underperforming outfielder Andrew Benintendi to be at the top of his offseason visit list. Rookie pitchers like Travis Lakins and Mike Shawaryn will be monitored closely. Infielders Michael Chavis and Marco Hernandez will both play winter ball; Chavis in Cora's hometown of Caguas and Hernandez in the Dominican Republic.

"From workout programs to nutrition to working on their fastballs up or whatever. It's going to be interesting," Cora said. "I'm not saying we're going all football-style structure. The way the game is going, we have to be on top of it. You have to be. If you don't pay attention to them in the offseason, they might gain a few pounds and then they're behind. I'll be all over the place."

Part of Cora's mission will be to get everyone in the organization on the same page in terms of approach and preparation. He feels Boston got away from a cohesive culture at times this season.

"As a whole, from top to bottom, we have to do a better job (communicating) what we want at the big-league level," Cora said. "From Boston all the way to the Dominican Summer League, you need to stick to the approach. That's the way you maintain a winning culture and you're successful at the big-league level."

An example of that change is in the team's offensive preparation, Cora said. Entering his third season at the helm, the manager hopes to build a more collaborative relationship between the organization and some of his hitters' personal swing coaches.

"We're in an era that all these guys have their hitting guys and swing coaches and all that. There has to be a balance, too," Cora said. "(Hitting coaches Tim Hyers and Andy Barkett) have to be on top of them and know what's going on.

“That’s another aspect of the game where we have to be with them,” he added. “We respect that because they’re doing everything to get better, but at the same time, they’re our players. We want our players to do certain things.”

Cora doesn’t believe the Sox are far off from being a top contender in the American League once again. He realizes there are certain adjustments that need to be made for that to become a reality.

“It’s nothing major,” he said. “It’s not that we feel like we have to redo things or do things differently. But at the same time, there’s a few things.”

David Price surgery: Boston Red Sox lefty to have wrist cyst removed Thursday

Chris Cotillo

Red Sox left-hander David Price will undergo minor surgery to have a cyst removed from his left wrist Thursday, manager Alex Cora said before Sunday’s game.

Price will fly back to Boston on Monday and meet with a specialist before the surgery. The lefty has pitched just two innings since the TFCC (triangular fibrocartilage complex) cyst was discovered during an MRI in early August after he felt tightness in the area.

Price originally went on the injured list Aug. 8 and was shut down for three weeks before returning for a two-inning start in Anaheim on Sept. 2. He felt tightness in the days after that outing and was held out of the rotation until the Sox made the decision to shut him down for the season last week.

Having the procedure to remove the cyst will allow Price to get an early start on his offseason work.

“We just want to get it over and for him to start the offseason, quote-unquote, the right way,” Cora said. “He has a week or whatever to start taking care of himself and start doing what he needs.”

The expectation is that Price will be able to have a normal offseason after recovering for the procedure and that he’ll be ready for spring training. The cyst has affected Price’s grip on offspeed pitches this season and the team believes it contributed to his struggles in July and August.

Cora expects the procedure to be a simple one.

“Obviously, you never know. They might go in there and find something else,” he said. “As of now, everything seems like we’ll take care of the cyst and he should be fine. I don’t know what the recovery time is. They’re going to talk in the next few days. It seems like it’s something simple.”

Price, 34, was 7-5 with a 4.28 ERA in 22 starts this season. He has three years and \$96 million remaining on the 7-year, \$217 million contract he signed with Boston before the 2016 season.

*** *RedSox.com***

Eovaldi gets first win of the season as starter

Ian Browne

That was the Nathan Eovaldi the Red Sox have been looking for.

Powerful and in control, the righty pitched Boston to a 7-4 victory over the postseason-hunting Rays on Sunday afternoon at Tropicana Field.

This was Eovaldi’s first win in the 11 starts he’s made this season.

“My fastball location felt really good,” said Eovaldi. “I started elevating the fastball up and Juan [Centeno] back there behind the plate, I felt like he did a really good job calling the game. He’s been catching my bullpens and things like that, using the curveball with the high fastball started to play a lot better.”

Things have been disjointed in 2019 for the righty, who had elbow surgery in April and then tried to get comfortable in an unfamiliar bullpen role when he returned in July and was slow to get back in a groove once he became a starter again on Aug. 18.

Eovaldi generated 20 swings and misses in his 100 pitches -- the most whiffs he’s gotten in any outing since 2014.

“He did an outstanding job mixing up pitches,” said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. “Used the breaking ball a little bit more, especially in the second part of the outing. The fastball, he elevated a few pitches. They put some good swings, the first few at-bats and then after that, kind of went to places with the fastball. We liked where he went. He did an outstanding job.”

With Eovaldi owed a total of \$51 million over the next three seasons, it was crucial for the pitcher to show some progress, and for the Red Sox to see some entering the offseason.

It was with that in mind that Cora -- after Sunday’s game was over -- gave Eovaldi the option of skipping his final start of the regular season.

“I asked him how he feels for the next one,” said Cora. “He was like, ‘I want it. I want to build off this one.’ Those are good signs. Physically he’s in a good place. Tampa Bay has a good lineup, they loaded up with all those lefties. He did an outstanding job and it’s good to see him finishing the season strong.”

The quality start was Eovaldi’s first since April 17 -- his final start before surgery. In fact, it was the first time he was able to go six innings since then. He did so with a balanced arsenal that included 38 fastballs, 25 curveballs, 23 cutters, 10 splitters and four sliders.

Eovaldi did give up a run in each of his first three innings but finished strong with three straight zeros. He walked two and struck out six.

Mid-game, pitching coach Dana LeVangie helped Eovaldi with a mechanical adjustment that boosted his success for the rest of the day.

“Early on, he was a little quick through his delivery. Made a big-time adjustment, settled down, good tempo, good rhythm, mixed his pitches really effectively from [the] third inning on,” said LeVangie. “He used his breaking ball, was using his split, slowed down the hitters because they were attacking hard. A lot of foul balls. But once he was able to slow ‘em down, he took full command of that game. It was fun.”

Cora had been talking for weeks about how Eovaldi needed to do a better job of elevating with his fastball, so critical to his success last season. The way LeVangie explains it, even more went into Sunday’s turnaround.

“Elevation is good,” said LeVangie. “It plays. But the one thing that helps elevation is you have to get [the opposition] on something soft. You have to slow him down. You have to create some depth in the strike zone. Once he was able to, he really took off. Throwing strikes with the breaking ball early. Being able to change the eye level underneath the zone gets their eyes shifted down so it helps you pitch up.”

The Red Sox allowed him to pitch from ahead, as they jumped on Rays lefty Ryan Yarbrough for four runs in the first inning, including a three-run homer by Christian Vázquez.

Eovaldi will make his final start of the regular season on Friday night against the Orioles, hoping to build more momentum.

“Yeah, kind of building off the game today and going into this next one, I want to finish up [strong],” said Eovaldi. “I felt like I’ve missed so much time as it is now and I just want to be able to make every start that I can and finish on a strong note and go into the offseason and next year healthy and picking up where we left off.”

Price set to undergo wrist surgery on Thursday

Ian Browne

The discomfort David Price has dealt with in his left wrist for months should be completely gone by Spring Training.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora announced Sunday that Price will have surgery on the problematic wrist on Thursday in Boston. Matt Liebman, a team physician and hand specialist, will perform the surgery.

A cyst developed in Price’s wrist at some point in July and his performance took an immediate downturn when he tried to pitch through it. He pitched just two innings for the Red Sox after Aug. 4.

From the start of the season through July 14, Price was arguably the team’s most dependable starter, going 7-2 with a 3.16 ERA in 17 starts. In his final five starts, he was 0-3 with a 9.47 ERA.

Despite the surgery, Price should be able to have a fairly normal offseason.

“I think we just want to get it over with and for him to start the offseason, quote unquote, the right way,” Cora said. “He can start taking care of himself, be ready for next year.”

The Red Sox and Price will know for sure about a more specific recovery time once he undergoes the surgery. Price deferred commenting to the media until after the operation.

“Obviously you never know, you might go in there and find something else, but as of now, everything seems like, take care of the cyst and he should be fine,” Cora said. “I don’t know what the recovery timetable is, obviously they’re going to talk in the next few days, but it seems like it’s something simple and he should be OK throughout the offseason.”

Benny back Monday; Mookie gets a day

Originally, Cora mentioned that Andrew Benintendi might return to the lineup Sunday after exiting Friday’s game with a left thumb contusion. But the manager decided to play it safe and give his left fielder one more day.

“He’s OK actually,” said Cora. “He’s going to hit outside today a little bit, so he should be OK for tomorrow.”

Mookie Betts returned from a week-long absence with left foot inflammation by playing the first two games of this series, but was out of the lineup on Sunday. He did not have a setback.

“He’s OK, but we already had it planned out,” said Cora. “He’s playing tomorrow, playing the outfield I believe. He moved well, he almost made that play in right field, he ran the bases well, so he’s good.”

Hernandez will branch out in Winter Ball

Marco Hernandez already gives the Red Sox good versatility with the ability to play second, short and third. He will look to expand his horizons in Winter Ball, as Cora revealed Sunday that Hernandez will play some left field.

“He’s going to be introduced to left field. Actually I have to talk to the [Tigres del Licey] GM, I think it’s Junior Naboia if I’m not mistaken, the manager I know is Pedro Lopez,” said Cora. “I contacted them yesterday. Just for him to get a few games in left field. He’s athletic enough that I think we can move him around.”

*** ESPN.com**

Why nobody might want to be Boston's GM

Buster Olney

Ben Cherington followed Theo Epstein as general manager of the Boston Red Sox after the 2011 season, and over the next three years, the team fostered what might have been the best farm system in baseball. Matt Barnes, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Mookie Betts, all developed effectively, with infielder Xander Bogaerts just ahead of them.

Meanwhile, at the big league level, a series of short-term free-agent signings paid off, and the Red Sox won the 2013 World Series. For all of that success, Cherington was demoted in the summer of 2015 -- effectively fired as the head of baseball operations.

His replacement was Dave Dombrowski, who did the bidding of ownership and worked aggressively to augment the team, using assets from Cherington's fertile farm system and the team's substantial financial resources and adding Chris Sale, Craig Kimbrel, David Price and others. The Red Sox won the World Series in 2018, after 119 wins and arguably the greatest performance in franchise history. And less than a year later, Dombrowski was fired.

Two World Series titles in six years, and two executives -- with two very different personalities, operating very differently -- both dismissed. These decisions loosely frame the industry perception of the Red Sox as a chaotic company, a miserable place to work. Boston owner John Henry needs to understand this, because it is why some of the people he'd probably love to consider as possible replacements for Dombrowski privately dismiss the idea out of hand.

They saw what happened to Cherington. They saw what happened to Dombrowski.

In fact, a wide-held view in other front offices is that the highly respected and well-liked Red Sox president Sam Kennedy stands as a thin buffer between the team devolving to the level of the Mets, the team generally regarded by rival executives as baseball's model for dysfunction. "If Sam ever walked away," said one official, "the whole thing would be a complete mess."

The Red Sox will eventually hire somebody good for the job, and in theory, it's a great job -- running baseball operations for a wealthy team steeped in history and legacy, in an iconic market packed with passionate fans. When Henry's time as owner is completed, his tenure will be viewed as an extraordinary success -- the 2004 comeback and breakthrough championship, and the three titles that followed.

But in this time and place, highly qualified evaluators wave off the idea of working for Henry because they doubt that he'd have the patience to back his next general manager through the difficult crossroads ahead.

The Red Sox must make a hard and perhaps unpopular choice with Betts, their best player, who is eligible for free agency in the fall of 2020. They have to ride out the contracts of three veteran pitchers with daunting injury concerns -- David Price, Chris Sale and Nathan Eovaldi, who are owed about \$80 million combined for the next three seasons, obligations that will greatly restrict the team's other work.

Meanwhile, the Red Sox are surrounded by functionality in the AL East. The rival New York Yankees -- a team once renowned as the most chaotic, under George Steinbrenner's stewardship -- are run with almost complete symbiosis, from owner Hal Steinbrenner through GM Brian Cashman to Aaron Boone and his

staff. The Blue Jays are poised for progress, around a strong core of young position players. Even the Orioles have the ground floor of a long-term plan.

Henry needs to recognize that his franchise is extremely vulnerable in this moment, and if he yanks the steering wheel in different directions in the critical years ahead, impatiently ejecting chosen executives and plans along the way, he could spin the Red Sox right into the sort of hole that Steinbrenner drove the Yankees into in the mid-'80s. (It was only when Steinbrenner got out of the way and entrusted Gene Michael and Bill Livesey and others that the Yankees rebounded in the mid-'90s.)

Henry must somehow get his shop back to a place of equilibrium. Deferring to Kennedy through this process would be a good start, because it will be Kennedy who will have to convince leery candidates that it's possible that the Red Sox can be operated with confident circumspection. Right now, there is a mountain of doubt about that.

News from around the major leagues

Francisco Lindor & Co. face a hard road over the next week or so. Duane Burleson/Getty Images
The Yankees have been a model of resiliency this year, winning over 100 games in spite of a ridiculous, nonstop series of injuries. But the Cleveland Indians, who will face the Phillies on Sunday Night Baseball (6:30 p.m. Eastern start time) while in the midst of the American League's wild-card race, have contended under similar circumstances.

Cleveland (91-64) lost star shortstop Francisco Lindor for the first month. Only two starting pitchers have had more than 20 outings for them -- the emerging Shane Bieber, who is likely to finish third in the AL Cy Young Award voting, and Trevor Bauer, who was dealt away before the trade deadline. Corey Kluber, greatly limited by various injuries, has made just seven appearances this year and didn't fare well, with a 5.80 ERA. Mike Clevinger missed more than two months with an upper back strain. Danny Salazar's return lasted one outing.

Third baseman Jose Ramirez suffered a broken hamate bone and hasn't played since Aug. 24 -- although Ramirez took batting practice here Saturday afternoon and could be back in action as soon as Sunday night. Second baseman Jason Kipnis is out for the rest of the year, after he, too, broke a hamate bone. Bradley Zimmer, long viewed as the center fielder of the future, has two plate appearances this year. The Indians have fielded 11 different outfielders in 2019. All-Star closer Brad Hand has dealt with arm trouble lately, although he looked very good in relief Saturday, throwing his fastball as high as 94 mph, and spinning sharp sliders.

In spite of all that, the Indians could finish this season in the range of 95 wins, and perhaps make the playoffs. After Sunday night's game, they'll start a stretch on the road that could take them through as many as five cities -- Chicago and Washington, to face the White Sox and Nationals in the last games of the regular season; perhaps a play-in game against the Rays in St. Petersburg, possibly followed by a wild-card game in Oakland; and the first two games of the division series.

- Once the Indians complete their season, they will have a difficult decision with Kluber: They hold a \$17.5 million option on the two-time Cy Young Award winner, who turns 34 next April. Just last year, Kluber threw a league-high 215 innings with a 2.89 ERA, and he has reached the age when concerns grow about mileage and injuries.

The Indians will presumably decline their 2020 option on Kipnis, and choose instead to give him a \$2.5 million buyout. Lindor made \$10.85 million this year and will get a healthy raise through arbitration for 2020.

- John Middleton, the principal owner of the Phillies, has remained mostly silent as his team drifted late in this season, so it's unclear how he feels about its 2019 performance, and whether he attributes some of the inconsistency to injuries (Andrew McCutchen, Jake Arrieta, David Robertson, etc.), or if he has larger concerns. He has demonstrated a willingness to step in when he feels it's necessary -- he was the driving

force behind the pursuit of Bryce Harper in free agency, and the firing of hitting coach John Mallee and the temporary shift of Charlie Manuel into Mallee's former role.

While there has been a lot of speculation about the status of manager Gabe Kapler, but the relationship between Kapler and the front office is perceived to be rock-solid. The larger and more pertinent question that hangs over the team is how Middleton feels.

- If the late-season slide of the Chicago Cubs concludes with the team out of the playoffs for the first time since 2014, this will likely serve as the end of Joe Maddon's time with the team. But there may be other significant changes as well, with the front office pursuing ways to adjust the makeup of the roster.

Last winter, the Cubs made it clear to other teams for the first time that they were open to offers for third baseman Kris Bryant, but didn't get any traction toward a deal. They could push harder for a Bryant trade this winter, now that he's one year closer to free agency. Bryant is represented by agent Scott Boras, who almost always takes his clients into free agency, and Bryant could be eligible to hit the open market after the 2021 season.

Bryant is liked by teammates, but his trade value will never be higher than it is this winter, off a good season, and the simple matter is that the Cubs are looking for a different mix of players. Theo Epstein, the team's head of baseball ops, has been outspoken about what he considers to be a lack of urgency and attention to detail in the team's play. For example: The Cubs have lost more runners making outs on the bases than any team in baseball this year.

Among the Cubs with expiring contracts: left-hander Cole Hamels, relievers Brandon Morrow, Pedro Strop, Derek Holland and Steve Cishek and super-utilityman Ben Zobrist. The Cubs also hold a team-friendly option on left-hander Jose Quintana.

- Some agents who don't represent right-hander Zack Wheeler believe that the Mets will tender him a qualifying offer of \$18 million. If that happens, then Wheeler will have two choices -- accept the one-year deal before hitting the market again next fall, or reject it and be tied to draft-pick compensation as he goes into free agency.

If the Mets attempt to keep their current rotation into the start of the 2020 season -- Jacob deGrom, Marcus Stroman, Noah Syndergaard, Steven Matz and Wheeler (perhaps on that qualifying offer) -- it would cost them about \$75 million in salary.

- After a long summer of rehabilitation, Dellin Betances's big league season lasted all of two batters, before he partially tore an Achilles tendon. The timing could not be worse for him, within the context of the business side of baseball: Betances, 31, is a free agent this fall for the first time.

There are evaluators and agents who believe that Betances' best play at this point is to work out a one-year deal with some team, betting on himself to rebound in 2020, and then hit the market again next fall. Betances could seek opportunities to close with teams other than the Yankees, but considering how teams evaluate relievers these days -- let's face it, front offices just don't care about saves -- it will be more important for him to just get back to being a dominant late-inning force, regardless of whether it's in New York or some other club. Given his mileage, his 2019 injuries and the general volatility in reliever performances, evaluators will want to see a larger sample size of success from Betances.

During his career, Betances has averaged 14.6 strikeouts per nine innings, with a 2.36 ERA in 358 games. It will be interesting to see if the Mets, with a bullpen makeover to look forward to this winter, get involved in the bidding for Betances, who was born and raised in New York.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

For Red Sox in final week, playing hard is all that's left

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox are a frustrated bunch these days — or at least you hope they are.

Fresh off a 108-win season and World Series victory, they were supposed to be contenders, supposed to return the postseason, supposed to be getting a chance to defend their title.

As it turned out, none of those things happened. The starting rotation massively underperformed, then went down in a heap in the second half. The bullpen, overworked in the early going, took until the second half to begin locking down leads.

And so, the Red Sox limp to the finish line, having been officially eliminated late Friday night, but in reality, out of playoff contention for some time now.

The final two series of the season will see them squaring off against two other teams without anything to play for — first Texas on the road, then Baltimore at home.

And if you think the last month or so has been uninteresting, just wait until those series get underway. They'll closely resemble spring training games, with one key difference: in spring training, the best (presumably, at least) is still to come. There are expectations then, and in theory, your team still has a chance to surprise.

There will be no surprises in the final two series. In fact, there won't be a lot of interesting players. Anyone battling even a hint of physical issues will likely play sparingly, so don't expect the likes of Andrew Benintendi (thumb), Mookie Betts (foot) or J.D. Martinez (groin) to be lineup staples.

The same goes for younger pitchers who have already pitched more innings and deeper into the calendar year. That means Darwinzon Hernandez and Josh Taylor are close to being shut down for the remainder of this hugely disappointing season.

But for another game, the Red Sox get to make life miserable for a team that still has a chance to play in October. The Tampa Bay Rays are still fighting for the final wild card spot, and that presents the Red Sox with a chance to drag another team down to their level.

Misery loves company, and all that.

In the first two games, the Red Sox fought. On Friday night, they tied the game in the ninth and forced extra innings. On Saturday night, they tied it in the eighth to force extra innings, and then briefly took the lead in the top of the 11th.

That they ultimately lost both games is almost secondary. Whether the Red Sox finish with say, 84 or 86 wins won't matter a whit.

But they can at least hold their heads high when they leave St. Petersburg for Arlington, Tx. late Monday night. They can at least begin the truly insignificant portion of their schedule, knowing that they didn't roll over, or appear that they were more consumed by meeting their offseason tee times than they were in playing with some effort down the stretch.

There are times in recent weeks when, especially in "bullpen games," the Sox have been unwatchable. One reliever follows another in a steady march to the mound, giving the appearance of not just spring training games, but split-squad bullpen games.

But this weekend at Tropicana Field, there's at least been some context. Only the Rays are playing for something, but at least the Red Sox are providing competition, maintaining a slight bit of their dignity by playing hard, and as Alex Cora noted Friday night, "fighting."

In fact, this series serves as a tribute to Cora. He noted the importance of these games before the series started — not just for the Rays, but the Cleveland Indians and Oakland A's, too — and said the Sox would treat them with respect.

And they have. Extra-inning loss Friday. Extra-inning loss Saturday. A win on Sunday.

There's one more game of consequence remaining. After that, it gets murky.

This wasn't how the Red Sox season was supposed to play out. This certainly wasn't how it was supposed to wind down.

And pro athletes shouldn't be congratulated for exhibiting effort and treating the games with respect.

Still, the Sox have shown up and done all of that. Not since 2015 have the Sox been playing games without consequence in September, but at least they're playing them with conviction.

It's cold comfort for fans who are rightfully unhappy with how things have reached this point. But it beats the alternative.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 7, Rays 4 – Three things we learned

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox snapped a two-game losing streak with a 7-4 win over the Tampa Bay Rays. Here are three things we learned:

1 – After rough start, Eovaldi settles in

It didn't look good for Nathan Eovaldi in the early going. Through the first three innings, he had allowed six hits and a walk. Worse, he needed 66 pitches to get through those first three innings, and despite some early offensive backing — the Sox scored four runs in the first for him — it looked like it might be a short outing for Eovaldi. As usual, there were a ton of foul balls off Eovaldi and his inability to go deep into games was again looking like an issue.

But after the first three innings, Eovaldi began to make some adjustments — spotting his fastball better up in the zone and, thus, able to spot his curveball off that. He also made some mechanical adjustments with where he held his hands and glove, and the delivery was smoother. “The rhythm just felt better,” he said. Hard to believe, but this qualified as his first win as a starter this season and the six innings matched his longest outing since April. It's too late to make this an impressive season for Eovaldi, but with one more outing later this week, he has a chance to go into the off-season on a strong note.

2 – Martinez looks more like himself

J.D. Martinez returned to the lineup Saturday night after missing a handful of games with a slight groin strain, and it wasn't surprising that he looked out of sorts at the plate, going 0-for-5 with four strikeouts. It's understandable that he would feel a little rusty in the box. But that changed Sunday and Martinez looked more like himself with three singles and a bases loaded walk in five plate appearances. The first single in the first inning produced one RBI and the bases-loaded walk in the fourth led to another, giving him 99 for the season. With seven more games remaining, Martinez stands an excellent chance of finishing with 100 RBI and enjoying his fourth season of 35 or more homers and 100 or more RBI and third in a row, the last two with the Red Sox. If he can finish with his batting average over .300, he would also become just the 20th player since 1920 to have three straight seasons of hitting .300 with at least 35 homers and at least 100 RBI. He's currently hitting .302.

3 – Vazquez adds to his best season

Every time Christian Vazquez puts the ball in play, it seems, he helps set a new career high. His three-run homer in the first — No. 22 — gave Eovaldi and the Red Sox a big lead right out of the gate, and his RBI total climbed to 69, also a career high. And still, Vazquez wasn't done, stroking two more singles over his remaining four plate appearances, boosting his average to .274. At a time when teams are looking for offense at every position on the field, the Red Sox now have a dependable power bat behind the plate, giving them the kind of run production they haven't had from the catcher's spot since the first three years of Jarrod Saltalamacchia's time in Boston, when he averaged 18 homers and almost 57 RBI per season. And as added bonus, Vazquez continues to look engaged and capable at first base, when the Sox move him there to save his body a bit while still reaping the benefits of having him in the middle of the lineup.

*** *The Tampa Bay Times***

Tampa Bay Rays fall in a sleepy loss to Boston

Joey Johnston

Six games to go.

For the Rays, involved in a tight race to the postseason, every one of them has urgency.

Yes, Sunday afternoon's 7-4 defeat against the Red Sox seemed deflating for the announced crowd of 17,946 at Tropicana Field. But that sensation must fade — quickly. The Rays spring back into action for Monday night's finale to the four-game series before welcoming the Yankees for the regular season's final two home games.

"We're going to lose at some point and it's disappointing," Rays third baseman Joey Wendle said. "You never want to lose when you're in a race like this (but) we're right in the thick of it."

The Rays (92-64) woke up Monday tied with the Cleveland Indians for the second American League wild-card spot. The Indians beat the Phillies 10-1 Sunday night to even the race.

After a pair of late-night electrifying walk-off extra-inning victories, the Rays lost Sunday by early walkover after left-hander Ryan Yarbrough was ambushed in a four-run first inning.

"All in all, it was really frustrating," said Yarbrough (11-5), who lost back-to-back decisions for the first time in his career while yielding six runs in his second straight start. "At the time of year, it shouldn't be happening, especially where we're at right now in the race."

Yarbrough surrendered six hits in the first inning, including a three-run homer by Christian Vazquez, and trailed 4-0.

The Rays tried to make a game of it, chipping away with single runs in each of the first three innings, including a second-inning RBI single by Kevin Kiermaier (ending a career-high 0-for-22 slump) and a third-inning solo homer by Wendle.

But Yarbrough, suddenly within 4-3, still couldn't hold down the Red Sox. He was lifted in the fourth after allowing a leadoff double to Jackie Bradley Jr. and walking Rafael Devers.

Reliever Andrew Kittredge made things worse by hitting Xander Bogaerts with his first pitch, loading the bases, then walking J.D. Martinez to force in a run. The sloppiness continued when Devers scored on a wild pitch. In the seventh, the Red Sox scored their final run on Wendle's two-out fielding error.

Overall, the Rays had only four runners in scoring position. They couldn't do much against Red Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi (2-0) and five relievers.

There was a magnificent sight to witness in the ninth when two-way player Brendan McKay blasted a 420-foot pinch-hit solo homer off the Trop's rightfield "D" ring.

"We know he's really talented, whether he's on the mound or in the batter's box," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "He put a charge into one."

"It looked like early on he couldn't execute pitches when he got ahead," Cash said. "He got ahead of guys, but just couldn't put them away."

"A couple of soft hits in there, but then Vazquez comes up with the big blow to separate the game early on. He was falling behind when he got ahead and didn't have the finishing pitch. Ideally, that's not going to set you up for too strong of an outing."

Yarbrough is winless (0-2) in his last seven starts (beginning Aug. 17) with a 5.45 ERA over that stretch.

"Just got to put it behind (us) and get back at it," Yarbrough said.

"You move on to the next one," Wendle said.

From momentary deflation back to the customary urgency of a postseason race.

That's life for the Rays.

Six games to go.

*** *Associated Press***

Eovaldi, Vazquez help Red Sox beat contending Rays 7-4

A former teammate created a speed bump for the playoff-contending Tampa Bay Rays.

Nathan Eovaldi pitched six gritty innings, Christian Vazquez hit a three-run homer and the Boston Red Sox beat the Rays 7-4 Sunday.

Tampa Bay dropped into a tie with Cleveland for the second AL wild card, and both teams trail Oakland by two games for the top spot. The Rays won the first two games of the series by identical 5-4 scores in 11 innings.

"Every loss now you've got to find a way to bounce back," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "Eventually you do run out of mulligans. We're not there but we've got to make sure we don't get to that point."

The defending World Series champion Red Sox were eliminated from postseason play Friday night.

Eovaldi (2-0) gave up three runs and seven hits in picking up his first win as a starter since last Sept. 24. The right-hander had elbow surgery to remove a loose body in late April and has been building up innings over the last month.

"I want to finish strong," Eovaldi said. "I feel like I've missed so much time as it is now."

Eovaldi was traded by Tampa Bay to Boston in late July 2018 and won both his playoff starts and ended up with an 1.61 ERA in six overall appearances.

"Did an outstanding job," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said. "Good to see him finishing the season strong."

Boston designated hitter J.D. Martinez drove in two runs and is one RBI away from his third consecutive and fourth overall season of at least 35 homers and 100 RBI.

Rays two-way player Brendan McKay got his first major league homer on a solo shot off Trevor Kelley as a pinch-hitter in the ninth.

"My family was here today," McKay said. "They came down, I think, last night and decided to come to a game today and they ultimately get to see it. Exciting."

Martinez had an RBI single and Vazquez hit his homer off Ryan Yarbrough (11-5) as Boston went up 4-0 in the first.

Vazquez has 22 homers in 133 games this year. He went deep 10 times over 291 games during his first four seasons.

The Rays scored a run in each of the first three innings off Eovaldi, including Joey Wendle's third-inning homer, to get within 4-3.

Boston took a 6-3 lead in the fourth when Andrew Kittredge replaced Yarbrough with one-out and walked Martinez with the base loaded and later threw a wild pitch.

Yarbrough allowed six runs and eight hits in 3 1/3 innings.

"All-in-all, very frustrating today," Yarbrough said.

Tampa Bay All-Star second baseman Brandon Lowe, out since July 3 with a bruised right shin and later strained left quadriceps, was reinstated from the 60-day injured list and went 1 for 3 with a walk.

PREPARING FOR 2020

Cora plans to have a busy offseason working with his players in a number of areas like on-base percentage and cutting down on strikeouts. "We have to keep adjusting," Cora said. "Be better at certain aspects and we'll be back."

KIERMAIER HITS

Rays CF Kevin Kiermaier was mired in an 0 for 22 skid before getting an RBI single in the second. He was hit on the left forearm-wrist area by an Eovaldi pitch during the fourth but stayed in the game

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: LHP David Price will have surgery Thursday to remove a cyst in his left wrist but is expected to be ready for spring training next year. ... OF Mookie Betts, who played the previous two days after missing a week due to left foot inflammation, had a scheduled day off. ... OF Andrew Benintendi (jammed left thumb) was out of the lineup for the second straight game but could start Monday.

Rays: OF Avisail Garcia, who left Friday's game with vertigo-type symptoms, is now experiencing just slight discomfort.

UP NEXT

Rays LHP Blake Snell (6-7) will make his second start Monday night since surgery July 29 to remove bone chips in his throwing elbow against Boston RHP Jhoulys Chacin (3-11).