

The Boston Red Sox Thursday, September 26, 2019

*** *The Boston Globe***

Rick Porcello empties his tank in perhaps his final win for the Red Sox

Julian McWilliams

Rick Porcello wouldn't go fly fishing at his family's property in Vermont earlier this season. Despite it being his go-to place to relax, unwind and indulge in his favorite hobby, Porcello knew his struggles on the mound were of paramount concern and had to be addressed.

So the 30-year-old righthander confronted his challenges head-on, and took pride in his diligent preparation for his next turn in the Red Sox starting rotation. Fly fishing would have to wait until the end of the season.

He took that approach into his final start of the season in Wednesday night's 10-3 victory over the Texas Rangers at Globe Life Park. One that marked, quite possibly, the final start of his career after five seasons with the Red Sox.

Porcello put off talk about free agency or the possibility of playing somewhere else. "I'm not even thinking about it right now, man," he said recently. "I haven't gotten anybody out in two months"

But heading into his last turn in the rotation, the reality of his situation set in.

Porcello talked to Red Sox manager Alex Cora about it before the series against the Rangers. Even for Porcello, who fiercely tried to remain in the present, his uncertain future played in his head.

It looked as if Porcello's final appearance in a Red Sox uniform — if this was indeed it — appeared to be an unforgiving one when he got off to a shaky start, allowing three runs in the first inning after loading the bases with no outs. The Rangers capitalized with a two-run double by Rougned Odor, who later scored on a Ronald Guzman single.

But Porcello (14-12) gathered himself and didn't allow a run over his next five innings, submitting six strong innings during which he allowed three runs on six hits while striking out eight batters.

"That's typical, Rick, you know," said Mitch Moreland. "Had a tough one there, and then pulled it together and goes six. He's the ultimate competitor. He's a winner out there. It's been a blast playing behind him. Don't know what's going to happen, but that was a good one to go out on."

Chris Owings hit a two-run single to help the Sox tie it in top half of the second, 3-3. In the third, Christian Vazquez's two-run homer (his 23d of the season) put the Sox ahead, 5-3.

Moreland then homered in the top of the sixth, extending the lead to 7-4. Moreland went on to record four hits, matching his career high.

Porcello finished his outing with a 1-2-3 sixth, inducing Scott Heineman to fly out to left field for the final out of the frame. Porcello and Cora embraced at the bottom step of the visitors' dugout before shaking hands with his teammates.

"It's been a tough one this year," Porcello said. "I don't get too emotional and close the door on anything, but from the bottom of my heart it's been an absolute pleasure to wear this uniform and play for the Red Sox organization."

Porcello's taken the ball in each of his starts this season. He's only been on the injured list twice in his five years with the Red Sox. Both times were in 2015. He's won a Cy Young in 2016 and a World Series in 2018. More importantly, he's showed up.

"It's good to see him finishing this season this way. It's a teachable moment to guys in that clubhouse," Cora said. "No matter how good or bad you struggle over 162 games, preparation is very important."

Despite the myriad challenges Porcello faced on the mound, it never caused his love for the game to waver.

"I love the game. I put everything I have into it," he said. "You're no good to anybody when you can't go out there and take the ball and that's one thing I always prided myself on."

Rafael Devers, who went 2 for 5, blasted his 32nd homer of the season in the top of the seventh inning. It was a solo shot, giving the Sox an 8-3 lead.

It put Devers' hit total at 195 for the season with four games to play (including a day off Thursday). More importantly, he passed Ted Williams for the most extra-base hits (87) by a Red Sox player before age 23.

After concluding his postgame remarks, Porcello picked up his black backpack and gathered the rest of his belongings from his locker. But there was one last question: "Are you going fly fishing this offseason?"

Finally able to exhale for the first time since the start of his pressure-packed season, Porcello smiled, flipped his backpack over his shoulder, and replied, "You bet I am."

Josh Taylor, former PTBNL, has made a name for himself with Red Sox

Peter Abraham

David Ortiz was once the player to be named later in a trade. So were Moises Alou, Michael Brantley, and Gio Gonzalez.

They all escaped anonymity, and went on to have long and successful major league careers.

But when the Red Sox traded Deven Marrero to the Arizona Diamondbacks for a player to be named later in 2018, the expectation was not to get much in return.

Marrero was a poor hitter out of minor league options, and a PTBNL was a better option for the Sox than releasing the 2012 first-round pick.

The teams made a deal that the Sox could scout a group of players over seven weeks, then make their choice.

Senior analytics analyst Greg Rybarczyk recommended Josh Taylor, and pro scout Steve Peck agreed after watching the lefthanded reliever pitch in person.

"It was a good example of analytics and traditional scouting coalescing," assistant general manager Eddie Romero said.

The deal was completed on May 15. Taylor, who had no idea what was happening, was surprised when he was told.

"It came out of nowhere," Taylor said Wednesday before the Sox beat the Texas Rangers, 10-3, "but it worked out pretty well. I've had a lot going on over the last 18 months. I try to take each day as it comes."

The 26-year-old Taylor made his major league debut with the Sox on May 29, and he has a 3.04 earned run average in 52 games, with a healthy 11.8 strikeouts per nine innings.

Taylor was a starter in high school in Arizona, junior college, and at Division 2 Georgia College before signing with the Phillies in 2014 as an undrafted free agent.

He was traded to the Diamondbacks 11 months later for international bonus slot money, which is the right to spend money on international prospects, not actual money.

Taylor became a reliever during the 2017 season, but it wasn't until this year that it clicked for him.

Lefthanded hitters have hit .206 with a .562 OPS against Taylor, but manager Alex Cora hasn't made him a specialist. Taylor has faced righthanded hitters 122 times and held them to a .692 OPS.

A 95-m.p.h. fastball complemented by a slider and a sinking fastball gave Taylor the tools he needed.

"I've learned how to read the scouting reports and use my strengths against the weaknesses of the hitters. It's a process and I'm learning every day," he said. "This is a good clubhouse and the guys here helped me a lot in terms of preparing for games."

Next season, when pitchers will have to face a minimum of three hitters unless it's the end of the inning, Taylor should fit in just fine.

"Coming up as starter, you have to face righties and lefties," Taylor said. "I've always been comfortable facing righthanders."

Counting his time with Triple A Pawtucket, Taylor has appeared in 72 games and pitched 70⅓ innings. He plans to give his arm a good long rest once the season ends.

"It's definitely been a grind," Taylor said. "We have a good training staff that gets us ready to play. It took a little while to find a routine that works. Some days you don't feel 100 percent, but you do what you have to and get close to that."

For a little-known pitcher who was among the early cuts in spring training, Taylor became somebody Cora could count on.

"We were very impressed. He was really, really good," Cora said. "There was a stretch there when we used him a lot and we had to give him some time off.

"But overall, he was amazing and physically he was able to hold up."

When the Sox were eliminated from playoff contention earlier this month, Cora mentioned Taylor along with Matt Barnes and Brandon Workman as relievers he planned to use sparingly with an eye on next season.

"That was good to hear, a comment like that," Taylor said. "Especially from somebody who makes decisions. Hopefully I've showed them what I can do and I can be part of this next season.

"We're going to be a hungry team next year, I know that will be the case. This season was a disappointment and you wonder how the heck it happened. Going through this is going to make us stronger."

Brandon Workman's Red Sox career year brings him home

Julian McWilliams

Brandon Workman grew up going to games at Globe Life Park. He was raised in nearby Bowie, Texas, just 90 minutes away from the stadium. He'd never pitched there before Tuesday, when Alex Cora called on his closer to help secure a 12-10 lead and Eduardo Rodriguez's 19th win of the year.

"It was cool," said Workman, who's now pitched in 25 MLB ballparks. "It was good to come here and pitch professionally finally."

It was good timing, too, because this is the Rangers' final homestand before they move to their new stadium, Globe Life Field, which will feature a retractable roof.

Workman had friends and family in the stands Tuesday evening, and they couldn't have caught him at a better time.

Workman's put together a career season. He entered Wednesday leading the league in opponent batting average (.125), slugging (.168) and OPS (.438). He's given up only one home run all season, to Colorado's Charlie Blackmon on May 14, with Workman's 0.13 HR/nine innings also first in the majors (minimum 40 innings).

"I've just been consistent," Workman said. "I'm executing my pitches a lot more consistently this year and it's put me in a good spot."

Cora wants him to take everything into next season but the walks, which Workman was handing out at a clip of 5.7 per nine innings.

"It's a little bit different in every situation because you don't want to give in," Cora said. "I think he did a good job this year of using his fastball enough to keep [hitters] honest, and being able to throw the breaking ball for strikes early in the counts."

The Sox won, 10-3, Wednesday, meaning they didn't have to use Workman. With just four games left, Cora recently mentioned he will stay away from Workman and the rest of his high-leverage guys as much as possible.

Theo says no

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein told reporters Wednesday that despite speculation to the contrary, he intends to stay in Chicago.

The Red Sox fired Dave Dombrowski earlier this month, and the thought of a Boston reunion with Epstein was a possibility, especially given the Cubs' rocky finish to the 2019 season. But Epstein appeared to quash that discussion, saying he's in Chicago for the foreseeable future.

"We have a lot we need to work on to get back to the level we're accustomed to," Epstein said of the Cubs. "I'm invested in that."

Epstein was a part of Boston's front office for many years, becoming GM in 2002 before leaving for Chicago after the 2011 season. He signed a five-year contract extension with the Cubs in 2016.

Another for Devers?

It's been a year of milestones for Rafael Devers. The 22-year-old slugger recorded his 50th double on Sept. 10 against Toronto, his 30th homer against San Francisco on Sept. 18, then his 31st on Saturday at Tampa Bay, becoming the youngest Red Sox third baseman to reach that mark.

Now, he could reach 200 hits, entering Wednesday's game just six shy. He'll have Thursday off, but will play in the series against the Baltimore Orioles.

“That would be cool for him to get to it,” Cora said.

Cora admitted that with each potential milestone, Devers has picked up some bad habits this month. The numbers reflect that: Entering Wednesday, Devers was having his worst month of the season, hitting just .238 with a .685 OPS. His 23 strikeouts are the most of any month.

“One thing’s for sure,” Cora said. “To get to 200 hits, we told him he needs to get back to owning the strike zone and going the other way. He’s in a good place now. Mechanically we found a few things the last couple of days.”

He tallied two hits Monday and added in two more on Wednesday (a double and a homer). He now has 196 hits on the year.

If Devers reaches that mark, he’ll be the youngest American League player to do so since Alex Rodriguez in 1996.

Betts out for series

Cora said Mookie Betts (foot) will be out for the remainder of the series, but should be active against Baltimore. Betts hit his 29th homer of the season Tuesday; he would be just the second Red Sox ever to record 30 homers and 40 doubles in as many as three seasons. David Ortiz did it four times . . . David Price is still scheduled to have surgery Thursday to remove the cyst in his left wrist.

After Wednesday, the Sox now have the most homers (241) and most strikeouts (1,346) in franchise history.

Theo Epstein says he’s staying in Chicago

Christopher Price

Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein told reporters Wednesday that despite speculation to the contrary, he intends to stay in Chicago.

The Red Sox fired Dave Dombrowski earlier this month, and the thought of a Boston reunion with Epstein was a possibility, especially given the Cubs’ rocky finish to the 2019 season.

But Epstein appeared to quash that discussion on Wednesday, saying he’s in Chicago for the foreseeable future, despite the Cubs’ September struggles.

“We have a lot we need to work on to get back to the level we’re accustomed to,” Epstein said. “I’m invested in that.”

Epstein was a part of Boston’s front office for many years, becoming GM in 2002 before leaving for Chicago after the 2011 season. He signed a five-year contract extension with the Cubs in 2016.

“I have a lot of great relationships with people who work for the Red Sox and I wish them the very best, but there is nothing more to it,” Epstein added of a potential return to Boston.

*** *The Boston Herald***

Rick Porcello wins final start with Red Sox before entering free agency

Jason Mastrodonato

If it was Rick Porcello’s final pitch in a Red Sox uniform, it was perfect.

Perfect in that it was a fastball at 90 mph, thrown by a right-hander who survived five years at Fenway Park and won a Cy Young Award while never averaging harder than 92 mph on his heater.

Perfect in that it was located low and inside, the sweet spot for the sinkerballer throughout his time in Boston.

And perfect as Porcello watched it sail into the glove of Andrew Benintendi and walked off the field with a lead, one the Sox would keep in an eventual 10-3 win over the Texas Rangers.

It was Porcello's 73rd win in a Red Sox uniform, a reminder that despite never having the best stuff on the staff, he averaged 15 wins a year while the Sox went 94-65 (.591) in the games he started.

"Who knows what's going to happen?" Porcello said afterward. "You never close the door on anything. It was definitely a special night for me."

He looked shaky in the first inning. His command was erratic as he plunked Willie Calhoun in the elbow and forced him out of the game. The Rangers knocked him around to take a 3-0 lead.

And then Porcello found it. They didn't touch him over the next five innings.

"Typical Rick," said first baseman Mitch Moreland.

Porcello collected six strikeouts, including the 1,500th for his career, and walked off in the sixth with an 8-3 lead.

Alex Cora was the first to meet him at the top of the dugout steps with a high five and a hug. One by one, Porcello was greeted for a warm embrace by his teammates. Always well-liked in the clubhouse for his professionalism, Porcello was a friend to all in his five years with the club.

Cora came over for another handshake and one last hug. Porcello sat down on the bench and threw his head in a towel. He had given everything he had.

"I sat there and said, '(Expletive), it's been a tough one this year,'" he said. "I don't want to get too emotional or close the door on anything and who knows what's going to happen in the offseason? But from the bottom of my heart it's been an absolute pleasure to wear this uniform and pitch for the Red Sox organization the last five years for Mr. Henry and Mr. Werner and all these guys."

"The coaching staff, all these players, it's as good a group as you're going to find. I know this year hasn't worked out the way we wanted to but it doesn't take away from the special human beings we have in this clubhouse and that's really for me, sitting there and soaking that in, that was nice."

Porcello was never a perfect pitcher. Even his great games often look laborious. He struggled when he didn't have his sinker. He took too long to adapt when the game changed and he tried throwing more fastballs high in the zone, only for hitters to blast them out of the park at a record pace when he led the league with 38 homers surrendered in 2017.

He was a blue-collar pitcher. He almost never missed a start, save for five in 2015 when he needed a month on the disabled list. He made every start since, even while pitching into October in three straight years.

"I take a lot of pride in it," he said. "My body hurts. It's not easy to do... Through some of the tough results and some good results, that was definitely something I can hang my hat on since I've been pitching here for the Red Sox."

It was fitting, too, that in perhaps his final game with the Sox, former manager John Farrell's son, Luke, pitched for the other team out of relief. John Farrell wasn't the most adored manager in Red Sox history,

but the old school manager and the old school pitcher seemed to share a specific kind of mutual respect. Farrell cared less about Porcello's ERA and more about the way the Red Sox always seemed to win with him on the mound.

Instead of letting a contract define his Red Sox career — former general manager Ben Cherington took a lot of heat for signing him to a four-year, \$82.5-million extension on Opening Day in 2015 — Porcello was a consistent winner.

“We know because of the nature of the business, not everybody is going to be together,” Cora said. “He’s a free agent. We don’t know what’s going to happen but we’re very proud of what he’s done throughout his years here. This is a guy that, for me, he means a lot, not only on the field what he did last year and the way he fought this year, but in the clubhouse. He’s one of those guys that I rely on.”

He’s now collected 149 wins at just 30 years old. The last pitchers to collect as many wins prior to turning 31 were all elite: Clayton Kershaw (153), Félix Hernández (154), CC Sabathia (171), Greg Maddux (166), Dwight Gooden (157), and Roger Clemens (161).

“He’s the ultimate competitor,” said Moreland. “He’s a winner out there. It’s been a blast playing behind him. Don’t know what’s going to happen but that’s a good one to go out on.”

Porcello likely finishes his season with a 14-12 record and a 5.52 ERA, unless Cora surprises Porcello with a relief appearance this weekend to give him one last ovation in front of the home crowd at Fenway Park.

“I’ll pitch, I don’t care,” Porcello said. “I’m starting to feel good.”

What comes next for him is to be determined. He’s likely made the bulk of his money in his career, but betting against him wouldn’t seem wise. One way or another, Porcello always finds a way to win.

Theo Epstein on Red Sox rumors: ‘There’s nothing to that story’

Jason Mastrodonato

Theo Epstein indicated on Wednesday he will not have interest in the Red Sox opening.

Speaking to Cubs reporters in Pittsburgh, he refuted rumors that he was a candidate to replace Dave Dombrowski as the president of baseball operations.

“There’s nothing to that story,” Epstein told reporters. “I’m here. We have a lot we need to work on to get back to the level we’re accustomed to. I’m invested in that. That’s what I’m focused on.”

Epstein previously told reporters neither he nor former Sox executives Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod were linked to the Sox opening.

“That’s still true,” he told reporters Wednesday. “I have really good relationships with a lot of people there, and I certainly wish them the best, but there’s nothing to that story.”

Season review

One by one, Red Sox players will step into Alex Cora’s office this week as the manager explains to them what he saw in 2019 and what he wants to see in 2020.

The exit interviews have begun. Looking back, he should’ve done them last year, too.

“It’s something that you have to do, actually regardless of whether you make it to the postseason or you don’t make it,” Cora said. “It’s important. If I learned something today, that one, we need to do that even if you have a headache.”

Cora never did exit interviews last year, when the Sox cruised to a World Series title, never losing more than a single game in any postseason series.

Players celebrated the title then went home for the offseason without ever stopping by for a formal exit interview.

“Yeah, actually this is something that, I talked to (assistant general manager Eddie Romero and Brian O’Halloran) and hopefully we accomplish the things that we did last year,” he said.

In particular, Cora highlighted the relief crew as part of the team he wants to see improve this winter.

“We’ve been telling these guys, this offseason is very important for them,” he said. “You can have one good season in the big leagues, but the goal is to have in consecutive years. I know a goal for a baseball player is to play 10 years in the big leagues. For that to happen, they need to attack the offseason the right way, physically, mentally, take care of the bodies and move forward.”

Workman for real

One more regret from the Sox manager: Not naming Brandon Workman the closer heading into the season.

But how could he have seen this coming?

Workman started last year in the minors and was solid when he returned to the big leagues, posting a 3.27 ERA in 41 innings. Then he allowed five runs while recording just three outs over three postseason appearances and was left off the World Series roster.

Cora wouldn’t name Workman the closer in 2020 but liked what he saw this year.

“Everything,” the skipper said. “From leadership to work habits to the way he attacked guys... Well, if I had a crystal ball and said, ‘OK, this is something that is going to happen with Brandon Workman,’ then go ahead and be the closer. It’s a testament to who he is. Last year was a very disappointing season. We took him off the roster. He was a great teammate and he was there, but I know it hurt him. He had a better offseason than previous ones. Hard work pays off and he’s having an outstanding season.”

Workman entered Wednesday with a 1.91 ERA and has allowed just one home run in 70²/₃ innings while striking out 101 batters. The only flaw has been his control. He has 45 walks.

“But if you aren’t giving up hits that’s fine,” Cora said. “Is that sustainable? I don’t know. Maybe it is.”

Barnes on roll

Matt Barnes look to be back in form and is finishing the season strong.

He’s allowed just three runs in his past 19 outings, with 27 strikeouts in 17¹/₃ innings in that span. He has a 3.84 ERA overall and should have another key role in the Sox bullpen in 2020.

“I think his stuff was great throughout,” Cora said. “I think, honestly, physically, what we asked from him early in the season, the relief ace, it’s not that easy. I think we can talk deep into it in February next year, but it’s hard, it’s very hard. Facing 3-4-5 every day, not only physically but mentally, it’s not easy.”

Cora said the “big hurdle” will be getting Barnes to stay strong throughout the entire season, particularly in August.

“Next year the rules change (with only 28 players on September rosters) and there aren’t going to be too many reinforcements,” he said. “September is going to be a lot different. We have to find ways to maintain

our stuff throughout because the rules help you out in September, but next year there is no luxury of that.”
...

Mookie Betts (foot) was held out of the lineup again and is unlikely to play until Friday at the earliest. ...

Brock Holt is nursing tired legs and will also likely be on the bench until Friday. ...

The Sox plan to rest most of their regulars in the series finale Thursday. Brian Johnson will start on the mound for a “bullpen game.”

Brock Holt reflects on Red Sox career ahead of free agency

Jason Mastrodonato

There’s nobody quite like Brock Holt.

The Red Sox have learned that more than ever this year, as the utility man took no part in baseball’s home run surge (he’s hit just three) and still put up a career season at the plate.

Holt, 31, took some time Wednesday to reflect on his seven-year career with the Red Sox that could be in its final week as he prepares to enter free agency for the first time.

“I think it’s exciting,” he said. “I think it’s a little bit scary just because you don’t know what to expect. It’s the first time I’ve ever gone through free agency so I’m anxious to see how it plays out and what happens. I’m excited about the opportunity and I know that whatever happens is going to be the right thing. We’ll do what’s best for our family, me and Lakyn and Griffin. We love it in Boston and we’ll see what happens.”

Not only has Holt hit .303 with a .793 OPS while playing the best second base on the team (and arguably one of the best in the American League when he’s healthy), he also is the Red Sox’ Roberto Clemente Award nominee and Jimmy Fund captain for his commitment to helping those less fortunate in the Boston community.

There are days Holt will show up to the park coming straight from the hospital where he was visiting children battling cancer. Manager Alex Cora will ask, ‘Was that a planned thing?’ And Holt often says no. He just wanted to stop by and see the children.

He’s become a fan favorite in Boston and even got his own bobblehead this year.

The Red Sox have no second baseman with Dustin Pedroia’s career looking like it’s coming to an end, but Holt soon will find out if he’s done enough to make himself indispensable to the organization.

“I feel like I would’ve done all that no matter where I played,” Holt said. “And it just so happens Boston is where I’ve been the last seven years. This is home for us right now. And no matter what happens, it’s always going to hold a special place in our hearts. I loved being a Boston Red Sox my entire time here. We’ve won, we’ve lost and I played with a lot of really good players, made a lot of really close friends here. That’s going to be the difficult part if things don’t line up and work out.

“But that’s part of it. Everybody knows the business side of it. Regardless of what happens, I’ll have nothing but nice things to say about my time here and vice versa.”

As well as Holt has played this year, he said he wishes he played in more games. Missing time to start the year with a scratched cornea (his son poked him in the eye while the two were playing) was frustrating, but Holt has been on a tear since his return May 27, hitting .320 with an .829 OPS since then.

“I always felt like I was a good hitter,” he said. “I don’t hit a lot of home runs but I’ll give you a good at-bat, I’ll get the job done more times than not. You have to have confidence in yourself to get the job done. I

think I've been given more an opportunity the last couple years to prove that. That goes to the staff we have here with (Cora) giving me a shot to play."

But as the game trends in the direction of power hitters, Holt has lagged behind.

With just three home runs, he and the Twins' Luis Arraez could be the only players this year with an OPS of at least .800 with three home runs or fewer (minimum 80 games).

"Everyone is joking about the balls being juiced," Holt said. "I always say, whenever I come up they must not use the juiced balls. They must be using the regular ones. I've never been a guy to hit home runs. I'll hit a couple but everything has to be just right for me to hit it."

There already have been 55 players to cross the 30-homer mark, more than any other year in history.

"I don't get it," Holt said. "I honestly don't get it. I see some guys hitting all these home runs and it doesn't make sense. I've never been a guy — maybe if I went all out and tried to hit home runs I'd hit more but that's just not who I am. I'll never hit 20 home runs, 30 home runs. My career high is seven. I try to hit the ball hard. Sometimes I do it, sometimes I don't. Wherever it goes after I make contact, I can't direct where it goes. I try to hit it."

He was never tempted to try for higher launch angle to knock the new baseballs out of the park?

"Not really because I've never been that guy," he said. "I want to be a productive player and feel like I can help a team. I feel like I help a team by doing what I do. There are guys who will hit home runs. I'm not going to hit 500 home runs in my career. J.D. Martinez is that guy. We have guys that hit home runs."

The Red Sox have plenty of them. They don't have any players like Holt.

"If I can get on base for those guys, drive in a couple, move a guy over for a guy who can hit home runs, I just try to play the game," he said. "Whatever the game is telling me to do, try to do that."

He's done it well for seven years in Boston. This weekend could be his last in a Red Sox uniform.

*** *MassLive.com***

Xander Bogaerts' accountability stands out in lost season for Boston Red Sox

Chris Cotillo

Xander Bogaerts isn't the oldest or most experienced player on the Red Sox. He doesn't have an MVP award or some of the other accolades his teammates have racked up.

But Bogaerts, who turns 27 next month, has emerged as one of Boston's outspoken leaders in his sixth full major-league season. Throughout an unexpectedly difficult season for the Sox, the shortstop has consistently made himself available in the toughest of times, never shying away from a question or criticism.

Playing for a manager in Alex Cora who constantly preaches accountability, Bogaerts has been accountable at every turn. Though he was under no obligation to take the heat on a nightly basis, Bogaerts has stood at his locker at every turn, trying his best to explain what at times has seemed inexplicable.

"He's a quiet kid from the island (Aruba) and sometimes you need to push him to talk to people and let everybody know what's going on," Cora said. "Little by little, I'm doing less of that. Now, it's him."

Bogaerts, who tends to wear his emotions on his sleeve and offer candid responses, doesn't grumble about having to talk to the media after a tough loss. Modeling what he saw from veterans Dustin Pedroia and David Ortiz in his early days, the shortstop has taken it upon himself to be a quasi-spokesman for the Sox all year.

"Someone has to do it. I think that's good for the younger guys to see," he said. "One day, if they're in my situation, they'll be able to do that also. Obviously, in tough times, a lot of us get frustrated. Sometimes you want a break or you just don't want to hear much or have a lot of people talking to you. Just kind of being there whenever I can and when I can't, having someone else pick me up."

Answering for his team's struggles has not always been easy for Bogaerts, who at times has taken the hard times as hard as anyone on the team. After certain losses-- like the finale of a four-game sweep at the hands of the Yankees in August or a crushing walk-off loss in Cleveland a week later-- Bogaerts was despondent, with the wear of more than four months of disappointing baseball starting to show.

"Those were some of the toughest times," Bogaerts said. "We knew where we were in the standings and the teams we were chasing. How important every win was at that time. Obviously, now, we're not going anywhere. There was always a chance. That was all we wanted, a chance. We had it but we just didn't take advantage of it. That kind of sucked."

Even then, Bogaerts tried to answer every question thrown his way, even if he didn't know all the answers. His responses ranged from nearly speechless ("I don't even know what to say") to overly accountable ("You feel like you help the team and it's just like, you didn't do enough") even in the midst of a career year that he'll finish with career-highs in nearly every offensive category.

Bogaerts' accessibility makes him valuable to reporters, but his teammates also benefit greatly from it. His role as an internal leader has grown, too, as young infielders like Rafael Devers and Michael Chavis carve out their own places in the game and view Bogaerts as a mentor.

"I just try to stay focused and help others with little stuff I see to help make them better and help make us better," Bogaerts said. "Obviously, it's good to recommend (things) to the other guys."

For the first time in four years, Bogaerts will head back to Aruba in early October and begin his preparation for next season early. He'll stay in touch with his teammates throughout the winter while taking on a temporary role as one of the de facto captains on his pickup soccer teams at home.

"I kind of notice playing with (my friends), they kind of listen to me a lot," Bogaerts said. "I notice people kind of look up to (me)."

Bogaerts isn't the only player who has gone out of his way to take the lumps this season, as veteran starters Chris Sale, Rick Porcello and David Price are among the others who have been consistently transparent. But Bogaerts -- an everyday player -- has been the most consistent, emerging as a leader when his team has needed it most.

"I think it comes with it, just trying to understand," Bogaerts said. "I think that's been the biggest thing, just understanding, this comes with what you're doing. It'll be much worse if no one does it. I think that's not the way it should be done."

10 observations from the last week in baseball

1. The Brewers seem like a team of destiny, huh? Magical things going on in Milwaukee.
2. The Theo Epstein reunion talk never really made sense. And no, his denial doesn't seem like an empty claim.
3. That being said, the 2019 Cubs are eerily reminiscent of the 2011 Red Sox.

4. The Red Sox are in no rush to fill their top baseball operations role. One would think Nov. 11 (the start of the GM Meetings) would be a logical target date.
5. The Twins have already won 20 more games than they did a year ago. Heck of a job by Rocco Baldelli in his first season.
6. None of the American League wild-card contenders are limping to the finish line. The Athletics, Rays and Indians have all kept pace by going 7-3 in their last 10 games.
7. Would have loved to see Zack Greinke's reaction to the "hassle" of throwing a no-hitter. He was two outs away from Houston's third no-no of the season and the third of the year against the Mariners (both would have been MLB firsts).
8. Felix Hernandez's last start in Seattle will be a special moment Thursday. Nothing cooler than the "King's Court" in its day.
9. The Pirates are reportedly expected to bring back Clint Hurdle as manager, so third base coach Joey Cora will likely be back next season as well. The guess here is that he eventually joins his brother's staff in Boston at some point, at least for one year.
10. Congratulations to WBZ's Jonny Miller, who will be inducted to the Massachusetts Broadcasters Hall of Fame later this week.

Rick Porcello gets win as Boston Red Sox defeat Rangers, 10-3

Chris Cotillo

If Wednesday's outing was Rick Porcello's last in a Red Sox uniform, the veteran starter ended his tenure on a good note.

Porcello went six innings and got the win as the Red Sox beat the Rangers, 8-3. Boston broke its franchise record for home runs in a single season in its 83rd victory of the year.

Porcello ran into trouble in the first, digging the Sox a 3-0 hole when Rougned Odor hit a two-run double and Ronald Guzman added another run with an RBI single. The Sox bounced back with a three-spot of their own a half-inning later, tying the game on a Jackie Bradley Jr. RBI groundout and Chris Owings two-run single off Texas starter Kolby Allard.

In the top of the third, Christian Vazquez put the Sox on top with a two-run homer, marking Boston's 239th home run of the season. That set a new franchise record, breaking the mark (238) set in 2003.

Mitch Moreland (two-run) and Rafael Devers (solo) added insurance homers to give Porcello his 14th victory of the year. Porcello settled down after the first, finishing six innings having allowed three runs on six hits while recording eight strikeouts.

Boston extended its lead to seven runs on a Xander Bogaerts sacrifice fly and J.D. Martinez RBI single in the ninth. The Sox had 12 hits, including four from Moreland and two from Devers, Martinez and Owings.

The Red Sox improved to 83-75. They'll look to finish off a three-game sweep of the Rangers in the series finale Thursday afternoon with lefty Brian Johnson likely to start opposite Mike Minor.

Boston Red Sox break franchise record for home runs in season; Christian Vazquez hits team's 239th blast of 2019

Chris Cotillo

With Christian Vazquez's two-run homer in the third inning against the Rangers on Wednesday, the Red Sox broke their season-single home run record with their 239th homer of the season.

Boston's previous single-season record was 238, set in 2003. Mookie Betts tied that mark with a homer Tuesday before Vazquez broke it to put the Sox up, 5-3, on Wednesday.

The Red Sox have six players with at least 20 homers, tying the most in franchise history (also in 2003) and have eight players with at least 15, which is a franchise record.

Boston entered the night ranked 10th in the majors in homers. The Yankees lead the league with 299 this season.

The Sox will have a chance to add on to their new high mark. Boston has four more games after Wednesday.

*** *The Pawtucket Times***

Promotion to MLB awaits PawSox broadcaster Mike Monaco

Brendan McGair

It's always been easy to spot talent at McCoy Stadium. This time, we're taking the spotlight and shining it away from the playing surface. Instead, let's point it toward the press box.

Remember the name Mike Monaco, folks, and not just because he's answering the Red Sox broadcast call on NESN this Friday night and again on Saturday afternoon. Remember his name because in this scribe's humble opinion, it won't be long before you tune into a big-time sporting event and see this particular cool-as-a-cucumber/prepared-to-the-gills purveyor of on-air syntax staring back at you.

The upcoming NESN gig represents the latest in a series of résumé-building moments for the 26-year-old Monaco, who grew up less than hour away from Fenway Park and swore his fan allegiance to the BoSox at a very young age. One Halloween, Monaco went trick-or-treating for sweets as Nomar Garciaparra because he admired the shortstop's sweet pre-batting rituals. Talk about your Sox devotion.

"When Nomar got traded [in 2004], I remember exactly where I was. My first autographs came on the same day at Fenway. The ball was signed by [former Boston third base coach] Wendell Kim and [catcher] Jason Varitek," said Monaco.

These days, Monaco is devoted to all things related to his broadcast craft, which I've witnessed firsthand.

Earlier this month, Monaco wrapped up his first season as one of two broadcasters the PawSox employ. He spent the two previous seasons with the local Triple-A ballclub as a broadcast intern. If he wasn't sitting next to me in the McCoy press box with his headphones on and listening to Will Flemming and Josh Maurer so he could compile a detailed postgame recap, you could find Monaco either in the TV or radio booth.

With the PawSox ramping up their television appearances in recent years, the need was there to fill airtime. For Monaco, it was a prime chance to get more hands-on experience after getting his feet wet at the Single-A level – 2015 with the South Bend Cubs and 2016 with the Fort Wayne TinCaps.

You always want to secure an internship where the chance to get actual honest-to-goodness hands-on experience is available. Between the 2017 and 2018 seasons with Pawtucket, Monaco was afforded numerous opportunities to strap on the headset – home and away – and write the captions based on what was taking place on the field.

“Coming to Pawtucket in 2017, there was no expectation of ‘Here’s a certain amount of play-by-play you’ll be doing,’” said Monaco when asked to reflect on the steps that have led him down a fruitful path. “I was very lucky the PawSox kept believing in me and kept pushing me.”

Specifically, let’s retrace the steps down the path that led him to this weekend’s plum assignment, which includes sitting next to Jerry Remy and Dennis Eckersley as Boston closes out the season against Baltimore.

When Flemming joined the WEEI Red Sox radio booth prior to the 2019 season, the PawSox took swift action. This time, a national search to find a replacement was not conducted. Team management made the wise call to elevate Monaco from intern to fulltime broadcaster. Everyone inside McCoy knew they had struck gold with Monaco, who came across as appreciative when asked about the faith the PawSox showed in him, knowing full well he could have been asked to apply for the broadcast job just like everyone else.

The phrase “catch a rising star” has been often utilized over the years based on the wave of on-field talent that’s passed through McCoy before reaching Fenway Park. What the PawSox were telling Monaco upon informing him he would be teaming up with Maurer was that he was cut from a special cloth.

“To hear that, it makes me incredibly grateful when you think of the talented PawSox broadcasters the team has had over the years ... guys I’ve looked up to and try to learn from,” said Monaco.

Much like Mookie Betts and Xander Bogaerts, Monaco has been on the fast-track to bigger and better for some time. When he studied at the University of Notre Dame, he sought out Irish alums who have reached the pinnacle of the sports broadcasting domain. The responses and feedback he received provided him with a structural foundation that in turn helped him map out the appropriate course of action.

“Go do it and don’t say no to any opportunity. Go get as much experience as you can,” said Monaco when asked if there was a common thread from everyone who took the time to reply to his emails. “If you need to do a practice broadcast on your own, do it.”

Like a basketball player who seeks to build the perfect arc on his jump shot, Monaco has worked tirelessly to polish his on-air delivery. The only way you can do that is by landing gigs, which he has.

If your cable subscription includes the Big Ten Network, chances are you’ve seen Monaco wear a variety of hats. His role as a contributor has involved everything from college football to soccer to volleyball. This past summer, he flew out to the state of Washington to help ESPN’s coverage of the Junior League Softball World Series.

As for NESN, the sports cable station aired several PawSox games this past season with Monaco on the call. Clearly, he made a favorable impression. When NESN announced in late August who would be keeping the seat warm for Dave O’Brien during select weekend games in September, there was Monaco’s name. Given his relentless drive and clear-as-day talent, it was far from shocking to learn he had been chosen as a fill-in.

“I’m honored to be a small part of it even if it’s for just a few games,” said Monaco. “Going back to my very early years, I knew I wanted to be a broadcaster. I do feel really lucky that so many people were willing to help along the way.”

“The two words that probably get overused in our society are honored and blessed, but those are the right words,” Monaco added.

Guess there’s nothing left to say but go get ‘em, Mike!

*** *RedSox.com***

Porcello in vintage form, wins potential farewell

Ian Browne

The night started with the type of rough patch Rick Porcello has dealt with too many times this season. But it continued with another Porcello trait -- the ability to get back up after he's been knocked around.

What might have been the last start of Porcello's five-year run with the Red Sox ended with the righty earning the win in his team's 10-3 victory over the Rangers.

Expected to become a free agent this offseason, Porcello got hugs and handshakes as he returned to the dugout after his 98-pitch outing was complete.

"Who knows what's going to happen, you never close the door on anything," Porcello said. "It was definitely a special night for me. Just to go out there and get a win with all these guys who have gone through a lot together the last five years, it was a lot of fun."

After giving up three runs in the first inning, Porcello zeroed in for the rest of the night. He went six innings, allowing six hits while walking none and striking out eight.

"Outstanding," said Red Sox first baseman Mitch Moreland. "Just typical Rick. Had a tough one in that first, and pulled it together and goes six strong for us, just shut the door. He's the ultimate competitor. He's a winner out there. It's been a blast playing behind him. I don't know what's going to happen, but that was a good one to go out on, for sure."

Porcello finished the year with a 14-12 record and a 5.52 ERA. He went out on a good note, notching a 2.65 ERA over his last three starts.

"We don't know what's going to happen, but we're very proud of what he's done throughout his years here," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "This is a guy that, for me, he means a lot, not only on the field what he did last year and the way he fought this year, but in the clubhouse."

"He's one of those guys that I rely on. It's good to see him finishing the season this way. It's kind of like a teaching moment for a lot of young guys in the clubhouse. Regardless of how good or how bad you struggle over 162 games, preparation and going about it the right way, it's very important."

It's too early to know what the offseason will bring for Porcello after these past five years with Boston, going 73-55 with a 4.43 ERA in 159 starts.

There were certainly highs (the AL Cy Young Award in 2016) and lows (most notably this season), but Porcello was a constant presence in the rotation, making every start except for a brief stint on the injured list in 2015.

"I take a lot of pride in it," Porcello said. "My body hurts. It's not easy to do. I definitely take a lot of pride in that. We have a lot of guys who go out there and play every day as position players and things like that, and that's the one responsibility and thing I can control as a starter is preparation, putting myself in position to take the ball every fifth day."

"Through some of the tough results, and some good results, that was definitely something I can hang my hat on since I've been pitching here for the Red Sox."

The Red Sox aided his cause on Wednesday with a barrage of offense.

Moreland led the charge with four hits, including a homer. Christian Vázquez and Rafael Devers also went deep on a night Boston established a franchise record for home runs in a season.

Cora's team now has 241 dingers, surpassing the record of 238 set by the 2003 team.

The home runs were nice, but Wednesday belonged to Porcello. In the late innings, as he watched his team finish off his win, Porcello spent some time reflecting.

"From the bottom of my heart, it's been an absolute pleasure to wear this uniform and pitch for the Red Sox organization the last five years," Porcello said. "The coaching staff, all these players, it's as good a group as you're going to find. I know this year hasn't worked out the way we wanted to, but it doesn't take away from the special human beings we have in this clubhouse, and that really for me, sitting there and soaking that in, was nice."

Though the performance of Porcello has fluctuated, Cora considers him to be the epitome of how a Red Sox player should represent himself.

"We like those kind of players," Cora said. "Those are the kind of players we want in our organization as far as being a pro and prepared regardless of the situation. He's been amazing for us."

Vázquez sets club HR mark, exits as precaution

Ian Browne

No Red Sox player has had a more unexpected power surge in 2019 than Christian Vázquez, so perhaps it's fitting that it was his two-run shot Wednesday night that set a franchise record for home runs in a season.

The 23rd homer of the season for Vázquez was No. 239 for the Red Sox, surpassing the previous record set by the 2003 team. Mitch Moreland and Rafael Devers also went deep in Boston's 10-3 victory over the Rangers at Globe Life Park, raising the record total to 241.

Vázquez swatted his two-run homer in the third inning, giving Boston a 5-3 lead, but he was replaced by Sandy Leon on defense in the bottom of the inning.

The reason? Tightness in Vázquez's left hamstring. He was removed from the game as a precaution, according to a club representative.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora said after the game that Vázquez will probably rest until Sunday, when all hands will be on deck as the team tries to get lefty Eduardo Rodriguez his 20th win.

"He's doing OK," Cora said of Vázquez. "He got tight a little bit on the base hit by Mitch early in the game, when he went first to third. He was trying to stay there until we took Rick [Porcello] out, but I asked Rick, 'How do you feel?' He's like, 'No, just take him out, don't worry about this.'

"He'll be ready probably for Sunday."

Coming into 2019, Vázquez had just 10 homers in 922 career at-bats.

With homers up throughout MLB this season, Vázquez and the Red Sox have joined the power surge. J.D. Martinez has led the way with 35 blasts. Devers and Xander Bogaerts have gone deep 32 times.

Devers now has 196 hits for the season, inching closer to the 200 mark with four games to go. Devers' double in the ninth inning was his 52nd of the season, a new record for Red Sox third basemen.

"It's amazing what he's doing, with the runs scored and the doubles. He's approaching 200 hits," Cora said. "This kid likes to play. He enjoys it. It's a joy to see him getting locked in again. It's been a struggle in September. Everybody knows that. Everything comes down to controlling the strike zone. When he does that, he's one of the elite hitters in the big leagues."

Mookie Betts, last year's American League MVP, has 29 home runs this year. Jackie Bradley Jr. has 20. Moreland (19), Michael Chavis (18) and Andrew Benintendi (13) are also in double digits.

Workman on inside track for 2020 closer's role

Ian Browne

Red Sox manager Alex Cora isn't about to name his 2020 closer in late September 2019, particularly when he isn't sure who will be running the team's front office going forward.

But it seems clear that Brandon Workman has the inside track on that role for next year.

Cora was candid on Wednesday, saying that if he knew what Workman was going to develop into this season, he would have been the closer from the start of 2019.

"Somebody asked me last week if I would have changed something. Well, if I had a crystal ball and said, 'OK, this is something that is going to happen with Brandon Workman,' then go ahead and be the closer," Cora said. "It's a testament to who he is. Last year was a very disappointing season. We took him off the roster [in the postseason]. He was a great teammate and he was there, but I know it hurt him. He had a better offseason than previous ones. Hard work pays off, and he's having an outstanding season."

While Cora used a committee approach in the first half of the season that often included Matt Barnes or Ryan Brasier in the ninth inning, Workman pitched himself into that role after the All-Star break.

Since the break, Workman is 13-for-15 in save opportunities. Remarkably, he has given up just one home run during this record-setting season for the long ball.

"I really do enjoy it," Workman, 31, said of closing. "I like pitching in those big situations. It makes it real easy to bring the intensity and the focus every time out."

And without question, Workman would welcome the chance to pitch the ninth inning in 2020 and beyond.

"Since I became a reliever, closing has been the job I want out of the bullpen," Workman said. "I think that goes for most relievers. That's kind of the role you want to have in the bullpen, so I've obviously thought about it."

With his team eliminated more than a week before the end of the season, Cora has had more time to huddle with players and establish goals for 2020.

Cora started the process of exit interviews on Wednesday and expects the process to be complete by Friday. He's found it beneficial.

After winning the World Series, Cora didn't hold exit interviews last year. In hindsight, he thinks that was a mistake.

"Actually this is something that, I talked to [assistant general managers] Eddie [Romero] and BOH [Brian O'Halloran], and hopefully we accomplish the things that we did last year [going forward], but it's something that you have to actually do regardless of whether you make it to the postseason or you don't make it," Cora said. "It's important. If I learned something today, we need to do that even if you have a headache."

Workload management

With the regular season winding down, Cora started to plot how he will use his position players the rest of the season.

Mookie Betts, who has been dealing with discomfort in his left foot, won't play the remaining two games in Texas, but he should be on track to start in the final series of the season at home this weekend against the Orioles.

Third baseman Rafael Devers, who entered Wednesday six hits shy of 200, will get a day of rest on Thursday but should play all weekend in his quest at the milestone.

Brock Holt has been dealing with heavy legs of late, but Cora thinks he can start by Friday.

"The fact that they're showing up and giving it great effort, that's gratifying," Cora said. "That's the way it should be. I expect them to do the same thing all the way to Sunday."

*** *WEEI.com***

In appreciation of Rick Porcello

Rob Bradford

If you want to go by the numbers, go ahead.

If Rick Porcello never pitches for the Red Sox again he will have started two fewer games than Jim Longborg and six more than Mike Torrez. Since arriving with the Sox his team has gone 98-69 in his starts, with Porcello combining for a 4.45 ERA. He's had good years, bad years and an American League Cy Young Award along the way.

Potentially his last start in a Red Sox' uniform? A solid six-inning, three-run outing against the Rangers Wednesday night.

None of it tells the story of Porcello.

When he got here the righty was a 27-year-old sinkerballer whose existence was that of a career second fiddle thanks to living life on the same pitching staff with the likes of Justin Verlander and Max Scherzer. Five seasons later Porcello has been one of those guys making his mark beyond those numbers. It might not get him the contract he was hoping for but it will allow for a pretty memorable legacy.

"I sat there and said, 'Shit!' It's been a tough one this year," said Porcello regarding his thoughts upon finishing up his six innings at Globe Life Park. "I don't want to get too emotional or close the door on anything. Who knows what's going to happen in the offseason. But from the bottom of my heart, it's been an absolute pleasure to wear this uniform and pitch for the Red Sox organization the last five years for Mr. (John) Henry and Mr. (Tom) Werner and all these guys. The coaching staff, all these players, it's as good a group as you're going to find. I know this year hasn't worked out the way we wanted to but it doesn't take away from the special human beings we have in this clubhouse and that's really for me, sitting there and soaking that in, was nice."

Some might not care about what he represented off the mound, simply wanting to judge Porcello on runs given up and ERA. Too much money. Too much inconsistency. So be it.

If this is the final time we see Porcello on the mound for the Red Sox we should take the time to relay the reality of this pitcher. He represents the kind of professional athlete teams should strive to prioritize. Simply put, he gets it. He has made \$20 million a year over the past four seasons but carries himself like someone who would legitimately still be playing baseball for free. And isn't that the kind of player we always say we want to prioritize.

The business of baseball may now lead Porcello out of Boston, which is why this reminder is warranted.

"Like we talked about it, in spring training, we know because of the nature of the business, not everybody is going to be together. He's a free agent," said Red Sox manager Alex Cora. "We don't know what's going to happen but we're very proud of what he's done throughout his years here. This is a guy that, for me, he means a lot, not only on the field what he did last year and the way he fought this year, but in the clubhouse. He's one of those guys that I rely on. It's good to see him finishing the season this way. It's kind of like a teaching moment for a lot of young guys in the clubhouse. Regardless of how good or how bad you struggle over 162 games, preparation and going about it the right way, it's very important. From Day one when he struggled in Seattle, it's been a grind. He kept working at it, kept working at it and now, the last three or four or whatever it's been, it's been solid. It's been the same guy in between starts, just trying to improve and find it. That's the way it should be. We like those kind of players. Those are the kind of players we want in our organization as far as being a pro and prepared regardless of the situation. He's been amazing for us."

Mookie Betts on contract stance: 'It's how I was raised'

Rob Bradford

The foundation for how Mookie Betts is approaching his future started long before anyone could predict superstardom or contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

It began on a youth football field in Tennessee.

"I had started playing football and it was the first day I ever put on pads and I was pit against a guy who it was his fourth year," Betts told WEEI.com prior to Wednesday night's game at Globe Life Park. "He was murdering me, just killing me. So I told my Mom I wanted to quit. This is crazy. If this was what football is I didn't want to play anymore. It was an emotional decision. It's not a decision that is necessarily what is right. She told me there was no need to quit. Just because you had a bad day or just because things didn't go your way doesn't mean you quit. You see it through, you started it and you finish it. It was an emotional decision and that was to quit. That was my first thought."

And thus the approach toward all of Betts' big life decisions was born. Business was always going to win out over emotions. That's how it has been and, according to the Red Sox outfielder, that's how it will be.

"It's nothing new. It's just a bigger amount of money," Betts explained. "It's the same thing. The perception is that he hates it here and that stuff. Those are all emotions. Put that all to the side. Just focus on business."

Betts has been very consistent in his answers and strategy whenever his financial future is brought up. So many want to compare and contrast others who have been in his situations -- elite players in line to reel in big contracts. Others want to surmise where Betts might be beyond 2020 (when his contract is up) based on a sound byte here or some sort of personal interaction there.

The 26-year-old wants to tell people not to waste their time. It has been well-established: Whether or not Betts agrees to an extension with the Red Sox will be based on business.

"It's how I was raised to look at the thing," he said. "As a whole, when it comes to business in general, whether it's buying a building or contract negotiations or whatever it is, you have to take emotions out of it. That's what people forget. Fans and media get caught up in emotions and that's just not how I was raised and that's just not what my point of view with my agents is. We take emotions out of it and we focus on the business part. Of course, I love it here. This is all I know. But you also have to take that emotional side out of it and get to what is actually real."

"Even when I was younger. My Mom and Dad always told me to not act on emotion, act on what is real. When you're mad don't do something wrong because you're mad. If you're going to do something bad

that's because that is what the situation called for. It's anything, not just this situation. You take emotions out of it and focus on what is real."

Well before his current situation, Betts already had numerous opportunities to practice what his parents preached.

There were those days after being taken in the fifth round of the 2011 draft, when the Red Sox tested exactly how much the then-second baseman wanted to play professional baseball over heading to the University of Tennessee.

"You weigh your pros and cons and what's real. You want to play baseball? Yeah. You want to go to school? If that's the best option, than that is what it is," he said.

He would ultimately take the Sox' offer of a \$750,000 signing bonus, but not until just moments before the deadline he had to accept the deal. If there was no business-first philosophy in place? "Than I would have jumped at the first option they came with and I didn't. We said we were going to go to school. I ended up winning that one," said Betts, who made approximately \$400,000 more by sticking to the plan.

But the most difficult test Betts has had -- and likely will have -- came the season before he became arbitration-eligible. It was that year, leading into the 2017 season, that he said the Red Sox first came at him with numbers for a contract extension. There would be no deal, with the outfielder playing 2017 for \$950,000 before winning in arbitration (\$10.5 million) a year later.

"That was a really emotional time because I was like, 'Mom, we've never seen this amount of money.' She was like, 'OK, cool. It's a lot of money. I think we know it's a lot of money. So let's focus on the facts. Let's focus on what is real and we took the emotions out of it.' The first one was definitely the hardest," said Betts, who agreed to a one-year, \$20 million deal last offseason. "At the time we had never seen anything like that."

Now the decision-making process is set in stone.

For one, Betts is in perfect sync with his agents Ed Cerulo and Steve Veltman. "I was able to implement their point of view with our point of view and it all kind of came together perfectly. They could say this is a great offer we think you should take it. But that's not what we do. We've been talking about this since the beginning of the year," he explained.

And then there is the dismissal of the outside noise.

"It's how a lot of the majority of people react to everything. But I don't care about it," Betts said of the very public guessing game. "It is what it is. I am who I am and my family is who we are and we're going to make the right decision."

No 'defined timetable' to find next Red Sox head of baseball operations

Rob Bradford

Dave Dombrowski was let go by the Red Sox on Sept. 9. Since then the Red Sox baseball operations have been run by the group consisting of Eddie Romero, Brian O'Halloran, Zack Scott and Raquel Ferreira. During these few weeks, the Sox' ownership has been formulating a plan for what the decision-making process will look like going forward.

That is all we have so far.

When will we have some sort of definition regarding who exactly will be succeeding Dombrowski? According to Red Sox president Sam Kennedy, there is no date circled on the calendar by himself, principal owner John Henry or chairman Tom Werner.

As Kennedy wrote in a text to WEEI.com, "John, Tom and I are actively engaged in a comprehensive due diligence process. There is no defined timetable for the search, as our only priority is to identify the right leadership for our baseball operations department as we move forward."

What this means is that there isn't a mandate to find Dombrowski's replacement by the time the General Managers Meetings in Arizona kick off on Nov. 11.

According to a source familiar with the situation, the Red Sox also haven't determined how the job in question will be defined, not committing to the same President of Baseball Operations title Dombrowski held.

Theo Epstein puts rumors of a return to Red Sox to rest

Rob Bradford

Scratch one (significant) name off the list.

Speaking to reporters in Pittsburgh, Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein addressed the rumors that he might be a candidate for the position with the Red Sox vacated by Dave Dombrowski.

"There's nothing to that story," the Brookline native said. "I'm here. We have a lot we need to work on to get back to the level we're accustomed to. I'm invested in that. That's what I'm focused on."

Epstein also said that Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer and executive Jason McLeod -- both of whom also previously worked in the Red Sox organization -- weren't in play for the job with the Red Sox.

Red Sox president Sam Kennedy told WEEI.com in a text Wednesday that the team has no timetable when it comes to filling the position.

*** *NBC Sports Boston***

Chaos? The Mets?!? Enough Red Sox hysteria — John Henry's a good owner

John Tomase

John Henry bought the Red Sox in 2002 and has overseen four World Series championships, including the one that allowed the ghost of Babe Ruth to rest in peace.

He has hired future Hall of Famers like Theo Epstein and Terry Francona. He has transformed Fenway Park from a dying relic — ex-CEO John Harrington would've ridden the wrecking ball like Miley Cyrus — into perhaps the most iconic stadium in professional sports. He has consistently spent as aggressively as any owner in the game, he has largely given his executives the freedom to pursue the players they want (sometimes to a fault), and on his watch we stopped counting beyond 86.

Now we're supposed to believe he's an agent of chaos?

As a local radio host with Wisconsin roots might say, "Sorey."

Not buying it.

Henry may not be perfect — for such a believer in the wisdom of numbers, he can be awfully reactionary — but this notion that no one wants to be general manager is unfounded, and the suggestion that the organization is only a Sam Kennedy away from devolving into the Mets is downright ludicrous.

An anonymous executive made both claims in a recent ESPN story that described an overall culture of misery in Boston. It follows up on a piece in *The Athletic* noting that an NL executive who visited Fenway in April couldn't believe how unhappy everyone was while receiving their World Series rings.

In both cases, some context is in order. For one, the Red Sox received their rings on April 9 after opening the season with a 3-8 road trip that featured two disastrous turns through the rotation and left us fearing that something was seriously wrong with ace Chris Sale.

A sign in the clubhouse before the home opener hinted at the crisis of confidence that would plague the team all season, noting that receiving the rings should serve as, "a reminder of how good we are." When the Red Sox went out and lost again to fall to 3-9, should we have expected them to be overjoyed? Or was maybe a little misery in order?

Also problematic: president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski wanted a new contract, leading to friction that could be felt throughout his department. Dombrowski constructed a turbocharged champion in 2018, but the Red Sox weren't built to last, and the fact that Henry could pivot from saying Dombrowski deserved an extension after the World Series clincher to leaving him hanging five months later created an atmosphere of instability.

Add to it the fact that the front office was factionalized — Dombrowski, Frank Wren, and the old guard on one side, and the Ben Cherington holdovers on the other — and you had a recipe for discontent. Once it became clear that Dombrowski wasn't ownership's man moving forward, though, much of that generational discord became temporary. The new GM will probably share a lot more in common with the holdovers than his predecessor.

This is not to say Henry hasn't screwed up. Firing Ben Cherington and then Dombrowski with World Series banners still crisply pressed doesn't scream stability, and whoever takes the job next will have every right to demand a long-term commitment.

(As an aside: I would argue that the Cherington/Dombrowski transition was an aberration born from consecutive last-place finishes, yes, but also Dombrowski's sudden availability after being fired by the Tigers. Had Dombrowski, who shared a history with Henry dating back to their Marlins days, not come along at that very moment, Cherington probably wouldn't have lost his job. And no matter what Dombrowski thinks, he was generally viewed as a hired-gun finisher, and not a long-term builder. He did his job, by the way.)

Henry failed to intervene when Epstein and former CEO Larry Lucchino took their feud to Defcon 1 levels in 2011, leading to Epstein's departure and the subsequent smear of Francona. Replacing Francona with Bobby Valentine basically amounted to setting the 2012 season on fire, and Henry admits botching the Jon Lester negotiations that cost the team its homegrown All-Star left-hander two years later.

Henry also spent some seriously bad money, whether it was on Carl Crawford, Pablo Sandoval, or David Price. Sale's extension looms as a potential albatross, too, and there's no reason the owner should get off scot-free because he let subordinates convince him those deals represented good business.

It doesn't help that the enigmatic Henry will never be a dynamic communicator, and we should probably just accept that public accountability will never be an organizational strong suit, either, even though fellow owner Tom Werner made his name bringing televised entertainment to the masses. They still owe us an explanation, for instance, on Dombrowski's ouster.

But let's be real. As long as Henry's in charge, the Red Sox will never be the freaking Mets. Running the Red Sox remains one of the best jobs in sports, and my guess is Dombrowski's successor will have no regrets.

*** *Bostonsportsjournal.com***

Waiting for Theo Epstein's return to the Red Sox? Don't be ... yet

Sean McAdam

A team several years removed from its first championship in several decades, thought to be a virtual lock for a wild card spot, instead suffers a late-season collapse, failing to make the postseason. As a result, the same manager who led them to a historic World Series, is on the final year of his deal and, it's widely accepted, will not return.

With the franchise seemingly heading in the wrong direction after a number of playoff appearances, rumors begin to circulate that perhaps the man in charge of the Baseball Operations might also be looking for a change and a new challenge.

Sound familiar?

Of course it does.

It perfectly describes Theo Epstein in 2011 in Boston. And, not incidentally, Theo Epstein right now.

The end of the 2019 Cubs season bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the nightmarish finish to the 2011 Red Sox season, when Terry Francona was told he wouldn't be returning and Epstein, of his own volition, soon followed him out the door.

Moreover, in recent days, the chatter about Epstein becoming the prodigal son and coming back to Boston have only grown, with speculation appearing locally and nationally.

But Red Sox fans hoping for a reversal of eight years ago — with Epstein returning to his hometown to take over the Red Sox again are very likely to be disappointed.

Here are a few reasons why a reunion almost certainly won't happen this year: 1. Epstein is under contract through 2021 with the Cubs.

Yes, it's true, Epstein also had term left on his contract when he bolted from Boston to Chicago in 2011 and it's possible he could negotiate a release from his current deal under the guise of going back to Boston, where his parents, twin brother and in-laws still reside.

But Epstein is said to be determined to see his contract through with the Cubs, intent on turning the franchise around before his contract expires.

Epstein felt compelled to address the rumors Wednesday.

"There's nothing to that story," said Epstein. "I'm here. We have a lot we need to work on to get back to the level we're accustomed to. I'm invested in that."

And remember a key distinction between his tenure in Boston. Epstein won two titles in Boston and came within a run in Game 7 of the 2008 ALCS of having a chance to win a third. In Chicago, Epstein won once (2016) and has seen the Cubs going backward ever since: losing in the NLCS in 2017; losing in the NL wild-card game in 2018; and missing the postseason altogether this season.

There's more unfinished business in Chicago. For one thing, there likely is a new manager to hire, with Joe Maddon all but gone from Wrigley.

2. The Red Sox ownership situation may still be off-putting.

You may recall that it did not end well for Epstein. First, there was the brief sabbatical after the 2005 season when Epstein was locked in a power struggle with then-team president Larry Lucchino.

Later in his tenure, Epstein worried that ownership was more concerned with marketing and TV ratings than it was in putting a championship-caliber team on the field.

Time has a way of healing past issues, and Epstein's relationship with ownership is nowhere near as strained as the one, say, between former manager Francona and ownership. But it's logical to assume that some issues remain.

And in Epstein's absence, things have hardly solidified. The Sox pushed aside Epstein's protégé Ben Cherington less than two years after winning the 2013 World Series. That move deeply disappointed Epstein.

The recent dismissal of Dombrowski, meanwhile, some 11 months after winning 119 games and another World Series, only further advanced the perception around the game that Fenway is an impossible place to work with no room for error, and, when things go wrong, no support from the powers that be.

One important change in Red Sox management in recent years — Epstein's childhood best friend, Sam Kennedy, replacing Lucchino — would serve as a lure. But likely not enough to convince Epstein that now is the time to come back home.

3. Real life intervenes.

Epstein has two school-aged children and may be at the point of his life where he desires to spend more time with them.

In Chicago, Epstein has spent the last eight seasons building the organization he wants. His right-hand man, Jed Hoyer, is his general manager and Epstein recently promoted longtime associate Jason McLeod, giving him additional responsibilities.

It's not as if the Cubs' organization runs itself. But there's more stability and familiarity in place.

If Epstein were to return to Boston, there would be more demands on his time and more rebuilding to do and family time might be reduced.

Down the road, when Epstein's deal has expired and he has an opportunity to re-assess what he wants to do next, the timing might be better suited for Epstein to come back to Boston. In fact, given his family ties, such a return almost seems inevitable at some point.

But not, it would seem, this winter.

BSJ Game Report: Red Sox 10, Rangers 3 — Three things we learned

Sean McAdam

The Red Sox won their second straight in Arlington, a 10-3 victory over the Texas Rangers. Here are three things we learned:

1-Porcello went out in style

Not only was this Rick Porcello's final start of the season, but it was also, in all likelihood, the final start of his Red Sox career. Porcello is eligible for free agency and the Sox rebuffed a request in spring training for a contract extension. Given how much money the Sox have committed to other veteran starters, it's unlikely that they want to retain Porcello, especially in a season when he posted a 5.52 ERA.

But while Porcello has had a mostly disappointing season, he has finished strong. He allowed three runs in the first, then didn't allow another, retiring the final 11 hitters he faced and striking out eight. Over his last three starts, he's allowed a total of five runs in 17 innings. That's been accomplished by returning to his two-seamer, which has made him more effective. It seemed like an emotional night for Porcello, who hugged many of his coaches and teammates in the dugout when he came out of after six innings. "I don't want to get too emotional or close the door on anything," said Porcello. "Who knows what's going to happen. But from the bottom of my heart, it's been an absolute pleasure to wear this uniform and pitch for the Red Sox organization the last five years." You'll not find a better pro in that clubhouse.

2-Devers piles up the milestones

It seemed like every time Rafael Devers came to the plate late in the game, he was setting or tying a club mark. In the seventh, he homered to lead off the inning, giving him 32 homers, tying him with Tony Conigliaro for the most homers by a Red Sox player in a season before turning 23. The homer also gave him 87 extra-base hits, the most in a season for a Red Sox player before turning 23, passing Ted Williams. Then, in the ninth, he slashed an opposite-field double, giving him 52 doubles, surpassing Wade Boggs for most doubles by a Red Sox third baseman. The double also gave him 195 hits, the most by a Red Sox player before turning 23, passing teammate Xander Bogaerts, who had 194 in 2015. Finally, Devers is now four hits away from 200 hits this season. To find an American League player who accumulated as many 196 hits in a season before turning 23, you had to go back to 1996, when Alex Rodriguez had 215. So in one night, Devers either tied or surpassed records held by Tony Conigliaro, Ted Williams and Wade Boggs. "It's amazing what he's doing," marveled Cora. "It's a joy to see him getting locked in again."

3-Context is important when it comes to home runs.

The Sox got three homers — Mitch Moreland, Christian Vazquez and Devers — to give them 241 homers this year, establishing a new club record, eclipsing the previous record of 238, set in 2003. And make no mistake: 241 homers is a huge total. But it comes in a season in which everyone is hitting more homers. For the second time in three seasons, a record was set for most homers in a season. How much has the game changed? A mere five years ago, just 57 players hit 20 or more homers; this year, as of Tuesday, 57 players had already hit 30 or more homers and another five were sitting at 29. It's possible that at many as 65 players could hit 30 or more homers. Meanwhile, at Triple-A, using the same ball used as the major leagues for the first time, homers were up nearly 80 percent. Clearly, there's an issue with the ball and it's something that MLB needs to address before the numbers become cartoonish — the way they were in the Steroid Era.

* ***The Athletic***

The many reasons the Red Sox' head of baseball operations job is a difficult one to fill

Ken Rosenthal

If not Theo Epstein, then who?

The question lingers for the Red Sox, who are searching for a new head of baseball operations, and it probably will linger a good bit longer.

The Sox, who fired Dave Dombrowski 2 1/2 weeks ago, have the highest payroll in baseball, one of the game's most identifiable brands and a recent history of success. It's telling, perhaps even damning, that none of their former executives is rushing back.

Epstein, the Cubs' president of baseball operations, told reporters on Wednesday that he is not connected to the Boston search, and neither are two other former Red Sox executives who joined him with the Cubs, Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod.

But another former Sox executive, Diamondbacks general manager Mike Hazen, remains bullish on Boston for other candidates, even though he signed a contract extension with the Diamondbacks shortly after the Red Sox parted with Dombrowski.

Hazen says his decision to stay in Arizona was not due to any resentment toward the Sox, who employed him for 10 1/2 years, including one year as GM under Dombrowski.

Still, does it not give Hazen pause that the Sox fired Ben Cherington within two years of him building a World Series champion and Dombrowski a little more than 10 months after he achieved the same feat?

“The optics (from the outside) are certainly difficult to wrap your arms around, I guess. It’s a very tough job. It’s a meat grinder, from all angles. But the history of that place, and walking into Fenway Park every day as your office . . . I really don’t know how to explain it,” said Hazen, who grew up in Abington, Ma.

“You can’t go anywhere because everybody in that city knows who works in baseball operations, from the head of baseball operations down to the interns. It makes for a pretty special environment. It’s very challenging. Every move is scrutinized, ad nauseum. I think it’s a very difficult task for the head of baseball operations. But there are people out there who are 100 percent up to the task of doing it.”

Hazen pointed out that each of the Red Sox last three heads of baseball operations won World Series, and two – Epstein and Dombrowski – probably are headed to the Hall of Fame. He lauded the team’s long-time front-office employees, adding, “the culture that permeates that place, I don’t think it’s going to be broken by subtle recent downturns.”

But what about upper management, the four-man power structure that includes principal owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, president Sam Kennedy and Fenway Sports Group president Michael Gordon?

“It’s a little tough for me to speak directly to that,” Hazen said. “When you’re underneath a No. 1 (as Hazen was with Dombrowski), you don’t have the daily dialogue that you would as a No. 1.

“There are a lot of opinions to weigh. There are multiple ownership opinions to put into perspective. I think that’s part of what makes it a little challenging. But I have a hard seeing that it’s that much different from any other place, honestly.”

Others in baseball take a less charitable view, pointing to the impatience of Sox ownership – reflected by their seeming reluctance to rebuild and abrupt dismissals of Cherington and Dombrowski – as red flags.

The day after Dombrowski’s firing, The Athletic’s Steve Buckley wrote a column headlined, “Memo to the next Red Sox GM: It’s going to end badly.” Many candidates indeed got the memo, if they weren’t aware of it already.

Maybe the Red Sox will lure a top executive from another club who has no previous ties to their organization – they are aiming for the biggest names, according to major-league sources.

Or maybe the Sox, if they get shut out, will promote one of the four executives currently running the club on an interim basis, with assistant general manager Eddie Romero being the most likely choice.

As the Giants discovered last offseason, luring a top executive from another club is difficult even when candidates might be willing to interview. The Diamondbacks denied permission for Hazen to speak with the Giants. The Brewers did the same with their GM, David Stearns. And multiple other executives under contract also were not allowed by their teams to pursue the Giants’ opening, sources said. The Giants ultimately hired Farhan Zaidi, the No. 2 to Andrew Friedman with the Dodgers, as their president of baseball operations.

Friedman is believed to be the only prominent No. 1 whose contract is expiring, but the Red Sox can forget about bringing him to Boston – Dodgers president Stan Kasten said recently that he is “completely certain” Friedman will continue running the team’s front office in 2020, indicating an extension is in the works.

“Teams are being smarter about who’s working for them, if they like what they have and what they’re developing internally,” Hazen said. “That’s complicating it.”

The Red Sox also face other obstacles, sources say:

- The esteem for Cherington throughout the industry.

Cherington, 45, is from the same generation as many of the prospective candidates, and virtually all of them respect him greatly. The younger execs admire the accomplishments of Dombrowski, 63. But with Cherington, the connection is deeper, the concern over the Red Sox’s treatment of him greater.

Cherington, now the Blue Jays’ vice-president of baseball operations, was not a perfect GM. But he was practically a Red Sox lifer, spending 16 years with the club, contributing to three World Series champions and helping build the farm system that Dombrowski later used to his advantage in trades. Friends describe him as fair and level-headed, a portrait of equanimity. And yet, even Cherington grew especially stressed out running the Red Sox.

Never extroverted, Cherington became occasionally reclusive. And while the Sox gave Cherington a chance to stay after hiring Dombrowski in August 2015, they did so only after humiliating him, casting him aside as if he was a recently hired temp.

Which leads prospective candidates to wonder: “If Ben couldn’t survive, how would I?”

- Family matters.

Many execs in the 40-to-50 age range are married with school-age children. Baseball people are accustomed to relocating; it’s a way of life in the industry. But the fact that both Cherington and Dombrowski won World Series and still lasted only about four years gives many prospective candidates pause.

As one such candidate explained, the Red Sox’s next head of baseball operations will need to assume he, too, will last a maximum of four years. Once fired, he will not want to keep his family in Boston. So he might move his wife and children twice in a four-year span – not an easy sell for execs, most of whom already are well-paid and comfortable in their current situations.

- A problem with titles.

Not World Series titles, but job titles.

Dombrowski’s reputation is that he is difficult on employees, but shortly after the Sox won the 2018 World Series he announced promotions for a wide range of front-office employees. The new titles, however, did not necessarily bring new responsibilities, making it frustrating for some employees who expected to play greater roles.

Two former Sox executives who followed Hazen to Arizona, Amiel Sawdaye and Jared Porter, would be logical candidates to return to Boston; both are under long-term deals, but the Diamondbacks probably would not stand in the way if the Sox or another team offered either a promotion, according to the Arizona Republic.

Sawdaye and Porter, however, worked for the Sox as recently as 2016, and are close with many of those who remained. It might be difficult for them to manage the expectations of friends seeking expanded duties. It would be less difficult on an external hire who has no history with the team.

- The difficult choices ahead.

One rival executive made a radical suggestion for the Red Sox, saying they should reboot not only by trading right fielder Mookie Betts, but also shortstop Xander Bogaerts and left fielder Andrew Benintendi.

Few in the industry, though, believe the Sox would do such a thing. Even if ownership persuades their next head of baseball operations it is willing to take a step back, few inside or outside the organization will believe it.

The Sox very well might trade Betts, who like Paul Goldschmidt last offseason, will be entering his free-agent year, albeit at a salary in the \$28 million to \$30 million range, as opposed to Goldschmidt's \$14.5 million.

Bogaerts, who will be starting his six-year, \$120 million extension, and Benintendi, who will be entering the first of his three years of arbitration, offer greater long-term control. The Sox also would be trading Bogaerts before his full no-trade clause kicks in at seven years of service, which will occur sometime in 2020.

Too much of an overhaul? Perhaps. But the Sox are operating with major financial commitments and a farm system that, while improving, still ranks only No. 22 according to Baseball America. They gave no explanation for firing Dombrowski, but seemingly wanted a more creative thinker to sort through their maze of options this offseason and beyond.

Those creative thinkers are out there, but the question remains:

Which one of them will want to work in Boston?

'I'm here': Theo Epstein dismisses Red Sox speculation and plans big changes for Cubs

Patrick Mooney

Amid a spectacular collapse that brought back memories of the 1969 Cubs and the 2011 Red Sox, Theo Epstein dismissed speculation that he could go home to Boston and run baseball operations again at Fenway Park.

While the Red Sox have begun the search for a replacement for Dave Dombrowski — less than a full calendar year after winning the World Series — the Cubs face their own leadership issues and difficult questions about the franchise's future.

Epstein insisted that he remains committed to finding those answers, which could mean a new manager and a restructured front office at Wrigley Field as well as an offseason filled with trade rumors. The rumblings about a potential Epstein-Red Sox reunion surfaced this week in a Boston Globe column.

"There's nothing to that story," Epstein said Wednesday at PNC Park before the Cubs were officially eliminated from playoff contention. "I'm here. We have a lot we need to work on to get back to the level we're accustomed to. I'm invested in that. That's what I'm focused on, so, yeah, there's nothing to that."

Epstein, who worked as the Red Sox general manager for nine seasons and helped construct their 2004 and 2007 World Series teams, quickly added: "I will say I have really good relationships with a lot of people there, and I certainly wish them the best. But there's nothing to the story."

Epstein also reiterated what he told 670 The Score during a radio interview two weeks ago — that Cubs executives Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod are also not connected to the Boston search: "That's still true."

Epstein framed this season as a reckoning for the Cubs, and it will be remembered as a system-wide failure. Even without Christian Yelich, the surging Brewers won again Wednesday night to clinch the National League's final playoff spot, eliminating a Cubs team with a luxury-tax payroll in excess of \$240 million, according to Roster-Resource.com. About 20 minutes later, the last-place Pirates closed out a 4-2 win over the Cubs, who have lost eight games in a row for the first time since 2012, or Year 1 of the Epstein regime in Chicago.

Epstein declined to say when he will make a decision on Joe Maddon, who went into this season as a lame-duck manager and should attract strong interest as a free agent.

"I'm going to keep that between me and Joe," Epstein said. "It's just not something I'm comfortable talking about."

Even after a 95-win campaign and a fourth consecutive playoff appearance, Epstein tellingly declined to discuss a contract extension with Maddon's agent last offseason. Since the World Series hangover in 2017, Epstein has repeatedly questioned the team's focus and fundamental lapses.

The Cubs also aren't as deep or as talented as they were in 2016, leaving Maddon with a flawed roster shaped by complex, organization-wide issues involving the free-agent market, the draft, the farm system and the business side.

But if there were any doubts about Epstein's willingness to make dramatic changes, an eight-game losing streak at the most critical time of the season made it obvious.

"The extreme nature of it — the degree to which we've stumbled here down the stretch — is definitely surprising and not something you anticipate," Epstein said. "But it's happened, so we have to try to learn from it and try to grow from it. When you have the best possible outcome — and you overcome a lot of things and you can do some transcendent things — I think you grow from that because you do something you haven't done before."

"When you have the middle-of-the-road outcome, you can always tell yourself whatever story you want to hear. It's a gray area. You can look at last year — we had some issues, but we won 95 games, so you can try to get to the bottom of some issues. But there's always a 'Yeah, but we won 95 games.' When you have the worst possible outcome, like we've had recently, it reveals everything."

Epstein deferred some big-picture questions until his end-of-season press conference, which last year memorably featured his "Our Offense Broke" executive summary. Maybe everything didn't break this year, but this team doesn't need more tinkering and half-measures. Too often, the 2019 Cubs beat themselves and didn't have enough overall talent to overcome those mistakes and overwhelm opponents.

A big-money rotation needed to be great, not pretty good. An inconsistent offense put even more pressure on the bullpen to cover high-leverage innings. There were too many careless, overaggressive moments while players ran the bases. This no longer resembles the historically great defense from 2016.

"Are there things that we need to fix? A hundred percent, absolutely," Epstein said. "When you go through things like this and the extreme nature of what's happened, it can make things clear. It can make things unavoidable. You can't spin a narrative for yourself and avoid facing some reality. I think there are important things that we need to examine and fix in every aspect of our operation. That's the mindset we're all going to take."

The Cubs are on the clock with a free-agent class of 2021 that could include Kris Bryant, Javier Báez, Anthony Rizzo and Kyle Schwarber. Epstein's contract will also expire after that season.

In leaving the Red Sox after the 2011 season, Epstein cited football legend Bill Walsh and his belief that 10 years is a good timeframe for coaches and executives, or else they risk burnout or their messages becoming

stale. Epstein has the 2020 and 2021 seasons to reimagine the Cubs and add to his Hall of Fame legacy before he hits that decade mark.

If not the Red Sox right now, this is how another team could someday tempt Epstein: offer an ownership stake and the chance to set the baseball agenda and merge his off-the-field interests.

Epstein gave a glimpse into his potential post-Cubs plans when he appeared on “The Axe Files” podcast with David Axelrod, the CNN commentator and former strategist and advisor to President Barack Obama. During a wide-ranging conversation released in conjunction with the Cubs’ visit to the White House in January 2017, Axelrod asked Epstein if he might someday own a team.

“Sure, yeah,” Epstein told Axelrod, “I think you can do things as an owner that you can’t necessarily do as an employee, helping the team really get involved in the community and doing some great work, using baseball as a vehicle to do some important work in society.”

But those are faraway concepts. There is still unfinished business in Chicago, where the goal was never just one World Series title. As Epstein found out in Boston, you can break a curse, but everyone will want more and more.

“Absolutely, the goal is to win a championship next year, 100 percent,” Epstein said. “That’s what this organization’s about. I think the thing that gets you excited — even in the face of this adversity — is waking up and trying to build the next championship Cubs team. We want that to be as soon as possible.”

I hope I’m wrong, but Red Sox must now plan for a post-Mookie Betts era

Steve Buckley

It’s not that I want the Red Sox to trade Mookie Betts, or that I’m using this little press box pulpit of mine to direct (fill in name of next general manager here) to get on the phone and make a deal.

The baseball connoisseur in me hopes Mookie Betts becomes the next Teddy Ballgame, the next Yaz, the next Jim Rice — Hall of Famers who spent their entire big-league careers in Boston.

The baseball connoisseur in me hopes he joins those fellas in Cooperstown, hopes he gets his No. 50 retired, hopes there comes a day when there’s a statue or bridge or something with his name on it. (To clarify, I’m generally not a fan of stuff being named in honor of sports stars. I’m simply hoping the day arrives when Betts is as deserving as those who have already received such honors.)

What’s the big deal with Betts? It’s not just the home runs, or the great catches, or that throw he made the other night at Tropicana Field after the Tampa Bay Rays’ Avisail Garcia had lined a shot into the right-field corner. Avisail ran hard to no avail, as Betts nailed him at third with a throw that traveled 305 feet on the fly.

He hustles. When he does something fun — hits a homer, makes a fine catch, completes a textbook-perfecto pop-up slide at second — he acts like it’s fun. His brand of on-field emotion and joie de vivre are sorely lacking in baseball, and the Red Sox should think twice before parting with a 26-year-old outfielder who has an MVP Award, three Gold Gloves and a cool nickname that appeals to kids.

The problem, I fear, is that the Red Sox have done more than think twice about trading Mookie Betts. I’m guessing they’ve thought about it 145 million times, which, coincidentally, is the same number of dollars the Red Sox will be paying lefthander Chris Sale next season when his new deal kicks in.

If I were sipping early-evening cocktails on some Brattle Street back porch with men who wear seersucker and suspenders and ladies who speak French, I might offer that the Red Sox are a team in transition. If I were at the Highland Kitchen in Somerville I’d throw it out there that the Red Sox are going to suck next year. This being the case, and with Mookie Betts eligible for free agency after next season, and with (fill in

name of next general manager here) facing a rebuild, does it make sense to sign Betts to what promises to be one of the biggest contracts in baseball?

The Red Sox made Betts a long term offer after the 2017 season, reportedly for \$200 million over eight years, and the outfielder turned it down. He also has said he expects to enter free agency after next season, and that he wants only to be “treated fairly.” Just guessing here, but being “treated fairly” sounds like code for “no hometown discount.”

Here’s the problem: To look at how this season is turning out — and to look ahead to 2020 and wonder who, exactly, is going to do the pitching — it’s not unfair for Red Sox fans to be afraid, very afraid, of how things are going to play out over the next couple of years.

Ask yourself this question, Red Sox fans: Are you confident that Sale and lefty David Price are going to recover from their various injuries and be ace-like in 2020 and beyond?

Ask yourself this question, Red Sox fans: If the Red Sox give Rick Porcello a one- or two-year deal and thus provide him a platform to bounce back from his horrendous season, will he indeed bounce back?

And this: As fine a season as Eduardo Rodriguez has had — he’ll be going for his 20th victory in Sunday’s season finale against the already-closed-for-repairs Baltimore Orioles — are you confident he can repeat that kind of success in 2020?

Allow me to answer those questions in reverse order.

Rodriguez: Can’t guarantee he’ll be flirting with 20 next year, but that’s not the point. E-Rod has arrived. Barring injury or some other calamity, he’ll be fine.

Porcello: I’d bring him back for 2020 and allow him to use the season to prove he’s still got it. Or some of it, anyway. He’s still youngish (turns 31 in December) and he has made 27 or more starts in each of his 11 big-league seasons. In nine of those seasons he’s made 31 or more starts. He never gets hurt, never dogs it, never makes excuses. Worth the gamble.

Sale and Price: Not. A. Clue. One likes to think guile and professionalism will lead them back to ace-like status, but damaged arms are damaged arms. I have absolutely no idea if these guys can be top-line pitchers again, or even innings-eaters. What I do know is that former president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski made a huge mistake when he made Sale a spring training offer of \$145 million over five years (again, beginning in 2020).

Assuming Betts holds tight to his pledge to enter free agency next year, it’s doubtful the Red Sox will trade him this offseason. But early next summer, if the pitching is as bad as we fear it might be, and if the Yankees and Rays are still strong, then it’s certainly possible Betts will get traded. It happens.

Even if they don’t trade Betts, their payroll obligations and luxury tax pressure because of deals like Sale’s and Nathan Eovaldi’s (four years, \$68 million) might mean that they won’t offer up the money that some other club — hello there, Atlanta Braves — puts on the table.

While we’re having this discussion, I’d like to throw in my belief that former Red Sox stars Fred Lynn and Mo Vaughn would both be Hall of Famers this very day had they remained in Boston for all, or at least most, of their careers. Boston worked for them while they worked in Boston. But Lynn and the Sox couldn’t agree on a deal, and so in January of ’81 he was traded to the Angels. Vaughn left Boston via free agency after ’98, also winding up with the Angels. Betts might want to think about that.

But where he winds up long term will likely come down to money, not adoring fans and ballpark quirks. Where he ends up short term will likely come down to the blueprint laid out by (fill in name of next general manager here), as well as how the Red Sox perform during the first half of next season.

I don't think Betts is with the Red Sox in 2021, and likely not by the end of 2020.

But — and, again, this is the baseball connoisseur speaking — I hope I'm very wrong.

*** *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram***

Rangers need a righty starter for 2020. Did Porcello, a future free agent, just audition?

Jeff Wilson

Scott Feldman had the honor Wednesday of pulling another day off the Games Remaining countdown in left field. There are four games remaining at Globe Life Park.

Feldman broke into the majors with the Texas Rangers and was their Pitcher of the Year in 2009. He did his best pitching after he left them after the 2012 season, signing with the Chicago Cubs and going to the Baltimore Orioles in a July trade that involved Jake Arrieta and Pedro Strop.

Those names should ring a bell.

Feldman retired after the 2017 season at the ripe age of 34 with career earnings, according to Baseball-Reference, of \$52,776,883.

As for the Rangers, Wednesday was nearly as good.

Here's some Rangers Reaction to a 10-3 loss to the Boston Red Sox.

PORCELLO AUDITION?

Things didn't start remotely well for Red Sox right-hander Rick Porcello, who allowed three first-inning runs after the Rangers opened double (Shin-Soo Choo), single (Elvis Andrus), hit by pitch (Willie Calhoun), double (Rougned Odor).

Ronald Guzman had the fourth Rangers hit of the inning, an RBI single off of third baseman Rafael Devers.

Porcello then proceeded to allow only two hits over the next five innings while the Red Sox erased a 3-0 deficit for a 7-3 lead when Porcello excited what was the final start of the worst season of his career.

"He made a lot of quality pitches after the first," Rangers manager Chris Woodward said.

Porcello is a free agent of the season, and the Rangers are in need of a proven right-hander for their rotation next season. He looked like a fit Wednesday, albeit against a watered-down Rangers lineup.

Porcello is finishing his 11th big-league season, which is very impressive and surprising considering he's 30 years old. He has been great at times in his career, as he was in winning the 2016 Cy Young over Justin Verlander and ticking off Kate Upton.

But he's likely in the tier of starters the Rangers will be looking to add from, the Not Gerrit Cole Tier. There are other righties in there, namely Zack Wheeler, and could be more depending on who opts out of what or which teams decline options.

The Rangers could do better than Porcello, but they could do worse. Shelby Miller and Drew Smyly are proof of that.

CALHOUN CONCERN

X-rays were negative, which is always a good thing, but Calhoun has a bone bruise on his left forearm after getting hit by Porcello pitch.

(Also of concern, though less so: How the heck does plate umpire John Libka call that a foul ball?)

More will be known about the bruise Thursday, but it sure looked like the hit by pitch that broke Andrus' right arm in 2018. Calhoun appeared to be in plenty of pain, though he stayed into the game to run and was thrown out at home for the first out of what turned out to be a three-run inning.

The Rangers play a day game Thursday in the series finale against the Red Sox, so that might not be enough time for Calhoun to feel good enough to play. The Rangers end the season with a three-game weekend series against the New York Yankees.

Calhoun expects to play in the final series, perhaps as soon as Friday. He has 20 home runs and an .850 OPS this season in 295 at-bats and is likely never headed back to the minors unless he needs a rehab assignment.

Of the many players the Rangers needed answers on this season, they received the right answer on Calhoun.

ALLARD LABORS

Left-hander Kolby Allard made his first career start against the Red Sox, who did to him what they have been doing to all pitchers for more than a decade now.

They worked counts, they hit his mistakes hard, they hit good pitches well enough to find a hole. Allard, who was sick Tuesday, had to work just to get nine outs, throwing 80 pitches, in what will be his final start of the season.

"Kolby's done a good job," Woodward said. "He's impressed us. I know it's a short amount of time, but his competitiveness, the pitch selection he has and his stuff, it plays. His confidence on the mound, the way he attacks hitters, I think it plays."

Allard will head into the off-season in a group of young pitchers who will attempt to win a rotation spot in spring training. The Rangers like the way he competes and his ability to pitch, which wasn't always evident as he posted a 4.96 ERA in nine starts and 45 1/3 innings.

"All in all I left it between the lines every time this season," he said. "I got a pretty good sample size under my belt, so I think there are a few things I do need to clean up going into next year. Going into this off-season I have a few things I think I need to improve on so I can have a great year next year."

Allard will finish his season with 160 1/3 innings overall, which will only help his chances at the rotation. The Rangers would have to worry less about his workload than fellow lefties Brock Burke and Joe Palumbo, who dealt with injuries this season and won't reach 100 innings.

Woodward said late Wednesday that Burke is being shut down with some shoulder discomfort.

Depending on how the off-season unfolds, the Rangers could have two rotation spots available. Allard should get one of them.

*** Associated Press**

Porcello pitches strong 6 innings, Red Sox rout Rangers 10-3

Rick Porcello sat in the visitors' dugout following six strong innings pitched on Wednesday night and soaked in what could be his final start for the Boston Red Sox.

Christian Vazquez, Mitch Moreland and Rafael Devers homered, and Porcello improved to 14-12 as the Red Sox beat the Texas Rangers 10-3.

Porcello, who will be a free agent after this season, allowed all three runs (all in the first inning) on six hits, no walks and two hit batters in six innings. He matched a season high with eight strikeouts and retired his last 11 batters.

"It was definitely a special night for me just to go out there and get a win with all these guys that have gone through a lot together the last five years," said Porcello, who said he hasn't shut the door on returning to Boston. "From the bottom of my heart, it's been an absolute pleasure to wear this uniform and pitch for the Red Sox organization."

In the 30-year-old Porcello's last three starts, he gave up five earned runs in 17 innings with 20 strikeouts and one walk. He is 73-55 in five seasons with the Red Sox, including winning the 2016 American League Cy Young award. He was acquired from the Detroit Tigers in December 2014.

"We don't know what's going to happen, but we're very proud of what he's done throughout his years here," Red Sox manager Alex Cora said.

Vazquez broke a third-inning tie with a two-run homer. It was Boston's 239rd homer this season, breaking the franchise record set in 2003.

Vazquez has 23 home runs this season in 136 games after hitting 10 in 291 games during his first four seasons. He was removed in the third inning with a tight left hamstring and probably won't play again until Sunday.

Moreland also hit a two-run homer in the sixth inning. Devers hit a solo shot in the seventh.

Moreland, who played his first seven major league seasons with Texas before joining the Red Sox as a free agent in December 2016, hit his two-run shot as part of a four-hit game that matched his career best. His other four-hit game was as a member of the Rangers in August 2015.

"Just trying to make the most of it, the last few games we've got," Moreland said. "Enjoy the moment."

Kolby Allard (4-2), who was acquired on July 30 from the Atlanta Braves, allowed five runs in three innings, losing his second straight start. Texas has lost nine of 10.

"We had a chance to do some real damage, and obviously was nice to get," Rangers manager Chris Woodward said, "but I felt like we could have probably gotten more there. He got a little bit off the hook."

Rougned Odor had a two-run double for the Rangers during a three-run first inning. Odor leads Texas with 86 RBI and is hitting .203.

DEVERS DELIVERS AGAIN

Devers also doubled and leads the AL with 88 extra base hits. His 59 multi-hit games are second in the league to 60 for the New York Yankees' D.J. LeMahieu. He has 196 hits this season and has set club records for third basemen with 32 homers and 52 doubles.

"It's fun to see it," Cora said. "It's amazing what he's doing."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Rangers DH Willie Calhoun was hit by a pitch in the left elbow in the first inning and left the game with a forearm bone contusion. ... Red Sox RF Mookie Betts (toe) and 2B Brock Holt (knee) will probably return for Friday's home game opening the team's final series against Baltimore. ... Boston LHP David Price (wrist) is scheduled to have surgery on Thursday.

UP NEXT

Rangers LHP Mike Minor (13-10, 3.52) will take his third and final shot at setting a career mark for wins in the series finale on Thursday afternoon after losing his two previous starts. The Red Sox will throw a bullpen game, probably beginning with LHP Brian Johnson (1-3, 6.05).