

The Boston Red Sox Tuesday, September 24, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Mookie Betts on his amazing assist: 'I didn't know I could do that'

Julian McWilliams

It was the best throw Mookie Betts ever made, he acknowledged.

It happened in the bottom of the sixth inning of Monday night's game against the Tampa Bay Rays. With Ji-Man Choi on second, the Rays' Avisail Garcia laced an RBI double down the right-field line.

But Garcia got greedy. He headed for third.

"I saw Garcia rounding second and [Mookie] had the ball already," manager Alex Cora said afterward. "It seemed like the intention was to do that."

Betts, from a step off the foul line in the right-field corner, let fly and hit third baseman Rafael Devers, who applied the tag.

"I've never seen a throw that far on the money," Cora said. "It was a good one."

Said Betts: "I didn't know I could do that. It's fun to kind of do stuff you didn't know you could do.

"I was talking to [the Rays'] bullpen. They looked at me and I was like, 'I don't know.' "

On the hit, the bounce worked in Betts's favor. The ball ricocheted off the wall in front of Betts, allowing him to work through it with some momentum. If it was a softer bounce, Betts wouldn't have had that slight running start. Also, Betts shrewdly barehanded the ball, wasting no time in having to transfer the ball to his glove.

"It was kind of like Jackie [Bradley Jr.] last year against the Minnesota Twins [in June]," Cora said. "You look and you're like, 'No way. Is [Garcia] actually thinking this?' Yeah, he thought it and it will be all over the highlights all week.

"It was a great throw," Bradley said. "I remember him doing a play like two years ago. He proved it once again he's elite."

The run scored by Choi on the play made it 7-4, the eventual final. The Rays have a half-game lead over the Indians for the second wild-card spot.

Red Sox starter Jhoulys Chacin worked three innings of scoreless ball, striking out four batters. That all ended in the fourth, with him holding a 4-0 lead.

Chacin struck out Tommy Pham. He then surrendered singles to Austin Meadows and Travis d'Arnaud, and, after falling behind, 2 and 0, Choi belted a three-run homer.

Chacin got Garcia to ground out for the second out, but again, he fell behind in the count. This time it was to Brandon Lowe, who sent a 3-and-1 offering into the right-field bleachers to tie the game at 4. Catcher Sandy Leon wanted the ball low and away, but Chacin missed middle in.

Cora called on Bobby Poyner, who hit Kevin Kiermaier with a pitch and then allowed a long two-run homer to Willy Adames, which capped the six-run inning.

J.D. Martinez recorded his 100th RBI of the season in the fourth, giving the slugger 35 homers and 100 RBIs for three consecutive seasons. If Martinez's batting average stays above .300, he would become only the 20th player to hit .300-plus with 35-plus homers and 100-plus RBIs in three consecutive seasons. The most recent was Albert Pujols in 2010 while a member of the St. Louis Cardinals.

But the talk afterward was of the throw by Betts.

"There was nobody who was going to be on-base," said Betts, who knew he was going straight through to third with the throw the entire time. "I think that was the only way there was to get him out."

Once again, Jackie Bradley Jr. went missing at the plate

Julian McWilliams

Monday's version of Jackie Bradley Jr. was the type of offense both Bradley and the Red Sox wanted this year.

In the Sox' 7-4 loss to the Rays, Bradley went 3 for 4 with an RBI and a run scored. Monday was just a snapshot, though. For Bradley, it was another season of failure at the plate.

There's little doubt, he's the best defensive center fielder in baseball — perhaps in the conversation about the best in history — but the offensive production has been bumpy.

Bradley spent the offseason with well-known hitting coach Craig Wallenbrock, who helped turn J.D. Martinez into one of the best hitters in baseball. Bradley was coming off a season where he hit .234 with just 13 homers and a .717 OPS. He needed a shift in the way he was doing things.

But entering Monday, Bradley's batting average was just .221, his lowest since 2014, when he hit .198. He had 20 homers this season, but he had a career-high 147 strikeouts.

"Everybody knows it, when he's hot, he's hitting the ball the other way," manager Alex Cora said before the Sox' final game against the Tampa Bay Rays. "When he's not, he swing-and-misses and ground-balls to the right side. It's not for a lack of trying. I read stories about swing coaches and all that and how great they are, but for every successful story, there are those that don't work. Nobody talks about those."

Entering Monday, Bradley posted a 14.16 swing-and-miss rate, a career mark. In a 140-game span this season, Bradley actually went to the opposite field 24 percent of the time (up from last season's 20.5 percent), but Bradley often tries to pull outside pitches, resulting in a career-worst 50.8 percent groundball rate.

"He needs to be an athlete. That's the most important thing," Cora said. "When he's at the plate and is an athlete, he goes the other way. That's something we'll look at. I know he's frustrated with the way things went this year. One thing about him is he's not going to back out. He's going to keep continuing."

Hembree activated

Heath Hembree officially went to the injured list for the second time in 2019 on Aug. 2. Hembree had been dealing with right lateral elbow inflammation.

It was the first of many hits for the Red Sox. The Red Sox were in the midst of an eight-game losing streak. Shortly after, David Price went to the IL, too, as did Chris Sale as the Sox' season continued its downward spiral.

Even though the Sox' season will end Sunday, Hembree returned from the IL Monday. For the 30-year-old righthander, having peace of mind knowing he had some outings under his belt is important to him.

"I want to go into the offseason healthy, knowing I was healthy," Hembree said. "I felt like pitching a couple of games here in the last week of the season."

Cora targeted the upcoming series against the Texas Rangers for Hembree's return, but he used him during the seventh inning Monday. Hembree worked a 1-2-3 inning

"I feel like myself," Hembree said before the game. "I'm back to where I wanted to be and the level of competitiveness I want to be at. I feel good. I feel like the [platelet-rich plasma] injection did its job. We took our time and checked off the boxes."

Mixing and matching

Andrew Benintendi (thumb) was available off the bench, but Cora played the matchup game with the Rays' Blake Snell on the mound . . . Cora is close to shutting down rookie reliever Darwinzon Hernandez . . . With his fourth-inning RBI single, Martinez recorded his fourth season with 35 homers and 100 RBIs. He became the ninth Red Sox player to reach those totals in multiple years, joining David Ortiz, Manny Ramirez, Mo Vaughn, Tony Armas, Jim Rice, Carl Yastrzemski, Ted Williams, and Jimmie Foxx.

Facing free agency, Mitch Moreland determined to enjoy end of his run in Boston

Peter Abraham

There are plenty of statistics, traditional or advanced, that can give you a good sense of a baseball player's worth and Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland pays attention to a few of them.

But one indicator occurred to him just a few days ago that felt particularly meaningful.

This season marks the first time in his major league career that Moreland has played meaningless games in September.

"This is definitely different for me," he said. "I'm used to playing right up until the last game with something on the line. It's not a good feeling."

Moreland played for five postseason teams during his seven years with the Texas Rangers. In 2013, the Rangers missed the wild card by one game after a furious September charge.

The Rangers lost 95 games in 2014 but Moreland had season-ending ankle surgery in June.

In three seasons with the Sox, Moreland was an important member of two postseason teams and had an .898 OPS in 11 playoff games last fall for the World Series champions.

Moreland's 48 career postseason games are tied for 11th most among active players.

"My goal has always been to win and help my team do that in any way I can," Moreland said before the Tampa Bay Rays beat the Red Sox, 7-4, on Monday night. "Everything else is part of that.

"The goal is always to win the World Series and we did that. Obviously last year was special and this year we came up short. But, absolutely, I feel like I've succeeded here."

For Alex Cora, a rookie manager in 2018, Moreland was a valuable conduit to the clubhouse.

“He was important, very important,” Cora said. “I played with him [briefly in 2010 with Texas] and knew him coming into the situation . . . For all the positives last year, there were a few things that we had to work on in the clubhouse and on the field, and he helped me out.

“He understands where I’m coming from and I know he works, how he operates, and what kind of teammate he is. It’s been gratifying. I’m a big fan of his.”

Moreland learned the importance of leadership from Texas teammates Adrian Beltre and Michael Young during his first few seasons in the majors.

“Early in your career you don’t think about that. You’re looking for somebody to help you. But as you get on, you learn to appreciate your experiences and try to pass that on,” Moreland said.

“I would like to say I’ve played the game the right way throughout my career. Kept my head down and worked hard. I’ve enjoyed every part of it.”

Moreland’s two-year, \$13 million contract ends after the season and he will return to free agency at the age of 34.

Moreland is prepared for what figures to be a difficult transition given the cold reception aging hitters have received the last two winters.

“It was bad the last two times I went into free agency and I came out of it with a job,” Moreland said. “I’m not really worried about it yet. I just want to enjoy this last week with these guys. It’s a great group. I’ll worry about the rest when I get there.”

Moreland has an .827 OPS, 18 home runs and 56 RBIs over 57 games, having missed nearly two months with a quad strain.

The Sox are more likely to look for a younger and cheaper alternative at first base, perhaps Michael Chavis or Bobby Dalbec with 19-year-old former first-round pick Triston Casas on the horizon.

The coming months could be anxious ones for Moreland. He has nine years and 67 days of major league service time, just shy of the 10 years every player aspires to. Fewer than 100 active players have reached that mark.

“Is 10 years my final goal? No. But it definitely would be an accomplishment,” Moreland said. “Not a lot of players can say they’ve done that.”

There are practical considerations, too. Ten years of service time fully vests a player in the pension plan. That guarantees from \$68,000 to \$220,000 a year depending on what age you start to collect.

For now, Moreland will soak in what are likely his final days with the Sox. Three of those games will be back at Globe Life Park in Texas starting on Tuesday. Then it’s back to Fenway Park.

“Just try to enjoy it,” Moreland said. “It’s been fun. I just want to enjoy it and worry about the rest later.”

Red Sox promote from within to fill top scouting role, naming Mike Rikard VP

Alex Speier

While the Red Sox have yet to determine who will lead their baseball operations department, they nonetheless are embracing the idea of change among the decision-makers.

On Monday, the Sox announced changes within their scouting operations department. With senior vice president of baseball operations Frank Wren and special assistant Eddie Bane having been let go last week,

the team is elevating Mike Rikard — formerly the VP of amateur scouting who directed the team’s draft efforts since 2015 — to the position of vice president of scouting.

Rikard will enjoy an expanded profile, remaining involved in the draft but also heavily scouting the system. In so doing, the organization hopes for greater perspective in its evaluations, given the opportunity to put eyes on players from the time of their amateur careers through their time in the minors.

Additionally, Rikard will be involved in virtually every facet of the organization’s scouting efforts — including international amateur and professional scouting.

With Rikard’s portfolio broadening, the Red Sox will elevate Paul Toboni, the assistant director of amateur scouting, to amateur scouting director. Toboni, a graduate of UC Berkeley (where his playing career was cut short by injuries) and the MBA program at Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business, has been assistant director of amateur scouting since November 2016. Prior to that, he spent a year as a Red Sox area scout in North Texas and North Louisiana.

Devin Pearson, also a UC Berkeley grad who has been in the Red Sox scouting department since 2017, was elevated to the position of assistant director of amateur scouting.

The team announced other promotions, among them the elevation of North Florida area scout Stephen Hargett — whose signees in recent years have included 2015 eighth-rounder Logan Allen and 14th-rounder Bobby Poyner, 2016 third-rounder Shaun Anderson, and 2018 fifth-rounder Thad Ward — to a regional cross-checker position.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Mookie Betts makes highlight-reel play with ridiculous throw from right field

Steve Hewitt, *The Boston Herald*

When Avisail Garcia hit a pitch down the line that hit off the wall and rolled away from Mookie Betts, it didn’t look like the Red Sox right-fielder had much of a chance to make a play as Garcia rounded second base and headed for third.

But Betts gave it a shot anyway. He picked the ball up fast and fired a throw from the warning track.

“You look and you’re like, ‘No way. Is he actually thinking this?’” Alex Cora said.

What followed was one of the best defensive plays of the Red Sox season and Betts’ career. He threw a seemingly impossible dime that never touched the ground, right on the money to Rafael Devers, who tagged the sliding Garcia for the first out in the sixth inning of Monday night’s eventual 7-4 loss to the Rays at Tropicana Field.

“That’s probably the best throw I’ve ever thrown.” Betts said.

The throw went an estimated 305 feet from the spot in the warning track to third base. After making the play, Betts turned to the nearby Rays bullpen and shrugged his shoulders. It surprised even him.

“I didn’t know I could do that,” Betts said. “It’s fun to kind of do stuff that you didn’t know you could do.

“I was talking to their bullpen. They looked at me and I was like, ‘I don’t know.’ So, whatever.”

At first, Betts said he was just trying to get to the ball as fast as he could to prevent Garcia from attempting to go to third. But when that didn’t happen, he figured he’d give it a shot. No one else was on base — Garcia’s hit actually scored a run — so it was worth trying.

Jackie Bradley Jr., who's made his share of incredible plays in the outfield, was just as impressed.

"He proved once again that he's elite," Bradley Jr. said.

Cora has been around baseball for a long time, but the play provided even a first for him.

"I've never seen a throw from that far right on the money," Cora said. "It was a good one."

Red Sox finish season 7-12 against Rays with loss

Steve Hewitt

Alex Cora saw the difference between the Rays and his Red Sox when the former took three out of four at Fenway Park in early June.

"Right now, they're better than us," the manager said then, also including the Yankees and Astros in that belief. "And we've got to keep getting better."

The Red Sox, though, never got better. And as they took a huge step back in an underwhelming season that will end with this Sunday's regular-season finale, they were never any match for the playoff-bound teams in their division.

This past weekend put a bow on that. Behind three fourth-inning homers, the Rays won another series against the Red Sox, taking three out of four at Tropicana Field with a 7-4 victory on Monday night. The Rays, who moved a half-game up on the Indians for the second wild-card spot, drew just 8,779 fans for the game.

"They have a good team," Cora said of the Rays. "We talked about it last year. Last year they finished strong and there were a lot of positives. ..."

"It's a complete team. They have a good bullpen and obviously they've been playing solid the whole time."

With the loss, the Red Sox (81-75) finished 7-12 this season against the Rays. They went 5-14 against the Yankees, making for a .316 winning percentage against the two teams above them in the AL East.

The Red Sox were actually cruising and looked to be on their way to a series split, jumping out to a 4-0 lead behind an RBI double from Jackie Bradley Jr. — his second extra-base hit in as many days — and RBI singles from Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez.

Then the fourth inning happened.

Jhoulys Chacin no-hit the Rays through 3⅓ innings — which included a four-pitch second inning — but it quickly unraveled for the veteran right-hander. He gave up back-to-back singles to Austin Meadows and Travis d'Arnaud before Ji-Man Choi smashed a mislocated slider to center for a three-run homer.

Two batters later, he served up a solo shot to Brandon Lowe, and he quickly got the hook from Cora.

"It just happened fast," Cora said. "I don't know if he hit the wall. He hasn't been extended. But we felt his stuff was good and we were shooting for four and it just didn't happen."

Bobby Poyner couldn't do much better, though, hitting Kevin Kiermaier with a pitch before Willy Adames had no problem blasting an 88 mph fastball to the left-field seats.

The six-run fourth was all the Rays needed. They added another in the sixth when Avisail Garcia doubled to the right-field corner, but Mookie Betts made one of the Red Sox' plays of the year as he tried to stretch

it to a triple. Betts fired the ball from the warning track in the corner and made a perfect throw to Devers to gun down Garcia.

The Red Sox have six games remaining in the regular season, with three in Texas against the Rangers starting Tuesday before they come for three against the Orioles this weekend. Despite the results, he liked what he saw this weekend and hopes they can finish the right way.

“I like the fact we’re going out there and competing, putting good at-bats and being relentless.” Cora said. “We had first and third with no outs in the last inning against one of the best closers in the game so I do feel we played through until the finish line and that’s what you want. This is your job. We don’t owe it to anybody, only to the fans and we’re doing a good job.”

Red Sox pull for Eduardo Rodriguez as he closes in on 20 wins

Steve Hewitt

Rick Porcello saw the first signs of Eduardo Rodriguez’ special season on the first day of spring training.

Porcello has been teammates with Rodriguez since he entered the league in 2015. Rodriguez had pitched four seasons with the Red Sox that showcased his potential but were too often derailed by inconsistency. He was entering a critical fifth year and acted like it.

“His first bullpen, he didn’t miss a spot,” Porcello recalled of that first day in spring training. “He came in, he looked great physically, his command and everything was exceptional from the first day on, and you could see there was a little something different about his focus this year.”

The rise of Rodriguez, who has been far and away the Red Sox’ best starter this season, has been well-documented, and he has a chance to put an emphatic stamp on it this week.

With an 18-6 record and two starts remaining — tonight at Texas and Sunday’s season finale at home against the Orioles — Rodriguez can become the first Red Sox pitcher since Porcello in 2016 to win 20 games. Even more importantly to him, he’s 8 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings away from eclipsing 200 this season, once an unimaginable feat for a pitcher who long struggled going deep into games.

Rodriguez’ growth into a reliable and consistent big league starter has been one of the coolest stories of the season, and it’s been a treat for his teammates to watch.

“I’ve been here since he got to the big leagues, and to watch his entire progression and put out the year that he’s having, he’s worked his tail off to stay healthy and really refine all of his pitches, it’s been so much fun to watch,” Porcello said. “We’re really pulling for him. He’s been one of the really bright spots of our team this year, and we want to see him go out there and hit those milestones because if there’s anybody in this clubhouse that deserves some of those accolades, it’s him.”

Rodriguez, whose previous seasons have been wrecked by injuries, avoided getting hurt this season, which has allowed him to flourish. But that hasn’t been the only difference.

“Maturity, too,” Porcello said of the 26-year-old Rodriguez. “It’s hard to pitch in the big leagues, it’s hard to learn how to be a starting pitcher, especially at the young age he came up. Just watching his development and understanding himself, understand what he needs to do on and off the field to prepare and take the ball every fifth day, he’s really handled everything extremely well.”

Some might scoff at pitchers’ wins as a stat that doesn’t necessarily accurately reflect performance, but as Rodriguez pursues that number, the Red Sox believe there’s merit. Alex Cora acknowledged there are other factors at play that affect win totals, but to be in position to win 20 means Rodriguez did a lot of things right.

Porcello agrees. The righty, who was 22-4 in his 2016 Cy Young-winning season, said it speaks volumes about his durability.

“It’s a huge deal,” Porcello said. “First of all, you see it nowadays where half the battle is just trying to get guys to go out there and take the ball 20 times. If he’s in line to win 20 games, not many guys in the league have been there the entire year to hit that kind of a mark. So for him to be in that position, it’s a huge deal. It’s really important, especially for us.

“Yeah, it’s a tough stat to really judge yourself by, especially for the people on the outside looking in, but when you’re out there taking the ball every day and you see what kind of rhythm and a flow you get into, your team wants to play behind you and get those wins. That’s what he’s done this year.”

Even if Rodriguez doesn’t hit those milestones this week, the Red Sox have certainly found a guy who should be a fixture of their rotation going forward. He’s just scratching the surface of his potential.

“Everything is starting to come together and that’s really the progression that you see in a young starting pitcher,” Porcello said. “The sky’s the limit for him. He can make every pitch, and he’s got the work ethic now and head for it. He can be as good as he wants to be.”

Heath Hembree grateful to return to Red Sox after long rehab

Steve Hewitt

When Heath Hembree went down with an elbow injury in early August, the reliever thought it would be a minor issue. But it kept lingering, and there were doubts he would return at all in 2019.

Hembree, though, was intent on getting back on the mound, no matter what it took.

The Red Sox on Monday reinstated Hembree from the injured list, nearly two months since suffering right lateral elbow inflammation. He received a platelet-rich plasma injection, which typically is a shortcut used to help the player get back on the field. It took longer than he thought, but he feels healthy.

“It was a process to get back,” said Hembree, who also missed time earlier in the year with a right elbow injury. “It’s been a grind this year. It hasn’t necessarily been the year that I had drawn up coming into the season, but it is what it is. Injuries like this happen, but I put the work in, I feel good and I’m just excited to be back tonight.”

The original plan was for Hembree to be activated for this week’s series in Texas against the Rangers, but he returned in Monday night’s loss to the Rays and threw a scoreless 1-2-3 seventh inning. He’ll likely pitch one or two more times over the last six games of the season.

Hembree made it a priority to try to return before the end of the season, even if the Red Sox aren’t going to the playoffs.

“I want to finish the season out to the end with my guys and my teammates,” Hembree said. “They’ve been grinding every day from the beginning of the year. Regardless of the situation, I don’t really want to take playing major league baseball for granted. If I have an opportunity to come back and play the last week of the season with the guys on this team and finish it out to the end, that’s what I want to do. ...

“Just to finish on the positive side, the active roster and not hurt, I take the positives out of that and take it into the offseason and spring training.”

Bogaerts’ next step

Xander Bogaerts has had a special season, posting 32 homers, 51 doubles and 110 RBI with a .304 average with six games left. But Cora thinks the 26-year-old can get even better in specific areas.

“I think defensively we can make him better in a few things,” Cora said. “Be more consistent with his pre-pitch (routine) and help him on the double plays. I think that’s the next step. He’s a work in progress, and it’s kind of funny that I say that, but he is. He actually is. He’s 26 years old. He learns every day.”

Cora thinks he can make even more strides offensively, too, and pointed to his body, which he thinks can get stronger.

“He knows what he has to do in the offseason, and it seems like each year he’s getting better,” Cora said. “He had a great season last year offensively, and then this one was better. There’s a few things that he’ll work on in the offseason and next year in spring training. We’ll put them into practice and we’ll see where it takes us.”

Personnel moves

As they continue to search for a new president of baseball operations, the Red Sox announced some reshuffling within their scouting department Monday. Most notably, Mike Rikard, who has been with the team since 2004 and has served as the president of amateur scouting for the last five seasons, was promoted to vice president of scouting.

Paul Toboni, who has been the assistant director of amateur scouting, was promoted to director of amateur scouting. Devin Pearson was named the new assistant director of amateur scouting, and Stephen Hargett was promoted to amateur crosschecker.

Toboni will now oversee the team’s June first-year player draft. Rikard, who previously did so, will still have “significant involvement in the annual June draft,” according to a press release. ...

Andrew Benintendi (thumb) was out of the lineup again, but Cora said it was because of the matchup against lefty Blake Snell. Benintendi was available off the bench.

*** *MassLive.com***

Mookie Betts throw: ‘I didn’t know I could do that,’ Boston Red Sox outfielder says after 305-foot laser guns down Avisail Garcia

Chris Cotillo

Even Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts was amazed by the superhuman throw he made to gun down Avisail Garcia in the sixth inning of Monday’s loss to the Rays.

It takes a lot for Betts, a World Series champion who has won an MVP award and three Gold Gloves, to wow himself with an accomplishment. But this throw, which traveled 305 feet in the air was different.

“I didn’t know I could do that,” Betts said. “It’s fun to do stuff you didn’t know what you could do.”

With Ji-Man Choi on second, Garcia hit an easy double into the right field corner off Hector Velazquez and decided to try for a triple. Betts fielded the ball on the warning track before unleashing his toss, hitting Rafael Devers’ glove for the first out of the sixth.

Betts saw Garcia hesitate a bit around second base and decided the only chance at getting an out was to throw straight through to Devers.

“That’s probably the best throw I’ve ever made,” Betts said.

The toss immediately made the rounds on social media and was Scott Van Pelt's "Best Thing I Saw Today" on the late edition of SportsCenter. Sox manager Alex Cora was surprised by Betts' decision and accuracy.

"You look like, 'No way is he actually thinking this,'" Cora said. "He thought about it and it'll be all over the highlights this whole week."

Betts throw was one of the best plays in a lost season for the Red Sox, who were eliminated from playoff contention Friday night. It was the most memorable play from a meaningless 7-4 loss to the Rays in the finale of a four-game series.

"It was a good one," Cora said. "Saw Garcia rounding second and he had the ball already. It seemed like the intention was to do that. You could see it. Never seen a throw from that far right on the money."

Boston Red Sox lose, 7-4, as Rays score 6 runs in 4th inning

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox couldn't keep the Rays in the ballpark Monday night and left Tropicana Field having lost three of four to their division rival over the weekend.

Tampa Bay hit three home runs in a six-run fourth inning and beat the Sox, 7-4, in the series finale. Boston jumped out to a 4-0 lead before Ji-Man Choi, Brandon Lowe and Willy Adames went deep in the sixth.

Boston's offense rolled early, going up 2-0 on RBI doubles from Marco Hernandez and Jackie Bradley Jr. and doubling their lead on RBI singles by Rafael Devers and J.D. Martinez. Starter Jhoulys Chacin pitched well through three innings before running into major trouble in the fourth, allowing back-to-back singles before Choi brought the Rays within a run with a three-run blast.

Two batters later, Lowe took Chacin deep to tie the game, 4-4. Chacin was lifted for lefty Bobby Poyner, who hit a batter and allowed a go-ahead two-run homer to Adames.

Tampa Bay added some insurance in the sixth, when Choi and Avisail Garcia hit back-to-back doubles. The highlight of the night for the Sox came on that play, as Mookie Betts gunned down Garcia at third base with a laser throw that traveled 305 feet in the air.

Bradley Jr. had three hits and Betts and Devers each had two for the Sox, who fell to 81-75. Boston will be back in action Tuesday night in Texas, where they'll start their final road series of the year against the Rangers.

Hembree returns

Reliever Heath Hembree returned from the injured list to pitch a 1-2-3 seventh inning after being activated off the injured list.

Hembree had been on the IL since Aug. 2 with elbow inflammation.

Rangers up next

The Sox will fly to Texas after the game for a three-game set against the Rangers, who are also out of playoff contention. Here are the pitching probables:

Tuesday, 8:05 p.m. - LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (18-6, 3.53 ERA) vs. RHP Ariel Jurado (7-10, 5.73 ERA)

Wednesday, 8:05 p.m. - RHP Rick Porcello (13-12, 5.56 ERA) vs. LHP Kolby Allard (4-1, 4.25 ERA)

Thursday, 2:05 p.m. - TBD vs. LHP Mike Minor (13-10, 3.52 ERA)

Boston Red Sox activate Heath Hembree from injured list

Chris Cotillo

The Red Sox activated reliever Heath Hembree from the injured list before Monday's game against the Rays.

Hembree had been on the IL since Aug. 2 with right elbow inflammation. He is expected to pitch in Texas this week, potentially serving as the team's opener for Thursday's series finale.

Hembree, who owns a 4.06 ERA in 43 appearances, spent from June 14 to July 4 on the IL with an extensor strain in his elbow before returning for 12 appearances. In those 12 games, he posted a 9.00 ERA and went back on the IL at the beginning of August.

Hembree received a plasma-rich-platelet (PRP) injection in early August and has spent the last six weeks rehabbing. He threw a simulated game Friday at Tropicana Field and felt good enough to be activated for the series finale Monday.

Hembree will likely make one more appearance this season.

Boston Red Sox front office changes: Mike Rikard promoted to vice president of scouting; 3 others earn promotions

Christopher Smith

The Red Sox announced four front office changes, including promoting Mike Rikard to vice president of scouting.

Paul Toboni earned a promotion to director of amateur scouting. Devin Pearson will serve as assistant director of amateur scouting. Stephen Hargett is new the amateur crosschecker.

Rikard has worked for the Red Sox since 2004. He served as president of amateur scouting the past five seasons. He still will have "significant involvement" in the June draft, according to a press release.

Toboni spent from 2017-19 as assistant director of amateur scouting. He joined the Red Sox in 2015 as a baseball operations intern.

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Pearson has worked in the amateur scouting department for two years after serving as an intern in the professional scouting department in 2017.

Hargett scouted amateur players in northern Florida from 2015-19.

Red Sox ownership is in the process of searching for a new GM after firing Dave Dombrowski earlier this month.

The Red Sox fired Frank Wren, one of Dombrowski's top assistants, last week. The organization also didn't renew special assignment scout Eddie Bane's contract.

Tony La Russa, who Dombrowski hired, was asked to remain.

*** *The Portland Press Herald***

Rough year for Cora, Red Sox coming to merciful end

Tom Caron

The reality hit Alex Cora like a ton of bricks. We've known for weeks now that the Boston Red Sox were not going to play postseason baseball in October, but it didn't become official until Friday night.

Suddenly, for the first time in his short career as a manager and coach, Cora knows he is going home when the regular season ends. After a record-setting 2018 season that ended in a championship, the Red Sox will finish third in the American League East. A stunning reality for a team that spent the summer thinking it would finally shift into a higher gear and make a playoff run.

"This is a group that has been doing it for what, three years in a row," said Cora, "playing all the way to the end. Sometimes, hey, that grind costs you. I think at the end there's no excuses. We didn't play well. We were very inconsistent. When we got hot, other teams stayed hot."

Honestly, they didn't get hot that often. Now, after wrapping up a four-game series in Tampa Bay, they will finish the season with six meaningless games against the Rangers and Orioles, two other teams that will miss out on the postseason.

"There's no excuses," Cora said. "We will get better. We will attack the offseason the right way. You see it right now. The way they're going about their business, that's very gratifying because (the Rays had) to earn it. It's not that we come in here and, 'Hey, go ahead, win three out of four and move on.' There's certain things we're going to get better at and we're taking a look at a few things. Obviously there's still a question mark of what's going to happen with the organization in the upcoming days and weeks or months, you don't know. But as far as the staff and what we're doing, I'm already working for next year."

That will be different for Cora. Over the past 36 months he has had virtually no days off. He spent the winter of 2017 serving as general manager of the Puerto Rico World Baseball Classic team before becoming the bench coach of the Houston Astros.

That Astros won it all, and Cora got to take part in the offseason celebrations. Yet during that postseason run he was interviewing for various managing jobs. He was hired by the Red Sox, where he led the team to a record-setting season. Which led to more offseason celebrations.

"Now, I can have time to structure a few things I want to do in the offseason and spring training," said Cora. "It is nonstop focus for my family I was talking about it the other day and it was WBC in the offseason of 2016, then the playoff rounds with the Astros while interviewing for five jobs and then getting a job and to Boston to get the World Series and get back to spring training."

Last spring, Cora surprised people by saying he wasn't turning the page after winning it all in 2018. His point was that the Red Sox should continue to build on their success. To write another chapter in their championship saga.

This season has taught him to selectively look at what should stay the same and what should change.

"You turn the page on the things that are bad," said Cora. "You continue doing the things you're supposed to do to get better."

"At the end, there's no excuses. We just didn't play well."

*** *The Lawrence Eagle Tribune***

Don't be surprised if Dave Dombrowski's successor is already in Boston

Chris Mason

Around the Horn is a weekly column from Chris Mason, where the Eagle-Tribune beat writer offers nine thoughts from the Red Sox clubhouse.

This week's installment focuses on a front office shakeup and the season's final days.

1. New GM already here?

In the wake of Dave Dombrowski's departure, the Red Sox have begun to quietly restructure their front office.

Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Raquel Ferreira, and Zack Scott were elevated to active general managers. It's an interim title for now, but don't be surprised if it sticks to (at least) one.

The more breadcrumbs that fall, the more clearly the trail leads back to the Fenway Park front office.

Yesterday the Sox announced more internal promotions, as Mike Rikard was elevated to vice president of scouting, Paul Toboni named director of amateur scouting, Devin Pearson assistant director of amateur scouting, and Stephen Hargett amateur crosschecker.

It seems to signal that ownership is on board with processes that are in place. Though he still might go for an external hire, John Henry clearly likes the bones of this front office.

2. Few departures

The Red Sox have yet to part with many from the Dombrowski regime.

They let go of VP of baseball operations Frank Wren, and special assignment scout Eddie Bane's contract won't be renewed.

Beyond that? Just about everything has stayed the same.

3. Tony's here to stay, too

It may surprise some that Tony La Russa, a close Dombrowski confidant, is sticking around, but the Hall of Famer has made a bunch of fans inside the walls at Fenway. From front office to clubhouse, guys just like having La Russa around.

"He's a very important part of the organization," Alex Cora told reporters in Tampa Bay. "A guy that's always available. He sees the game in a different way where it's positive for everybody. One thing about this game, everybody feels like it has to be this way, numbers-wise, but now there's more than that when you have to deal with media and you have to deal with players and the fan base and all of that, and he's been through everything.

"It's a good conversation. I always like the fact that when he's around, he can talk to players, he has the green light to do all that stuff. He's a very successful person and it's always good to keep people that are positive."

4. AC still gets progress reports

La Russa was thought to be a strong liaison for Cora as a rookie manager, but in year two, he's remained hands on.

"He'll give me a check-up every like 15 days, write like a letter or something," Cora said. "The things that he saw that were positive and then not so positive, which I think is good. Every season, there's different

things that go on and maybe you see it one way and then somebody sees it a different way and changes your mind, so I think that's something that helped me last year and this year, too."

5. Price going under the knife

As the Red Sox look to get a jump start on 2020, David Price will have surgery to remove the cyst on his wrist this Thursday.

"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."

6. Nate flashes potential in Tampa

It's been a lost season for Nathan Eovaldi, but he's trying to finish strong. He delivered one of his better performances of the season on Sunday afternoon at Tropicana Field, picking up a win with six innings of three-run ball. This is one case where moral victories matter, too.

"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," Eovaldi said. "Go into the offseason and next year healthy and picking up where we left off."

7. A new (old) plan of attack?

When Cora was hired in 2017, he made a strong effort to spend time with all of his players before spring training began.

It sounds like that'll be a refocused point of emphasis this offseason.

"Spend time with family at the beginning, they know that we'll be flying all over the place," Cora said. "People will be flying to visit us and they like that part of that. Come to the island and work out and hang out, and there's going to be groups. Certain groups that we're going to visit and we're going to get better. That's the bottom line, we have to get better."

8. Chavis to play in Puerto Rico

One of those players will be Michael Chavis, who will spend quite a bit of time in Cora's home country.

"I think the plan will be now for him to play winter ball, most likely he'll go to Caguas and play a month down there," Cora said. "While he plays, he can stop by my house and we can cook some good Latin food and he can have it with me."

9. Happy trails, Ned Yost

With a surprise retirement announcement on Monday afternoon, baseball is losing one of its most colorful managers, Kansas City's Ned Yost.

The veteran came into last night with 1163 wins, a World Series, and thousands of funny soundbites to his name.

*** *RedSox.com***

You'll want to see this STUNNING Mookie throw

Ian Browne

By his own estimation, Mookie Betts made the best throw of his life on Monday night at Tropicana Field.

It was the best of the season for the Red Sox, and possibly the best in the Majors.

The fact that it happened in a 7-4 loss to the Rays was almost beside the point, considering Boston was eliminated from the postseason race on Friday.

The most amazing thing about the throw is that Betts -- a supreme athlete who excels in every aspect of his sport -- shocked himself.

“Yeah, I didn’t know I could do that,” said Betts. “It’s fun to kind of do stuff that you didn’t know you could do.”

So here is a recap of what Betts did.

When Avisail García ripped one into the corner in right in the bottom of the sixth to drive in a run, it seemed like just another highlight for the Rays in their quest to gain ground on their competitors in the Wild Card race.

But as Betts dug the ball out from the warning track, he fired the ball 305 feet and into the glove of third baseman Rafael Devers -- who slapped down the tag to easily erase García. The throw never touched the ground.

Betts wasn’t the only one who was surprised by his feat.

“It surprised me a little bit,” said García. “He’s a tremendous outfielder and that was a tremendous throw. That was an incredible play by him.”

As Betts saw the play unfold, a slight smile came across his face. He then gestured with his hands toward the befuddled relievers stationed in Tampa Bay’s bullpen, as if to say, “I don’t even know how I did that.”

It was reminiscent of a similar gesture by Michael Jordan to broadcaster Magic Johnson (sitting courtside) after the basketball Hall of Famer drilled six three-pointers in the first half of Game 1 of the 1992 NBA Finals.

When the great ones surprise themselves, that’s when you truly know something special has happened.

“I was talking to their bullpen,” said Betts. “They looked at me and I was like, ‘I don’t know?’”

Red Sox center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. has made throws like that before -- such as the one that Statcast tracked at 103.4 mph on June 19 of last season to nail Robbie Grossman at the plate in Minneapolis. Yet even he was impressed by Betts’ throw.

“It’s a great throw,” said Bradley. “I remember him doing a similar play like that either last year or two years ago, here as well. He proved once again that he’s elite.”

The throw Bradley was referring to actually happened in 2016, when Betts threw out Kevin Kiermaier in his pursuit of a triple. But that throw bounced, and it wasn’t from the warning track.

“Yeah, that’s probably the best throw I’ve ever thrown,” said Betts.

As for what he was thinking as the play developed in real time?

“Obviously he hit it down the line and I was trying to get to it quick to keep him from going to third and when it ricocheted off the wall, that’s when he decided to go and I just did all I could to get it there and that’s pretty much all I’ve got,” said Betts.

There was no thought about hitting the cutoff man.

“Yeah, I mean, nobody was going to be on base so I might as well [let it fly],” said Betts. “I think that was going to be the only way I was going to get him out.”

Red Sox manager Alex Cora has watched baseball just about every day of every season for about as long as he can remember, and he offered this:

“I’ve never seen a throw from that far right on the money,” Cora said.

It was the 10th assist of the season for Betts, who is aiming to win his fourth straight Gold Glove Award for his excellence in right field. Assuming Betts is successful in that quest, it’s fairly obvious which play will lead his highlight reel.

Hembree returns to Red Sox 'pen against Rays

Ian Browne

With seven games left in the season, Heath Hembree re-appeared for the Red Sox in Monday's 7-4 loss to the Rays, in which he pitched a perfect 7th inning.

The righty reliever was on the injured list for three weeks in June and then for another seven weeks until his return to the roster for the finale of the four-game series against the Rays. Hembree had been dealing with right elbow woes, and had a PRP (Platelet-rich plasma) injection last month.

Why was it so important for Hembree to come back, even with the Red Sox eliminated from the postseason race?

“Honestly, you don’t want to take playing Major League Baseball for granted,” Hembree said. “I wanted to be healthy and come back and finish out the season with my teammates and they’ve been grinding every day. I’ve been kind of sitting on my ass for the last month and a half. I kind of want to come back and finish it out with my boys a little bit.”

Prior to his initial elbow injury in June, Hembree had been one of Boston’s best relievers, notching a 2.51 ERA in 31 games. The first time Hembree came back he wasn’t nearly the same pitcher, registering a 9.00 ERA in 12 games from July 5-Aug. 1.

“The other time, I still felt it,” said Hembree. “The other time it was like, ‘I can throw a ball so I’ll make it work.’ I wasn’t really at the level that I wanted to be but this time I feel good. We’ll see how it goes.”

Hembree feels much better this time around.

“Yeah, I feel like myself. I’m back to where I wanted to be, where I’m capable of pitching,” Hembree said.

Putting a good outing or two under his belt is important for Hembree going into the offseason.

“I wanted to go into the offseason healthy and knowing I was healthy,” Hembree said. “I felt like pitching in a couple of games here the last week of the season will give me that mindset that I’m good to go and healthy to have a normal Spring Training next year. So I’m just looking forward to that.”

Decision on Darwinzon

There’s a chance that lefty reliever Darwinzon Hernandez has thrown his last pitch of 2019. Hernandez was electric in his first 23 relief appearances after being called up in July, striking out 43 in just 23 1/3 innings while producing a 2.31 ERA from July 16 to Sept. 6.

Of late, the 22-year-old has appeared fatigued, giving up six runs in his last 1 2/3 innings, spread over four outings.

The only time Hernandez might pitch is Tuesday in Texas, when all hands will be on deck as the Red Sox try to get Eduardo Rodriguez his 19th win.

"It just makes sense," said Cora. "He's healthy, he looks OK, the life of the fastball is not as it was a few weeks ago so we've been talking about it. Obviously we'll stay away from him today. If anything, we'll use him tomorrow. If anything, I think we're leaning towards not using him that much or at all the rest of the season."

Red Sox promote 4 in scouting department

Matt Kelly

The Red Sox promoted Mike Rikard to vice president of scouting as part of a series of personnel moves announced by the club on Monday.

Boston also promoted Paul Toboni to director of amateur scouting, Devin Pearson to assistant director of amateur scouting and Stephen Hargett to amateur crosschecker.

Rikard joined the Red Sox during their historic 2004 season, and he has served as the franchise's vice president of amateur scouting over the past three seasons. The UNC-Greensboro grad also led each of the club's past five Drafts, which yielded Andrew Benintendi, Bobby Poyner and Ben Taylor.

Toboni will oversee Boston's amateur scouting department after spending the past three seasons as the department's assistant director. The Red Sox hired Pearson full-time last year after he interned with the club in 2017, and Hargett has served as an amateur scout for Boston since '15.

*** *WEEI.com***

Rick Porcello unfazed by uncertain future

Rob Bradford

Dave Dombrowski drafted Rick Porcello and then traded the pitcher. When given the chance to entertain a contract extension for the pitcher -- at what Porcello identified as a discounted rate -- the former Red Sox president of baseball operations decided to prioritize other pieces of the roster.

Through it all, Porcello probably had a pretty good idea where he stood with Dombrowski. Now it doesn't matter. There will be someone else calling the contractual shots.

According to the 30-year-old free-agent-to-be, the uncertainty isn't going to faze him when analyzing what might unfold in the coming months.

"You know my situation," Porcello told WEEI.com. "You know what I'm headed into. I have no idea what is going to happen. We'll see. Until you get to an offseason and you see what is going to be there for you don't really know what is going to affect you."

Porcello is smart enough to also know that in cases like his Dombrowski may not have been working in a vacuum, that some of those who contributed to the decision of not committing to a new deal are still part of the Red Sox organization.

"A lot of times as players you don't really know what the front office is thinking if you are being prioritized by who, or what for ... You don't really think about it, or at least I don't," he explained. "I just kind of focus on what I can focus on and that's the clubhouse and what's in front of me. There are just so many things that go on in the front office that determine what path they're going to go so it's really hard to think about and try and keep up with the thought process and what is going on.

"Over the years when you're around it you kind of understand how different things work. I think it's the familiarity of being in baseball for an extended period of time. You see it."

If Porcello can duplicate his performance from Saturday night against the Rays, in which he tossed six shutout innings, the outing would certainly help the perception of what awaits beyond 2019. That said, the free-agent process, no matter who is pulling the strings with the Sox, figures to be a bit of an uphill climb for the pitcher.

Porcello has a winning record (13-12), with the Red Sox going 17-14 in his starts. And he has now made 30 more starts in nine of his 11 big league seasons. There is also the presence he brings to a clubhouse. But that 5.56 figure to be an albatross, perhaps leading him to a shorter-term deal that allows him to reestablish his value.

He may be the ultimate case of beauty resting in the eyes of the beholder, which is another reason Porcello isn't tying himself into knots trying to figure how this whole free agent thing will play out.

"There aren't too many things that happen year to year that you don't end up learning from," he said. "This is a new situation for me. I definitely learned a lot in the offseason, coming into the year and throughout the course of the season.

"Not every organization have the same philosophy or the same amount of money to spend or the same farm system or the same players. It's different for everyone."

Welcome to the most depressing pennant race ever

Rob Bradford

The beauty of baseball is often times the opportunity to show up on the most hum-drum of days and find yourself with something you've never seen before. For instance, watching Mookie Betts throw a baseball 305 feet through the air to third base in the sixth inning of the Red Sox' 7-4 loss to the Rays Monday night was a prime example.

What Tropicana Field delivered, however, was something that would have seemed nearly unfathomable in this day and age of professional sports.

With one week to play in the regular season and the Rays smack-dab in the middle of a neck-and-neck race for a postseason berth, the hosts were cheered on by ...

Of all the hits taken throughout the 2019 season, having to live in this existence should have been one of Major League Baseball's biggest slaps in the face.

This was simply ridiculous.

Take a walk through the stands during what is supposed to be the tensest of tense portions of the 162-game season and you have to wonder how this can be. The people working throughout the Flint Memorial Auditorium, I mean Tropicana Field, are over-the-top nice.

The barren gift shop was inhabited by two welcoming women trying to push some souvenir baseballs. The guy at the 50-50 raffle stand was fighting the unwinnable war. The elevator operators? The friendliest in the American League, not even close.

This isn't anything new. The Rays haven't averaged over 20,000 people a game since 2010, having now totaled under 15,000 fans in each of the last two seasons.

It's a team that is stuck in a stadium which has a lease that runs through 2027, residing on the other side of a bridge nobody from Tampa wants to cross. There is likely no new stadium coming, with the football team in line to get the area's next professional sports makeover. That brief run of Joe Maddon-induced cowbells came and went, leaving a very good product with more apathy than ever.

The Red Sox drew more than 16,000 people for a 12-minute day game in August. The team that they're 11 1/2 games in back of was letting what sounded like a Casio keyboard dictate the environment.

There is no solution. It is what it is. And what it was Monday night was depressing.

Heath Hembree offers great reason for giving it another try this season

Rob Bradford

The Red Sox have their reasons to activate Heath Hembree with just one week left in the regular season, and so does the pitcher himself.

For the Red Sox, they want to get another look at the reliever, who had been on the injured list with right lateral elbow inflammation since Aug. 2. The whole idea is to make sure Hembree can start the process of hitting the ground running when next spring training rolls around.

The righty's reasoning? It's a bit more sentimental.

"You don't want to take playing Major League Baseball for granted," he said. I wanted to be healthy and come back and finish the season out with my teammates. I mean, they've been grinding every day and I've been kind of sitting on my ass for the last month and a half. So I kind of want to come back and finish it out with my boys for a little bit."

Hembree insists this is different than the previous time he reemerged from the injured list in early July. That month-long stint did not go well, with the reliever showing few signs of the pitcher who had dominated for much of the season's first few months (having totaled a 2.88 ERA when June 1 rolled around).

"That other time I still felt it," admitted Hembree. "The other time I was could throw a ball so I'll make it work. I wasn't really at the level I wanted it to be. But this time I feel good, so we'll see how it goes.

"I feel really confident. I feel the injection did its job. The process this time we kind of took our time and checked off the boxes and making sure we took the right steps and everything was good day-to-day. As of now I feel good and feel like my normal self."

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

The next Red Sox GM should build around these five players

John Tomase

The defending MVP? No. The former Cy Young winner? Nope. The seven-time All-Star who just averaged over 13 strikeouts per nine innings? Uh-uh.

The question is whom I want back for next year's Red Sox. And the answer is kind of surprising, once you parse it and realize your list only includes five names.

The exercise crystallizes just what kind of challenge awaits Dave Dombrowski's successor as the Red Sox enter a period of bridging/rebuilding that could get ugly.

I wouldn't call any of the following "untouchable" because I don't believe in that concept. But they're the last guys I'd want to move if I were evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the roster: Xander Bogaerts, Rafael Devers, J.D. Martinez, Eduardo Rodriguez, and Brandon Workman.

That means no Mookie Betts, Chris Sale, David Price, Andrew Benintendi, Jackie Bradley Jr., and Nathan Eovaldi, to name just a few. Money plays a central role in these rankings, especially if the Red Sox are serious about corralling their runaway payroll. That's why Betts, an otherwise obvious fit, is a no for me, because it's going to cost \$300 million to keep him.

First off are two obvious names: Bogaerts and Devers. They're the present and future of the organization, with one already signed to a reasonable long-term contract and the other a candidate for an extension.

Bogaerts has emerged as a heart-and-soul player, and his six-year, \$120 million deal makes him a bargain. He has already topped 30 homers and 50 doubles while playing virtually every day, and he should finish above .300 for the second time in his career, too. He is a foundational piece not just on the field, but in the clubhouse, and the Red Sox are lucky to be able to build around him.

He has taken a particular interest in Devers, the supremely talented 22-year-old who is posting the kind of numbers (.307-31-112-.910) that suggest he could one day challenge for a Triple Crown. Devers remains under team control through 2023, but at some point the Red Sox will undoubtedly broach the subject of a long-term extension. He is already a monster offensively, but with considerable room to grow.

An offense built around young stars would be the envy of most teams, but this one could benefit from a veteran presence, and that's where Martinez enters the picture. The Red Sox don't suddenly need to become a small-market team, but they'd be wise to start limiting their long-term commitments after tying up too much money in Price (\$217 million) and Sale (\$145 million), in particular. Martinez can opt out of the final three years and roughly \$62.5 million remaining on his contract, but he's at an age (32) and position (DH) where he shouldn't command more than four years on the open market.

It may be old-fashioned to say that Martinez's presence allows other hitters in the lineup to flourish, but it's true. Like David Ortiz before him, Martinez commands respect in the middle of the lineup, and as long as he's around, Bogaerts and Devers won't feel the same kind of pressure to produce. Add his very specific skills as a clubhouse hitting guru, and Martinez is worth keeping.

If only we could say the same about any of the overpriced starters. Price will undergo surgery to remove a cyst from his wrist that might solve all his problems, but if the Red Sox could get out from under the final three years and \$96 million remaining on his contract, they wouldn't ask twice.

Sale, meanwhile, is still awaiting a follow-up visit with Dr. James Andrews after shutting it down for the final six weeks because of elbow soreness. And even if Eovaldi feels strong heading into the offseason, he remains not only injury-prone, but wildly inconsistent.

E-Rod, however, keeps establishing himself as a legit top-three starter. Still only 26 years old, the lefty has finally delivered his breakthrough campaign, going 18-6 with a 3.53 ERA while averaging more than a strikeout per inning. Maintaining this momentum in 2020 will be a challenge, but he's the one starter I'd bet on at the moment.

Workman seemed an unlikely candidate to be labeled indispensable when the season started, especially since he was only a few months removed from being left off the World Series roster. But the 31-year-old has inexorably transformed himself into one of the game's most uniquely dominant relievers.

Detractors point to his high walk totals and reliance on a curveball as proof that he's just a one-season gimmick, but doing so ignores (a) his 13 strikeouts per nine, and (b) the fact that his fastball is regularly hitting 95 mph again.

Workman has the makeup and stuff to serve as the last line of defense, but the flexibility and selflessness to set up if the Red Sox add a closer. Whatever role he fills in 2020, I just know I want him on my team.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Promotions in Red Sox' scouting department send mixed signals

Sean McAdam

On Monday afternoon, the Red Sox announced a flurry of changes and promotions to their Baseball Operations staff.

Among other moves, the Sox revealed that Mike Rikard, who has been the team's amateur scouting director, will now serve as vice president of scouting and be responsible for the entire scouting department. Additionally, Paul Toboni was elevated to director of amateur scouting, essentially filling Rikard's former position.

Meanwhile, two others — Devin Pearson was named to assistant director, amateur scouting and Stephen Hargett was promoted to amateur crosschecker.

Most of those names — other than perhaps Rikard, who has run the last five amateur drafts — are far from household names to the most avid baseball fans. That's not to suggest that they're bit players. To the contrary, the scouting staff is the lifeblood of any good organization.

And end-of-season promotions and changes are hardly rare in baseball front offices as teams prepare for the offseason. In fact, they're fairly standard.

But what's interesting about the changes is the timing.

The Red Sox, of course, are without a head of baseball operations, having fired Dave Dombrowski earlier this month. With the regular season not yet over, it's a safe bet that they haven't conducted interviews, though they may have reached out to some potential candidates to gauge their interest.

And yet, the Sox have been making moves for the last couple of weeks, which is unusual for a team without a general manager or a president of baseball operations.

The firings have been easier to understand. Longtime respected scouts Eddie Bane and Gary Hughes were informed that their contract wouldn't be renewed, and that makes some sense. It would be odd to offer new contracts without knowing if the incoming GM wanted to work with them.

The same goes for senior vice president Frank Wren, who was brought in by Dombrowski and closely linked to him. It's understandable that a close associate of Dombrowski's would be dismissed, even if it meant having to pay off the final two years of his contract. No new GM would want to inherit his predecessor's most trusted confidant.

But Monday's announcement fits into a different category.

By elevating a number of people to oversee an important area like scouting, the Red Sox are already filling out some key spots in the Baseball Operations department before choosing someone to oversee the entire department. Now, whomever the Sox hire will be told that the scouting department is already in place — with new titles and contracts to boot.

Ordinarily, an incoming executive would be given the opportunity to put his choices in those roles. The next GM/President of Baseball Operations will not have that luxury.

That suggests one of two scenarios:

1. The Red Sox plan to promote someone from the Gang of Four currently running Baseball Ops on an interim basis — Eddie Romero, Brian O’Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira.

That would ensure a smooth transition for the new GM — likely Romero — since there is already a familiarity and comfort level with those promoted Monday.

2. Ownership and upper management is so impressed with the work of the current scouring department that they will insist on the current group being retained by anyone coming in from the outside.

In the immediate aftermath of Dombrowski’s firing, numerous baseball sources indicated that the Sox would be aiming high and looking to land a big name executive — someone like Theo Epstein, Andrew Friedman or Jeff Luhnow — to take over the club.

The distinct impression within the industry was that the Red Sox wanted someone with experience and a track record of success, feeling that the job would be too much for someone who hadn’t run an organization.

In the wake of Monday’s moves, is this a signal that that thinking has changed? Or are the Red Sox merely putting people in place and making the job a turnkey operation?

At this point, there would seem to be far more questions than answers.

BSJ Game Report: Rays 7, Red Sox 4 – 3 things we learned

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox lost to the Tampa Bay Rays 7-4. Here are three things we learned:

1. The loss seemed like two separate games.

The night began well enough for the Red Sox. They took a 1-0 lead in the second, went up 2-0 in the third and then doubled the lead to 4-0 in the top of the fourth. Stater Jhoulys Chacin didn’t allow a hit through the first three innings, and it seemed like the Red Sox — not the Rays — were the ones with something to play for. Despite being in the middle of the wild card race, the Rays appeared to be flat and going through the motions. But in the bottom of the fourth, the game flipped in a hurry. After Chacin got the first out of the inning, but then began leaving pitches over the middle of the plate. The Rays smacked three homers in the inning — a three-run shot by Ji-Man Choi, a solo shot from Nate Lowe and a two-run belt by Willy Adames — and took the lead for good. Meanwhile, the Red Sox offense then shut down for the rest of the night. From the fifth inning through the eighth, the Sox managed just one baserunner.

2. Mookie Betts has a throw for the ages.

In the sixth inning, with Choi on second after a leadoff double, Avisail Garcia drove a pitch from Hector Velazquez and rifled it into the right-field corner. Choi scored easily from second and it appeared as though Garcia would have himself a triple. But Betts played the carom off the wall in right and came up throwing, firing a rocket — on a line — to third baseman Rafael Devers, who slapped the tag on a sliding Garcia. “I’ve never seen a throw from that far, right on the money,” marveled Alex Cora. “It was a good one. It was impressive.” The throw was later measured at 305 feet, and frankly, couldn’t have been better executed. Teammate Jackie Bradley Jr. likes to show off his powerful throwing arm in center, but sometimes can be

erratic. Betts is less flashy, but his throws are often more accurate. Both he and Bradley are now tied for third among American League outfielders with 10 assists.

3. Heath Hembree returns to the mound.

The Red Sox reliever had been sidelined since Aug. 2 with elbow inflammation and missed the last 45 games. It was the second IL stint of the season for the elbow issue for Hembree, and for the last few weeks, there was the assumption that he wouldn't pitch again for the remainder of the season. After all, what was the point, with the Sox slowly siding out of contention and now, officially eliminated. But Hembree, who had thrown a series of side sessions and simulated games in preparation, wanted to come back for two reasons. For one, he wanted to go into the offseason knowing that he was healthy. Also, Hembree felt he had an obligation to his teammates, who had trudged through the dog days of the season without him in the bullpen. It may only be a handful of meaningless games in the final week, but Hembree wanted in. He came on for the seventh and retired the Rays in order, and in doing so, met his two goals.

*** *The Athletic***

Life on the social media front lines: Voices of the Red Sox mix snark with ceremony

Jen McCaffrey

Red Sox legend Carl Yastrzemski walked up the dugout steps. He waved to an adoring crowd inside Fenway Park, with fans cheering and clapping as he made his way to the mound for the first pitch to his grandson Mike Yastrzemski, an outfielder for the San Francisco Giants.

Amid the melee of cameras and flashes and chaos, Kelsey Doherty darted from behind the dugout railing to get in place at the backstop. Her colleague Maria Schroeder wasn't far behind.

Like thousands of others in the ballpark, they couldn't miss capturing this Yastrzemski first pitch moment on their phones. But unlike everyone else, the images and video Doherty and Schroeder snapped were about to be uploaded to the Red Sox social media accounts for millions of fans to see.

They have images from the team photography staff and video from the Red Sox productions crew as well as a clip sent from the official broadcast, but getting the raw phone video is a pillar of their jobs as the social media managers for all Red Sox accounts.

As soon as the pitch was thrown and the hug exchanged between the Yastrzemskis, Doherty quickly exited the field, opening a gate in the fence behind home plate and weaving up through fans trying to get in their seats. Out in the concourse, she swam against the current of people pouring and finally made it out into the air of Jersey Street.

Kelsey Doherty, left with camera, at work prior to a game at Fenway. (Cameron Pollack / Boston Red Sox) "That's the hardest part of the day," she laughed. As she headed back to her office on the second story of a nondescript brick building across the street from Fenway's ticket office, the park buzzed in the background.

Technically it was already nine hours into her workday, but time is relative when you're a social media manager for the Boston Red Sox.

Five hours earlier, Doherty and Schroeder had been going over their plan for the day, one scribbled on the whiteboard behind their desks in an office complete with a replica Pesky's Pole in the middle. It hardly stood out: A Wally the Green Monster poster that doubled as a child's growth chart hung on the door, a J.D. Martinez big head leaned against a cubicle desk and a slew of bobbleheads crowded the desktops.

Yaz was their big content "get" for the day, but they also had to account for Brock Holt being honored as the team's Roberto Clemente Award nominee and a golden ticket fan appreciation giveaway. There was a

photo shoot with Jackie Bradley Jr. arriving at the park on his scooter. And then there would be the game itself.

Managing the Red Sox social accounts — with their 5 million Facebook followers, 2.1 million Twitter followers and 1.7 million Instagram followers — is a massive, 24/7 undertaking. There's also a Snapchat account catering to younger fans, a growing YouTube channel and a newer social medium called TikTok that they're still figuring out. And yet all of it is managed by just two 20-somethings — Doherty and Schroeder. Doherty is the senior partner at 28, with the title of manager of digital media. She has been with the Red Sox since she was an intern in 2012. She started out in the fan clubs department, helping with day-of-game preparation in 2012 and 2013. Then a job as a social media assistant opened up a month before she graduated from Emerson College in 2014.

“Going into college I wanted to work in marketing and sports marketing and then realized social media was a job, it was just becoming a job for people as I'd started school,” Doherty said. “I started in 2010 and it was like, ‘Oh you can get paid to be on the internet?’ I didn't realize that was all the time, constant. But it seemed great.”

Meanwhile, Schroeder, 23, graduated from Bradley University in Illinois last year. An internship in the commissioner's office led to a social media role with MLB, and the Red Sox claimed her off waivers as Doherty's sidekick in August.

The social media industry caters to a younger demographic, which baseball badly needs and actively courts. So it makes sense that young employees are the ones behind the team's voice. Nevertheless, serving as the team's internet face to the world can be daunting.

“People don't necessarily realize the power of it and I think across baseball most social people are our age,” Doherty said. “We know how to do it all, but like, it's like, ‘OK you're going to let me hit send?’”

Crafting an online personality

Each social platform has a different personality. Twitter is informational and Instagram offers snapshots. Instagram Story has become almost separate from Instagram with the ability to string together video clips. Snapchat is generally for the quirkiest, goofiest content.

“I'd consider Twitter and Instagram Story as probably the two places we can get our voice out the most and truly tell a story, where Facebook is just highlight, highlight or Instagram timeline is just some carousels of a moment,” Doherty said. “You can tell a story or show some of those quirky things or fun player high-fives so that I feel like is a whole shift for us. Snapchat we've seen go up and down, but ultimately it's a younger audience on there, even though it's one of our smaller followings, it's an audience everyone talks about that we need in baseball and that's who we want to be talking to.”

The job is a mix of planning certain posts and spontaneously capturing moments, all with the purpose of giving fans a behind-the-scenes look at the team. The job truly is a round-the-clock endeavor, since fans can interact with the club's social platforms at any moment. For a 7 p.m. home game, the day begins around 9:30 or 10 a.m. with planning meetings. Sometimes Doherty or Schroeder will accompany a player at a community event before the game. They'll head to the field for batting practice to capture players' pregame preparation.

On this day, Doherty heads into the stands for the chance to play Willy Wonka. An unsuspecting fan will find a golden ticket under a seat and win tickets to next year's home opener, and Doherty will tease that on Instagram Story later. Before heading to Alex Cora's pregame media session, she catches up with team photographer Billie Weiss and the team's two photo interns, Cameron Pollack and Maddie Malhotra. While some of the videos on their social platforms will be shot from iPhones, most phone photos don't meet their quality standard. Almost every photo they post is shot professionally from Weiss and his staff.

“If it doesn't come from a real camera, it's not getting posted for the most part,” Doherty said.

So how do those high-quality pictures travel from the photographers' pit to your phones in a matter of minutes?

In normal games, the photographers pull photos off their card in their cameras onto their laptops, give the photos a quick edit and send them to Doherty and Schroeder. But for the postseason or other big games, it's a different story. The photographers hard-wire their cameras to send images back automatically.

Either way, though, it's fast.

"Our day-to-day game (flow), we just ingest them ourselves," Weiss said. "The whole process still only takes a minute. We do it so much it's robotic so it's a constant flow of shooting, ingesting, editing and all happening at the same time."

To keep up with the ever-changing industry, the Red Sox added a social media video editor this year. The Red Sox have long had their own video staff to supplement broadcast cameras, but the content would be set aside for commercials or rain delay entertainment. This season they decided to cut video taken in-game for their social accounts.

Kellan Reck, the manager of Red Sox Productions, oversees the process in an office behind the Fenway press box. There's typically one editor and one videographer at every home game.

"Our shooter is filming from the seats or photo pit, wherever they film game action," Reck explained. "If something happens, like if Devers hits a home run, that person who's social editor will run down (to the field) and get the (video) card from them, bring it back up here, turn it into an Instagram Story, turn it into something for Twitter, and send it off to Kelsey like 10 minutes later. So it's all happening live. If Devers hits a home run, it's up on Instagram an inning or two later.

"We used to never do that and now we do it all the time."

Doherty, Schroeder and the rest of the social and video staff don't travel often in the regular season, so they rely on MLB photographers stationed at every park. Doherty will message the live content creator, or LCC as they're called, to ensure they get photos for anything specific, like a player returning from injury or a celebrity fan visiting the team. Mimi Murad is the LCC at Fenway. She deals mostly with visiting clubs because the Red Sox photo staff is out in full force at home games, but Doherty can use any of her photos if needed.

When there's no social staff on the road with the team, Schroeder and Doherty will trade off tweeting about the games while watching from home. They're hoping next year to have at least one person on the road with the team at all times.

For home games, after gathering the pregame and first pitch content, Doherty and Schroeder head to their office where they sort through the content they've collected and wait for the photos and videos from Weiss' and Reck's staff. Once the game starts, they'll be tweeting and posting any key plays while watching from a big screen.

Capturing the big moments

It's all a little bit different in the postseason. While Doherty was around in 2013 as an intern, she wasn't nearly as involved. So managing the accounts last year during a run to the World Series title proved all consuming, in a good way.

"It was a dream as someone who's hungry for content all the time," she said.

The games themselves were nerve-wracking, but the most stressful part of the postseason came when Doherty was running between batting practice and the office ahead of Game 2 of the American League

Championship Series at Fenway. In a moment familiar to so many, she dropped her phone and shattered the screen. The phone had already been cracked, but repairing it would have meant going without it for a period of time, and that wouldn't work for someone in Doherty's position.

"It was cracked all season and I literally didn't want to go without it for the hours it takes for it to be repaired," she said.

This drop, however, proved too much. She couldn't even enter her passcode.

Thankfully, the Red Sox IT department had a spare phone they allowed her to take. Not only was it the ALCS, but Doherty was leaving right after the game for Houston with the team, so she needed a new phone as soon as possible. Her phone was backed up to Dropbox, so Red Sox IT was able to transfer the content relatively quickly before the game, but she still needed to sign in to all the apps for Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, each with complicated passwords to ward off easy hacking.

"That was probably one of the more stressful moments of the postseason, non-baseball related," she said.

Another moment of panic came, ironically, right after the Red Sox won. In the euphoria at Dodger Stadium, cell service failed.

"We put out the 'win' stuff then it took another half hour before we could get anything else out, and I was losing my mind," Doherty said. "We've prepared for this for so long. It was utter chaos in the best way possible."

There were plenty of moments of validation, though, too, like seeing the players in their "Do Damage" hoodies at the victory parade. Doherty helped develop the slogan, and it became the club's mantra.

There was vindication as well. After a 2018 opening day loss, Doherty fielded a slew of messages deriding the team and manager Alex Cora. The night the team won the World Series, she sent a few snarky replies to those fans from Opening Day.

"There's the brand of the Red Sox and the historic franchise and all those things, but also, let's not be boring," Doherty said. "It was kind of like, we should be OK with chirping back at fans a little bit here and there."

That wasn't always the case.

The previous offseason had been a rough one with another quick exit in the division series followed by the firing of John Farrell. The negotiations to sign Martinez were dragging on and the Yankees had just inked Giancarlo Stanton.

"We were very safe on social, which is fine, but it led us to a very generic tone and voice, nothing special," Doherty said. "We were kind of in a tough place where people didn't love the team after 2017 and then our social on top of it was bland and after the Yankees traded for Stanton there was a tweet that went out with the word 'Rivalry' and three flames. It was a bad tweet."

Fans were frustrated and the responses showed. Doherty decided then they needed to freshen up their brand.

"I had been working on, how do we tweak things?" she said. "And then that week I was like, 'We are meeting. We are discussing this. We are changing. We've got to be comfortable with being uncomfortable with some of the things we say or do on social.'"

Doherty made a guide for everyone from graphic designers to marketing executives to the video and photo staffs, describing how to adjust their tone and voice on social media.

“If I were to disappear tomorrow and someone was like, ‘What is Red Sox social?’ Here you go,” she said.

It went over everything from how to handle trolling, to team news releases, to what types of content should go on each platform, to encouraging self-deprecation and an overall more casual tone.

“I talked with a few folks from different teams, like has anyone done this?” she said. “Some teams have very specific style guides. I wouldn’t call this a specific style guide because again I’m a big believer in everything is circumstantial and things happening on social last year that are different than this year. It’s also about our brand integrity across the board. Our whole vibe is not to tell people to screw off. That’s not what we are, but we do want to come across as intense.”

Doherty reports to vice president of marketing and broadcast Colin Burch, but by and large has freedom to direct the voice of their platforms.

“They give me a lot of agency here, I’m very lucky in the sense,” she said. “If we’re going back and forth with a team or if we want to chirp someone, (I might say) ‘This could be screenshotted and put on SportsCenter, there’s a chance ... are we OK with this?’ Anything I think might get some pickup, ‘All right what do we think?’ Because I know there will be other people that will have to defend me or I’ll have to defend myself, if it’s like why did we send this? But for the most part it’s understood we know what’s best and how to present the organization and what the right voice and tone is.”

Staying fresh

In the midst of a 162-game schedule, staying creative is always part of the trick. That comes in the form of pop culture references and giveaways of random items found in their office cubicle drawers.

Doherty keeps a close eye on the metrics for which content performs well, tracking them year over year and week over week. She taps other MLB teams for ideas that they might not have considered. Ultimately, though, she knows everything is dependent on how the team performs on the field. And when they’re not doing well, she and Schroeder are on the front lines when it comes to fan angst.

A large part of their job is keeping track of the conversation around the team. They have a special tool that pulls every tweet they’re mentioned in into an inbox where they can see the conversation history with that fan. The cacophony of these replies can be overwhelming, but they try to reply to as many as possible.

“There’s always a (browser) tab open anytime we get in,” Doherty said. “Usually when I’m home if I’m watching Netflix this is open. It’s constant and so we’re both always in that.”

The night of the Yaz first pitch, there was nothing but love in the replies.

It was a welcome change.

Reading tea leaves in Red Sox GM search: Why an internal candidate makes sense

Chad Jennings

They didn’t exactly stand out from the fans who’d gathered to watch Red Sox batting practice last week. To any outside observer, they were just another handful of guys, standing several feet from the batting cage, making small talk while catching sight of an occasional swing and watching the ball fly. But that group of five were flown into town specifically for this occasion.

Vice president of amateur scouting Mike Rikard was there, and it was one of the last days he would hold that title. With him were North Florida area scout Stephen Hargett, another whose job description was about to change, and South Florida scout Willie Romy, the guy credited with signing the top Red Sox prospect, Triston Casas. Crosschecker Justin Horowitz was there, as was a midwestern area scout named

Todd Gold, who four years ago signed a guy in the 36th round only to see him finally reach the big leagues this summer.

Elsewhere around Fenway Park were other international and pro scouts who had done their part to bolster the Red Sox system in recent years, and all had been flown into Boston so they could be honored along with the players they'd signed – standout players who'd just been named as the Red Sox minor league players of the year.

It was one thing to recognize the hulking 19-year-old Casas for his 20 home runs, or 1,071st overall pick Trevor Kelley (that 36th rounder) for his perseverance, or undrafted shortstop Ryan Fitzgerald for playing his way onto the prospect radar, but the Red Sox made sure to also single out the scouts who found them, followed them, and signed them. And now, it seems the Red Sox are committed to making that scouting success a foundation of whatever comes next for this organization.

Still without a general manager in the wake of Dave Dombrowski's firing, the Red Sox on Monday announced a series of promotions within their baseball operations department, and all came from the ranks of amateur scouting, making clear the organization considers scouting to be a strength on which to build regardless of who's in charge.

Rikard will now be vice president of scouting, expanding his reach to cover not only the draft but also the international and professional scouting departments. Hargett was promoted to amateur crosschecker, meaning the Red Sox will get his eyes on more draft-eligible prospects around the country, trusting the evaluation of a scout whose recent track record includes fifth-rounder Thad Ward, the system's latest pitcher of the year, and 14th-rounder Bobby Poyner, a late pick who advanced quickly to the majors. Former assistant director of amateur scouting Paul Toboni will essentially step into Rikard's old role as amateur scouting director, and Devin Pearson, a former intern and scouting assistant, will now be the assistant director of amateur scouting.

The promotions came after team president Sam Kennedy announced two weeks ago that manager Alex Cora's job is safe, and after last week's news that Tony La Russa – an old friend and special assistant to Dombrowski, who was often at his side – will also remain with the team in some sort of advisory role. That these decisions have been put in place without a general manager or head of baseball operations suggests the Red Sox are not looking for a wholesale shakeup, but rather a specific change targeted primarily at the very top of the hierarchy. At the moment, the team is being run by a quartet of longtime executives: assistant general managers Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, and Zack Scott, and senior vice president of major and minor league operations Raquel Ferreira.

The team's amateur scouting department has long been an understated strength of the organization, both in terms of impact prospects and overachieving late-round picks. When Dombrowski was hired in 2015, he made no changes to the amateur scouts, and said later it was because he knew their reputation throughout the industry.

It is notable that many of the Red Sox existing baseball operations executives — including the foursome currently running the show on an interim basis – have been with the organization more than a decade. That means they've been a part of at least two championships, and some have been around for three or four. Even though other key changes – Theo Epstein to Ben Cherington to Dombrowski; Terry Francona to Bobby Valentine to John Farrell to Cora – an organizational core has remained intact. Monday's announcement means that reality will not completely change, no matter who is eventually hired to steer the ship.

Whether Eddie Romero is promoted to the top position or an outside hire is brought in to provide a fresh voice or perspective, the new head of baseball operations will find himself in a situation not unlike what Dombrowski was given four years ago: an existing foundation on which to build, not a blank slate on which to start over.

*** *The Tampa Bay Times***

Tampa Bay Rays blast their way back to beat Red Sox, gain in wild-card race

Marc Topkin

The Rays sure weren't looking like a team going to the playoffs, or even battling to do so, in the early innings of Monday's game.

Their pitchers, starting with an ineffective Blake Snell, were giving up runs to the Red Sox, four through the first four innings.

Their hitters weren't doing anything, hitless the first time through the order against Boston starter Jhoulys Chacin and his 5.66 ERA.

And there wasn't much of a playoff feverish, inspiring crowd at the Trop — just an announced 8,779 — to cheer them on.

And then all of a sudden the Rays looked very much capable of playing their way into the tournament by winning one of the AL wild-card spots, launching three long and loud homers in the fourth inning and rolling to a 7-4 victory.

"I just feel like we're a really good baseball team right now, we're dangerous one through however many guys, including the bench," said Brandon Lowe, who hit the longest of the homers. "Everybody has faith in the guy before him and the guy after him to get the job done. And it's a dangerous team to play right now."

The Rays (93-64) moved into sole possession of the second AL wild card, onehalf game ahead of the Indians, who were off Monday. The Rays also moved to within 1½ games of the idle A's, who hold the top spot, and hold the tiebreaker over them.

"We're right there with Cleveland and Oakland, we have to keep winning," said Willy Adames, who hit the last of the three homers. "We have to win."

That's the mentality we have right now. If we want to make the postseason, we have to win. You don't make the postseason losing."

The Rays made sure of that — well, until a threat in the ninth anyway — with a quick strike in the fourth that turned the 4-0 deficit into a 6-4 lead.

Austin Meadows, named team co-MVP with Charlie Morton earlier Monday, got them started with a broken-bat single for their first hit. Travis d'Arnaud, in the middle of so many rallies, followed with a single.

Then came the biggest hit of the night, a three-run homer by Ji-Man Choi to center, estimated by StatCast at 412 feet, that got them revved up.

"To get us back in the game, at that point it was pretty frustrating, there wasn't too much to like," manager Kevin Cash said. "Ji-Man's was huge. You really saw the momentum start to turn in the dugout and the energy spike back up."

Choi did his part with his swing, and then his words.

"I thought my homer definitely changed the momentum of the game," he said through team translator Ha Ram (Sam) Jeong. "As I came back to the dugout, I told the guys to never give up in the game."

An out later, Lowe formally announced his day-before return from 2 ½ months on the injured list by getting the Rays even with a blast to rightfield that struck the Moffitt Cancer Center signage attached to the back wall, seemingly underestimated at 441 feet, coming off his bat at 110 mph.

“It felt good,” Lowe said. “Definitely missed the feeling of that.”

Then after Kevin Kiermaier was hit by a pitch for the second straight day, Adames launched his shot to left, a 409-footer that was his 20th of the season and, better, put the Rays ahead to stay.

“It means a lot,” Adames said. “I’m happy how everything has turned out. It makes me happy that I’m helping the team win. That’s the most important thing. If we win, I’m happy, and even more if I help the team win.”

The Rays have been coming back a lot to win lately, but Cash said making up this deficit may have been most impressive because of how they got in it.

"This was the most challenging one," he said. "Because it was ugly."

And which then made how they got out even better.

"Big hit after big hit," he said. "It was awesome. Maybe the most exciting inning of the year."

There was a little more excitement in the ninth.

After Oliver Drake, Nick Anderson and Diego Castillo to get there, Cash went as you’d expect to closer Emilio Pagan. But Pagan didn’t start well, allowing a pair of singles and then with lefty Mitch Moreland up, Cash made a bold move, summoning rookie lefty Colin Poche, who has struggling getting the ball over the plate and keeping it in the park.

The Red Sox pinch hit right-handed hitters Christian Vazquez and Xander Bogaerts, and Poche didn’t care.

He was aggressive, sharp and effective, striking them both out. And then he was emotional on the mound.

“It was awesome,” Poche said. “At this point of the year, whatever we can do to get the win, is big. I was glad that I was able to do my part, because everyone else certainly did theirs.”

Snell was not as sharp or effective in his second start since coming off the injured list compared to his first, needing 52 pitches to get five outs, walking three (all on two-strike pitches) and allowing the Red Sox to take a 1-0 lead.

“He looked uncomfortable,” Cash said. “He couldn’t get his timing on the mound right. He looked a little uncertain about what he was trying to accomplish. Some uncharacteristic things. You go back and look at some of the walks. Guys we walk to get to the guys in the middle of their lineup, that’s not an ideal way. You aren’t going to have a lot of success that way.”

Snell said he felt okay, which actually made the poor outing more frustrating.

But his teammates had him feeling better by the end of the night.

“The guys picked me up,” he said. “For them to put six runs in the sixth, this team is really good, and everybody has each other’s back. It was pretty exciting to see these guys do what they always do.”

*** *Associated Press***

Playoff-contending Rays score 6 in 4th, beat Red Sox 7-4

The Tampa Bay Rays turned a rough start into another important win.

Ji-Man Choi, Brandon Lowe and Willy Adames homered during Tampa Bay's six-run fourth inning, and the Rays moved into sole possession of the second AL wild card by rallying for a 7-4 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Monday night.

"Big hit after big hit," Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash said. "It was awesome. Maybe the most exciting inning of the year."

The Rays hold a half-game lead over Cleveland, which had the day off.

"It's fun but it's stressful at the same time because you just never know what's going to happen," Rays center fielder Kevin Kiermaier said. "But at the end of the day, the beautiful thing about this game is that we control our own destiny."

The announced attendance was 8,779.

Boston slugger J.D. Martinez drove in a run to become the ninth player in franchise history to have at least 35 homers and 100 RBI in multiple seasons. The list also includes David Ortiz, Jim Rice, Carl Yastrzemski and Ted Williams.

Jhoulys Chacin held the Rays hitless until one out in the fourth. After Austin Meadows and Travis d'Arnaud hit consecutive singles, Choi connected for a three-run drive.

Lowe had a solo shot that ended Chacin's night and Adames' two-run homer off Bobby Poyner (0-1) put the Rays ahead 6-4.

Tampa Bay went up 7-4 on Avisail Garcia's sixth-inning RBI double. He was thrown trying for a triple on a great on-the-fly throw from the right-field corner by Mookie Betts.

"That's probably the best throw I've ever thrown," Betts said. "I didn't know I could do that. It's fun to do stuff that you didn't know you could do."

"He proved it once again, he's elite," Red Sox center fielder Jackie Bradley Jr. added.

Colin Poche, the ninth Tampa Bay pitcher, struck out pinch-hitters Christian Vazquez and Xander Bogaerts with two on in the ninth for his second save. Austin Pruitt (3-0) worked one inning.

Chacin allowed four runs and four hits over 3 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. Between Milwaukee and Boston this season, the right-hander has given up 22 homers in 100 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings.

After scoring once in the second and third, Rafael Devers and Martinez hit RBI singles in the fourth. Devers has 113 RBI.

The Rays have trailed in seven straight games and 13 of 14, but have gone 9-5 in those games.

"This one was probably the more challenging one because it was ugly (early on)," Cash said. "So, this was frustrating and really, really that much more encouraging for us to mount that comeback."

Rays lefty Blake Snell struggled in his second start since surgery to remove bone chips in his throwing elbow on July 29, giving up one run and two hits in 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. The 2018 AL Cy Young Award winner threw 29 of 52 pitches for strikes.

"Guys picked me up," Snell said. "It's pretty exciting to see these guys do what they always do."

HONORS

Meadows and right-hander Charlie Morton were voted co-winners of the Don Zimmer award as the Rays MVP by members of the Tampa Bay chapter of the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Red Sox: OF Andrew Benintendi (jammed left thumb) was available off the bench. ... RHP Heath Hembree (right elbow inflammation) was reinstated from the 10-day injured list and pitched a perfect seventh.

Rays: Garcia (vertigo-type symptoms) missed the three previous games.

UP NEXT

Red Sox: LHP Eduardo Rodriguez (18-6) is slated to get the ball Tuesday night at Texas.

Rays: RHP Yonny Chirinos (9-5) will make his second appearance since being sidelined by right middle finger inflammation in early August against the AL East champion New York Yankees on Tuesday night. Yankees LHP CC Sabathia, moving to the bullpen for the postseason, is scheduled to make his first career regular-season appearance as reliever.